The Celibate Celebrity: Intersections of Masculinity, Stardom and Sanctity in Mid-Century American Catholicism and the Body of Fulton J. Sheen.

Alexander Nachaj

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_____ Examiner
Dr. André Furlani

_____ Examiner
Dr. Jane McGaughey

_____ Examiner
Dr. Marc Lafrance

_____ Supervisor
Dr. Hillary Kaell

Approved by _____
Dr. Marc des Jardins, Graduate Program Director

October 15th, 2021
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_____
Dr. Pascale Sicotte, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Science

ABSTRACT

The Celibate Celebrity: Intersections of masculinity, stardom and sanctity in mid-century American Catholicism and the body of Fulton J. Sheen.

Alexander Nachaj, Ph.D.
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Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen was a bestselling author and a mid-century Emmy award-winning television personality. For a major American Catholic figure of the twentieth century whose presence continues to impact American Catholicism and whose ongoing canonization cause continues to grab headlines in the Catholic press, he is remarkably understudied within academia. Using Sheen as a case study, this dissertation proposes a new rubric for examining modern religious figures and demonstrates how the overlapping fields of celebrity and masculinity studies complement the study of mid-century North American Catholicism. By examining these intersections of the sacred and the secular in Sheen's autobiography, afterlife, television series and body, I argue that for figures like Sheen modern notions of sanctity cannot be understood without also understanding their celebrity.

Few studies examine, much less acknowledge, the intertwined and ambiguous nature of modern religious celebrities – of which America has produced no shortage over this past century. This has led to a lacuna in the field where religious studies scholars have shied away from examining the complications and theoretical implications of fame intertwined with sanctity. My approach in this work is thus interdisciplinary, involving not just the lens of religious studies but also the overlapping fields of celebrity studies as well as critical gender studies. My chapters are structured thematically, with a recurrent emphasis on the intersections between mid-century celebrity and sanctity, and the interplay between then-contemporary norms of religious and secular masculinity.

Ultimately, I aim to demonstrate that the connections between these aligned fields and mid-twentieth century American religion extend far beyond the life of the figure under examination. It is my hope that scholars of religious can begin to implement similar rubrics in their examination of modern American Catholic figures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgement pages usually begin with a list of peers, colleagues and mentors who have helped, encouraged and otherwise supported the author along their way. This page will contain that, certainly, but I feel I cannot proceed without also acknowledging the pain, tragedy and sadness that have also gone into the creation of this work.

In the summer of 2019, the man who had been my supervisor and mentor since my Master's Degree, Dr. Donald L. Boisvert, passed away. I was fortunate to have seen Donald for the last time in November 2018. We met at a Starbucks near the Anglican Cathedral in downtown Montreal. It a typical grey autumn afternoon, with rain that came and went all morning. He was seated at a table in the corner. We each ate a croissant and enjoyed a coffee, before having a long conversation. We spoke not just about my thesis progress, but also about more personal matters. I feel that it was the first time that I truly opened up to him and shared some things that had long needed sharing. While I was not able to say a proper goodbye, I am grateful to whatever currents in the universe allowed me that moment.

Shortly after Donald's funeral, I met and became friends with his husband, Gaston Lamontagne. During the time that I got to know Gaston, I also got to know Donald better – both through my conversations with Gaston, and through the massive library that Donald left with his passing. I was fortunate to have spent several weeks going through his collection and organizing it (as well as inheriting more than a few monographs whose contents went into this work).

In early 2020, Gaston passed away, taken by the same illness as Donald.

I would like to dedicate this work to both of these wonderful men.

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In the aftermath of tragedy, I am grateful to have connected with my current supervisor Dr. Hillary Kaell. I am indebted to her for the invaluable support she has provided, the knowledge she has shared, and the conversations we have had which allowed this project to transition into its current and final shape. I am also thankful for her pushing me to keep working and helping me set the deadlines which have resulted in this work ultimately being produced.

I would also like to thank my committee members Dr. Marc Lafrance and Jane McGaughey for their support, knowledge and feedback as this project has taken shape. Their expertise has helped steer this project and my own research interests in directions I had not previously considered, and I am glad to have followed.

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Table of Contents

Introduction – The Busy Life, Many Names, and Numerous Intersections of Fulton J. Sheen

In the Beginning

The man who would become Fulton J. Sheen was born in El Paso, Illinois, on May 8th, 1895, as Peter John Sheen. His parents, Newton and Delia Sheen, were Irish American Catholics in a predominantly Protestant rural community. Sheen's mother was devout while his father had, by the time of Sheen's birth, fallen away from the Church and retained little more than a vestigial interest in Catholicism. They ran a modest hardware store in their local commercial strip until it – along with much of the surrounding El Paso business district – was destroyed by a fire, subsequently causing the family to relocate to nearby Peoria.[1] Sheen, the eldest of four boys in the family, was given the name Peter after his paternal grandfather. At some point during his childhood, Sheen either took or was given the name "Fulton" – his mother's maiden name.[2] Sheen would later make the shift more official when he took the name Fulton as his own during Confirmation.[3] From that symbolically poignant moment on, Peter Sheen was no more, and Fulton

[1] In Sheen's recounting of events in *Treasure in Clay,* he tells it as a rather light-hearted accident. The store's errand boy – unnamed – was apparently smoking a cigarette and "fearful of his father, he threw it down the stairs." Unfortunately, it landed in a "fifty-gallon can of gasoline" and the whole business district was subsequently burned down. While the fire is documented, the details Sheen presents are less so. See Fulton J. Sheen, *Treasure in Clay* (New York: Image Books, 1982), 8. Also Christopher Lynch, *Selling Catholicism: Bishop Sheen and the Power of Television* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 17.

[2] While biographical sources make it clear that "Fulton" was his mother's maiden name, it is not fully clear why he came to be called this. One of his biographers, Daniel P. Noonan, states that Sheen was referred to as "P.J." as a boy and had a "slight preference for his mother's maiden name" over his own surname for undisclosed reasons. *Missionary with a Mike: The Bishop Sheen Story* (New York: Pageant Press, 1968), 2. Sheen would himself echo this in 1953 to *Boston Post* journalist Ken Crotty, stating that he began calling himself Fulton during his school days to show filial affection for his maternal grandparents. "Bishop Sheen's Devotions Recalled," *Boston Post*, May 9, 1953. However, fellow biographer Thomas C. Reeves outlines a traumatic event in the Sheen family, when Sheen's younger half-sister (from a previous relationship of his father's) was forcibly removed by her Protestant grandparents owing to the household's "popery." Sheen began calling himself Fulton shortly after that event. *America's Bishop: The Life and Times of Fulton J. Sheen* New York: Encounter Books, 2002, 11. For more on this see also: Lynch, *Selling Catholicism*, 17, and Kathleen L. Riley, *Fulton Sheen an American Catholic Response to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Alba House, 2004), 2.

[3] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay,* 10.

Sheen would begin his long rise and eventual fall (and rise again) within the institutions of the American Catholic Church.

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The figure who stands at the center of this work is Fulton J. Sheen, a twentieth century American Catholic clergyman, bestselling author and television personality. Although Sheen's story indeed plays a pivotal role throughout, the focus of this dissertation is not biographical in nature, but rather seeks to present Sheen – his body, his identity, his career and his fame – as a case study on how celebrity studies and masculinity studies both offer important theoretical supplements to the study of mid-century American Catholicism. It is my conjecture that we cannot begin to properly understand the sanctity nor the religious appeal of these figures without also understanding their celebrity and engagements with wider culture made possible through emergent technologies and media of access. Television, radio, paperback publishing, magazines, and other mass media that became dominant over the past century have transformed the ways in which prominent Catholic figures like Sheen are encountered and understood by fans and devotees alike – as well as how these figures themselves construct, shape and negotiate the expectations of their own sanctity. In other words, the modern saint is also the modern celebrity, and to understand them as either, we must approach them from both theoretical perspectives.

To a lesser extent, this work also examines how Sheen's religious celebrity continues to impact the lives of his American devotees to this day. While Sheen's earthly life came to an end in 1979, his presence continues to live on through episodes of his television series, in the pages of his books, in the devotional lives of those pushing for his canonization, and in his material remains. The secondary purpose of this work is thus to bring renewed academic attention to a prominent figure who – apart from a handful of critical studies and despite his own prominence as a mid-

twentieth century figure – remains to some extent on the fringes of academic discussions of American religion and celebrity.[4]

Introducing Fulton J. Sheen

At the turn of the twentieth century, Sheen and his siblings attended a local parochial school, as was typical for Catholics growing up in rural areas. During his school years, Sheen was recognized as being bright and devout by his peers and teachers, and eventually became his high school valedictorian.[5] At graduation, he earned a prestigious scholarship that could have secured his entrance into any university. However, at the urging of a mentor he went to seminary in Saint Paul, Minnesota.[6] Ordained at age twenty-four, he was admitted to the Catholic University of America for his doctoral studies before transferring to the University of Louvain in Belgium.[7] There, he earned his doctorate in philosophy, followed by his post-doctoral *agregé* – a prestigious degree not typically awarded to Americans – which he earned with the highest distinctions.[8] After being temporarily recalled to Peoria to act as a parish priest, and so that his superiors could see whether the rising star was capable of following orders, Sheen received his dream posting as a faculty member at the Catholic University of America (CUA) in Washington, DC. Sheen would spend the next quarter of a century teaching philosophy and theology courses, while spending a

[4] At the time of this writing, I have yet to find any studies explicitly focusing on Sheen's celebrity and the overlap of religion and culture in this sense. Nevertheless, Sheen has figured into several works addressing mid-century American popular culture, notably Massa (1999). See Mark S. Massa, *Catholics and American Culture: Fulton Sheen, Dorothy Day, and the Notre Dame Football Team* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1999). See also, to a lesser extent, Timothy H. Sherwood, *The Rhetorical Leadership of Fulton J. Sheen, Norman Vincent Peale, and Billy Graham in the Age of Extremes* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013).
[5] Riley, *Fulton J. Sheen*, 3.
[6] There was little doubt that Sheen would become a priest. The only apparent issue was a matter of "when," as he also wished to become an academic. The question was thus which would come first.
[7] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 23; Riley, *Fulton J. Sheen*, 3-6.
[8] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 27-28; Riley, *Fulton J. Sheen*, 7-8.

significant portion of his time at promotional events for the faculty and away from the classroom, nurturing his burgeoning celebrity status.[9]

It was during his time as a lecturer when Sheen experienced his first real taste of fame and celebrity. Between 1930 and 1950, Sheen lent his vocal talents on a weekly basis to the *Catholic Hour* radio program, rapidly becoming their most popular personality (it is estimated that he garnered seven million regular listeners and received about six thousand letters a week). Largely avoiding politics and other matters that contributed to the rise and fall of other radio priests, such as Father Coughlin, Sheen spoke to his audience about everyday concerns and offered spiritual solutions. Following his time on radio, from 1950 until 1966, he was made National Director for Pontifical Missions Societies, notably helming the fundraising efforts for the national Society for the Propagation of the Faith (hereafter SPOF).

Shortly after having been made National Director at the Mission, Sheen was approached by the National Council of Catholic Men (NCCM) to act as a host of a weekly television program they were devising for the ill-fated DuMont Network.[10] That initiative would culminate in *Life is Worth Living*, a half-hour prime-time television show written, directed and staring Sheen, where the bishop, with a minimal props and stage dressing, would speak about philosophical and political issues in a manner accessible to the average American. At its peak, *Life is Worth Living* reached a weekly national audience of roughly 20-30 million viewers,[11] and brought in so much revenue for his program's sole sponsor, Admiral appliances, that by the second season of his show they were

[9] Sheen scholar Timothy H. Sherwood has remarked that Sheen spent so much time involved in speaking engagements, rather than teaching, that he was more of an "ambassador" than a lecturer for the CUA. *The Rhetorical Leadership of Fulton J. Sheen*, 17.

[10] Despite being one of America's pioneering broadcasters, the DuMont Network would fold within the decade due to financial problems Riley, *Fulton J. Sheen*, 65-66.

[11] The exact numbers for his series are hard to pin down and the numbers most sources provide appear to be largely anecdotal or "common knowledge" in that they do not cite any direct reference for these figures, typically suggesting 20-30 million viewers at his nation-wide peak.

sponsoring him to the tune of $1,000,000 per episode (which he consistently donated to the charitable efforts of the SPOF).[12] He also scored an audience rating of 23.7 by the American Research Bureau, which "was the highest ever recorded for anyone on TV in those pioneering years."[13] Sheen's program was so widely viewed and well-received that he won a primetime Emmy award for "Most Outstanding Television Personality," pulled audiences away from Milton Berle's popular *Texaco Star Theatre* – much to Berle's irritation – and caused Frank Sinatra's upstart *The Frank Sinatra Show* to end after a single season owing to poor ratings in the slot opposite Sheen.[14]

Sheen's program ran to widespread acclaim on DuMont until its closure in 1955. The show was then picked up by ABC until the end of its run in 1957, when Sheen was arguably at the height of his popularity. Reasons for the sudden ending to the program were never publicly disclosed, yet it was almost certainly owing to a growing behind-the-scenes feud between Sheen and his benefactor, the powerful Cardinal Francis Spellman of New York. Though television would continue to draw Sheen, and he would return to the screen several times in the years after *Life Is Worth Living* was pulled, he never again found the same level as success as during his heyday in the mid-1950s.[15]

Sheen continued to be active within the Church following his departure from television. He attended and participated in several Vatican II sessions in Rome before being made diocesan Bishop at Rochester – again, likely owing to the actions of Spellman. While Sheen arrived in

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[12] During the first season, Sheen was cautiously paid $10,000 per episode, and shortly after upped to $16,000 by Admiral, which he also donated to charity. Massa, *Catholics and American Culture Fulton*, 83.

[13] The audience rating would become more commonly known as the Nielsen rating. Though Sheen was highly rated, it is worth bearing in mind that the rating system only came into effect some three years earlier. Massa, *Catholics and American Culture*, 83.

[14] When Sheen went to accept his Emmy, Berle, who had won that same award only a few years prior, is widely reported to have quipped that Sheen "got better writers - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John!" Sheen was also the three-time recipient for the "Excellence in Television" award by *Look* Magazine. Lynch, *Selling Catholicism*, 7.

[15] While certainly successful, it is important to recognize that Sheen was hardly alone as a celebrity religious leader or preacher during this period. Joining him from across the ecumenical aisles were men like Billy Graham, Harry Emerson Fosdick and, notably, Norman Vincent Peale, along with Rabbi Joshua Loth Liebman.

Rochester with much fanfare – in part this was due to his enduring celebrity appeal, but he because also represented the promise of post-Vatican II change – his tenure was widely described as a failure. After three tumultuous years, he abruptly retired his post in 1969. In the final decade of his life, Sheen was made titular Archbishop of Newport in 1969 by Pope Paul VI, a largely symbolic appointment in recognition of his years of service. He spent some time as a mentor to fellow priests during a number of retreats and began composing his autobiography, *Treasure in Clay* (1979), before passing away in 1979 following a series of heart problems.

As is the case of many widely beloved figures within the Church, Sheen's story didn't end with his death, but continued to develop into his afterlife. While speculation about Sheen's possible canonization began shortly after his death, the first concrete steps were taken in 1998 when the Diocese of Peoria gave permission to the Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen Foundation to begin his formal cause for canonization. By 2008 their materials were submitted to the Vatican, and by 2011, thanks to their work, Sheen was declared a Venerable Servant of God. By 2014 his cause was proceeding steadily towards Beatification, however several disruptions put the cause on indefinite hold. As of this writing in mid-2021, his cause continues to be on hold with no clear indication as to when it will resume, nor what actions will be taken.[16]

Theoretical Considerations

Mid-Twentieth Century American Catholicism

The mid-twentieth century was a time of transition for America and its Catholic inhabitants. Following the conclusion to the Second World War in the nation's favour, a slew of government initiatives during the Truman and Eisenhower eras helped transform America's

[16] Sheen's canonization cause will be covered in more detail in Chapter 2.

economic, social and political landscapes. Legislation such as the GI Bill helped create unprecedented opportunities for America's young urbanites – including a disproportionate number of Catholics – allowing them to escape their overcrowded inner-city neighbourhoods and multi-family dwellings in order to attend college and trade schools, take up white collar work, and ultimately relocate to the suburbs. While Catholics spent much of the first half of the century occupied with questions of place and identity, by the post-war period Catholics of European descent were rapidly assimilating into the American mainstream. By the 1950s many of the lingering prejudices against Catholics – such as the once insidious specter of "popery," the belief in a Catholic "fifth column," and the question of American Catholic allegiances – had largely been settled. Communism became the new catch-all boogeyman to embody America's persistent fear of the incomprehensible other, and Catholic Americans were eager to stand at the vanguard of the nation's ideological war with their geopolitical nemesis – all the while casually reminding Americans that they had been warning of the dangers of Communism since the 20s and 30s.[17] The heart of this dissertation can therefore be situated in this era, firmly within mid-twentieth century American Catholic studies.

Mid-century Catholicism is hardly a niche topic in the larger field of American religion. Countless scholarly works inform us of the histories, practices and lived experiences of American Catholics of the era. Many of the first such studies examined American Catholicism from a largely

[17] Sheen was a vocal and vociferous anticommunist since the 1930s, regularly equating Communism, Fascism and Nazism as what he saw were the three enemies of American democracy and Christianity itself. Other vocal anti-communist Catholic figures during the pre-war period include the now-infamous Father Charles Coughlin and the lesser-known Edmund A. Walsh, S.J. For Sheen's most comprehensive treatise against communism, see Fulton J. Sheen, *Communism and the Conscience of the West* (Indianapolis: Refugee of Sinners Publishing, Inc., 1948). For more on Father Coughlin, see Sheldon Marcus, *Father Coughlin: The tumultuous life of the priest of the Little Flower* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1973), and Donald Warren, *Radio Priest: Charles Coughlin, the Father of Hate Radio* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996). For Edmund A. Walsh, see Patrick J. McNamara, "Russia, Rome, and Recognition: American Catholics and Anticommunism in the 1920s" *U.S. Catholic Historian* 24, no. 2 (Spring, 2006): 71-88, and Patrick J. McNamara, "'The Argument of Strength Justly and Righteously Employed': Edmund A. Walsh, Catholic Anticommunism, and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1952," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 22, no. 4 (Fall, 2004): 57-77.

institutional and macrocosmic angle. Several of these earlier works have focused on contrasts between pre- and post-Vatican II, such as McAvoy (1968), O'Brien (1974) and Bianchi (1985), while others have built on the narrative of Catholics as the "first" Americans and best representatives of the nation's values and promises, such as Ellis (1965) and Dolan (1985; 2002). More recently, Works such as Tentler (1998) and Fisher (2009) have put priests front and center as actors in their mid-twentieth century communities, marking a pronounced shift from earlier institutional histories where individual priests have often come across as non-descript participants in their engagements with ecclesiastical leaders. Theological studies scholar John C. Seitz, in particular, has also focused on the lives and lived experiences of American Catholic priests and the ways in which these men have negotiated their dual identities as sanctified clergymen and American citizens.[18] There have also been several recent studies focusing on the lives of particular priests, such as longstanding Notre Dame President Ted Hesburgh, civil rights activist Father Sherill Smith, and Knights of Columbus founder Michael J. McGivney.[19]

As part of this shift away from the institutions of the church, scholars have highlighted the devotional lives and lived experiences of America's Catholics. Monographs such as Robert A. Orsi's *Thank You Saint Jude* (1996) and *Between Heaven and Earth* (2005) have highlighted the prominent role that saints have had in mid-century devotional lives and experiences. Though the role of such intercessors has been markedly de-emphasized by the Vatican since Vatican II, scholars have noted how the enduring and often intergenerational relationships that have been

[18] John C. Seitz, "'What better place?': Refiguring Priesthood at St. John's Seminary, Boston, 1965-1970," U*.S. Catholic Historian* 33, no. 2 (January 2015): 49-82. Seitz has also written about the challenges in the existing scholarship and historiography of the lives of priests. See John C. Seitz, "The Lives of Priests," *American Catholic Studies* 127, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 18-23.

[19] Wilson D. Miscamble, *American Priest: The Ambitious Life and Conflicted Legacy of Notre Dame's Father Ted Hesburgh* (New York: Image Books, 2019); Mark Newman, "The Marching Priest: The Civil Rights and Labor Activism of Father Sherril Smith during the 1950s and 1960s," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 124, no. 3 (January 2021): 300-324; Douglas Brinkley and Julie M. Fenster, *Parish Priest: Father Michael McGivney and American Catholicism* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006).

forged between the faithful and their "invisible friends" are not so easily broken nor forgotten. However, many of the studies on mid-century Catholicism focus (either implicitly or explicitly) on the lives and devotional experiences of urban Catholics within the major archdioceses of the United States – notably Chicago, Boston and New York City.[20] Fortunately, there are some notable studies addressing the often-overlooked lives and experiences of rural Catholics and those living far from the nation's metropolises, such as Smith (2012), Marlett (1998; 2019) and Bovée (2010; 2016).

Predominantly, academic work focusing on mid-century American Catholicism and its prominent figures has also largely (and implicitly) focused on the experiences of Irish American Catholics.[21] Under a certain light, this was unavoidable: since the nineteenth century, the Irish in the United States have historically made up the largest Catholic communities by sheer numbers as well as influence. Irish Americans bishops have wielded enormous power over the development of the tradition in the US and were largely responsible for building the nation's Catholic educational systems and other communal infrastructure. As such, Irish Americans have largely found themselves entrenched in American Catholic culture, with their own experiences becoming synonymous for the greater whole. This is never more evident than when encountering the oft-repeated trope in of "coming of age" metaphors frequently used in studies of mid-century American Catholicism – whereby Catholics, by virtue of their immigrant heritages, overcame their

[20] See, for example, Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Robert A. Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude: Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); John McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: Catholic Encounters with Race* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); James M. O'Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2008).

[21] Scholars have gone to some lengths to address the lives of 'other' Catholics. See Timothy Matovina, *Latino Catholicism: Transformation in America's Largest Church* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Brett Hendrickson, *Border Medicine: A Transcultural History of Mexican American Curanderismo* (New York: NYU Press, 2014); Anne M. Martinez*, Catholic Borderlands: Mapping Catholicism onto American Empire, 1905-1935* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2014); Matthew J. Cressler, "Black Catholic Conversion and the Burden of Black Religion," *Journal of Africana Religions* 2, no. 2 (2014): 280-287; Matthew J. Cressler, "Black Power, Vatican II, and the Emergence of Black Catholic Liturgies," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 32, no. 4 (Fall 2014): 99-119.

histories of difference and successfully assimilated into wider American culture.[22] Such narrative tropes are inherently built on the understanding of American Catholicism as immigrant Catholicism – and by extension, Irish American Catholicism.

While insightful, the dominant narratives of American Catholicism have nevertheless had the tendency to unintentionally overshadow or oversimplify the diversity within American Catholicism, the lived experiences of its varied members, and the rate at which American Catholics were already integrating into wider popular culture before the mid-century mark. Of course, by virtue of focusing on the life of a particular Irish American Catholic, this work inevitably builds on the tradition of the "coming of age" metaphors.[23] However, my aim here is to problematize this traditional view, as the "coming of age" that interests me is not so much a story of immigrants integrating into society, but rather that of American Catholicism intersecting with American celebrity and media culture.

It should be noted that Sheen, by the 1950s, was by no means the first American Catholic celebrity – American Irish had largely integrated themselves into Hollywood and the motion

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[22] The oft-repeated adage that American Catholicism experienced a "coming of age" in mid-century America revolves around a narrative of linear progression – Catholics moved from being outcasts and immigrants to more fully welcomed and integrated, eventually becoming identifiably American sometime around the mid-century mark (variously pinned at the end of WWII or the election of John F. Kennedy). For the origins of this view see: John Tracy Ellis, *American Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Image Books, 1985), and *In Search of American Catholicism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). For examples of how this pervasive notion continues to inform readings of Catholic history – despite the fact that it often occludes important nuances and counter-narratives – see Lynch*, Selling Catholicism*, and Eugene D. McCarraher, "The Saint in the Gray Flannel Suit: The Professional-Managerial Class, 'The Layman,' and America-Catholic-Religious Culture, 1945-1965," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 15, no. 3 (Summer, 1997): 99-118.

[23] Bearing the above in mind, I feel it appropriate to demarcate the scope and limitations of this project. Though I am examining wider societal trends in America, the focus of this work will predominantly be with concerns and issues associated with white, English-speaking Catholics of European descent. While features of power imbalances and inequality, along with social mobility and middle-class comforts, will feature into my discussions to some extent in chapters 2, 3 and 4, considerations of race (apart from some discussions of Irishness), language, and economics will largely not be topics of consideration in this project. That is not to say that these topics are unworthy of academic interest, but rather that they do not fall within the scope of my focus on Fulton J. Sheen, his particular performance of masculinity, his enduring celebrity status, and the theoretical implications these intersections have for studies of mid-twentieth century American Catholicism.

picture industry since the 1920s – nor was he the first explicitly *clerical* celebrity, as Father Coughlin's radio program reached the nation earlier than Sheen's had.[24] However, Sheen stands as the quintessential figure embodying the dual concerns of celebrity and sanctity owing to the progress on his current path towards canonization, the breadth of media he employed – including radio, television, and publishing – and the ways in which his celebrity has both expedited and complicated that very process of canonization. In this regard, the overlap of his celebrity and sanctity has not only transcended the popular appeal which he enjoyed during life his but continues to impact the very institutions of the Church taking a part in dictating his afterlife.

Sanctity and the American Celebrity

Methodologically and functionally, celebrities bear much in common with saints – something which numerous scholars have commented upon. In a 2011 study, sociologist Natalie Heinich observed that in pop culture as well as academia, when talking about celebrities and stardom, the terminology deployed is often similar to that used for discussions of explicitly "religious" matters. Celebrities are the focus of adoration, have cults of devoted followers, can have their careers undergo resurrections, and are sometimes even referred to as "gods."[25] Heinich argues that, while these types of overlaps can be useful for some discussions, scholars should remain wary of directly transposing conceptual categories from one realm to the other, and, moreover, avoid discussing celebrity as a possible replacement for religion or the cult of the saints.[26] A more fruitful avenue for examining the overlap, she contends, is to build on historian

[24] Coughlin's first appearance on WJR radio took place in 1926, while Sheen would join *The Catholic Hour* in 1930.
[25] Heinich uses "*Dieux*" in the original French-language article. I have translated it for clarity. Nathalie Heinich, "Des limites de l'analogie religieuse: L'exemple de la célébrité," *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 57, no. 158 (April-June 2012): 158.
[26] Heinich, "Des Limites," 163.

Aviad Kleinberg's focus on *charisma* – developed in his 2008 monograph *Flesh Made Word*: *Saints' Stories and the Western Imagination* – and attempt to understand how it figures and functions in a given society. [27] Rather than argue that celebrities are a modern evolution of the saints or some other facile reading that overlooks the complexities of both concepts, it is more fruitful to remark that what both of these categories of being share is their reliance on charisma, personal magnetism, and the ability for the figures at the centre to affect emotional change in the people around them. In this regard, Sheen's dual identities – celebrity and would-be saint – intersect with his own charisma and presence, magnified not only by his virtuous life as a bishop, but through the lens of the cameras and projected into televisions across America.

In a 2017 study, historian Andrea Graus also explores overlaps between celebrity and Catholic sanctity, by examining the cultic following of several female mystics in Europe at the turn of the twentieth century. In the case of these women, many of their devotees initially flocked to them based on the power of their *reputation*, rather than the traditional links of regional proximity, shared community membership, etc. Graus remarks that the living saints in these cases functioned very closely to celebrities in that popular enthusiasm – rather than interpersonal relationships – built up and constructed their celebrated (and sanctified) identities, effectively allowing them to acquire a level of fame which could entice visitors from distant regions.[28] Discussing the means through which this was made possible, she highlights how the identity and reputation of saints in the modern era comes to be constructed differently than saints in the premodern era, largely owing to the emergent and ongoing prevalence of mass communication. Historically, technology was never a decisive factor in shaping and expanding the initial cults of

[27] See Aviad Kleinberg, *Flesh Made Word: Saints' Stories and the Western Imagination* (London: The Belknap Press, 2008), especially Ch. 1.
[28] Andrea Graus, "A Visit to Remember: Stigmata and Celebrity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *The Journal of the Social History Society* 14, no. 1 (2017): 57.

the saints, nor was it necessary for sustaining the complex network of relationships that exist between a saint and their devotees. In the premodern era, word of mouth, personal encounters, and/or clerical authorization were the dominant factors in building up recognition for these figures, with the focus often falling on the miracles that were understood to have taken place in their presence.[29] However, mass media has the capacity to allow figures to become more widely known in a quicker period of time, and also more widely accessible. This suggests that the construction of both celebrities and saints is closely related to the technologies of access available in a given society or historical context – whether it be word of mouth, pen and paper, or having one's eyes glued to the TV screen on a weekly basis.

While the mystics examined by Graus benefitted from technology and media in spreading their renown beyond their geographic area, it was a process that was taken up by their devotees – in other words, it was out of their hands. For Sheen, however, this was not the case: he was the primary actor in using technology to transmit his person beyond the Archdiocese of New York, first with radio, then with paperback books, then with television. While he was not the first priest to take to the radio (nor was he necessarily the most famous to do so, compared to Fr. Coughlin), he nevertheless utilized the medium to great effect, connecting with millions of American listeners and becoming one of the most well-recognized figures in the American Catholic church even before his TV fame would later cement that status. In many respects, Sheen's sanctity is thus a product of the modern world and the media and technology available within it, with his own charisma certainly playing a role, as it fit the criteria both for American celebrity and a Catholic saint.

[29] Graus, "A Visit to Remember," 86.

The confluence of celebrity and sanctity is perhaps not as remarkable as it might seem. After all, the word "celebrity" derives from the Latin nouns *celebritas* and *celebratio*, referring to the presence of a multitude or the gathering of a crowd. These words also point to the thing or presence giving rise to said crowds or multitudes – effectively the figure around which they rally. Celebrity is thus that which is out of the ordinary – not unlike sanctity itself, which at its heart refers to an act of demarcation, of being set apart. Where the mundane might go unnoticed, to be a celebrity is to be the focus of the crowd. The status of celebrity conveys on the person a level of visibility – to be suddenly seen by multitudes.[30] In this there is also an element of desire – a craving to encounter, be near, and see that which is being celebrated. Despite often hoping to be seen and acknowledged in return, those who gather nevertheless remain at a certain distance from the celebrated by virtue of being among their audience.[31] While celebrities come into being through the visibility of their actions, much like saints, the individuals who become celebrities are often only one among many agents proposing and sustaining their own star status.[32] In the case of celebrities, it is not cults, but managing agents, marketers, studios and audiences that play a role in the construction and maintenance of their celebrity and stardom.[33] Through their constituent parts, celebrities thus become complex and aggregated texts, the readings of which reveal not just the characteristics of the individual celebrity, but also much about the nature of celebrity as it is understood in a given culture by given audiences.

As such, celebrities can be understood as composite images patched together from carefully managed personas. They are, simultaneously, the person behind the screen, the person unseen by

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[30] Joseph A. Boone and Nancy J. Vickers, "Celebrity Rites," *PMLA* 126, no. 4 (October 2011): 900-911, 904.
[31] Boone and Vickers, "Celebrity Rites," 909.
[32] Boone and Vickers, "Celebrity Rites," 903.
[33] Sheen is perhaps unique among many of his fellow celebrities in this sense as he had no official publicists, agents, marketers or others acting for the promotion of his celebrity, apart from himself. He largely dictated his own dress, make-up, appearance and other aspects of his person, effectively taking the reins himself when it came to crafting his image. See Daniel Harris, "Celebrity Clothing," *Salmagundi* 168/169 (Fall 2010-Winter 2011): 233.

the cameras, and none of the above. The persona which appears on the screen is known to the public to be an act, a performance. Yet, even when they leave their stages behind and appear on screen as themselves, they offer the audiences a performance of another, more subtle kind. "Performance is a critical component in any public figure's identity," writes celebrity studies scholar P. David Marshall.[34] He goes on to state that "celebrities perform in their primary art form – as actors, musicians, singers, athlete – as well as the extra-textual dimensions of interviews, advertisements/commercial endorsements, award nights and premieres."[35] The celebrity never stops acting so long as they are under the public gaze. As such, their public persona as citizens is always a carefully managed act, one that fits and plays into the expectations of their audiences, providing just enough humanity behind the mask to make themselves relatable. Their public face is one which is highly mediated and refined, with blemishes on their faces and personal lives covered up by make-up and marketing. Celebrities do allow certain images from their private lives to be offered for public consumption, but each one is carefully selected in "order to construct and control a complete persona."[36]

Though Sheen held a tenuous relationship with his celebrity, he was not blind to its potential benefits with respect to his sanctified work – his celebrity provided him with certain opportunities with America's elites which might not otherwise have been available to the average priest. His celebrity granted him access to notable public figures such as Henry Ford II, columnist Heywood Broun, and Claire Boothe Luce, all of whom would eventually convert to Catholicism after one or more encounters with the bishop. Thanks to his national recognition, he was even able to secure meetings with organizers of the American Communist party – Louis Budenz and Bella

[34] P. David Marshall, "The Promotion and Presentation of the Self: Celebrity as Market of Presentational Media," *Celebrity Studies* 1, no. 1 (2010): 39.
[35] Marshall, "Promotion and Presentation," 39.
[36] Marshall, "Promotion and Presentation," 43.

Dodd – who also renounced communism and returned to Catholicism thanks to their meetings with the bishop. In *The Bishop Sheen Story* (1953), biographer James C. G. Conniff notes that Sheen was a popular companion to Hollywood starlets of the day – notably Loretta Young and Irene Dunne, who both happened to be devout Catholics – with whom he was frequently seen going to brunch in New York.[37] Sheen was so inspiring and influential among fellow Catholics that Martin Sheen – née Ramón Gerard Antonio Estévez – chose his surname for his acting moniker.[38] Indeed, Lynch has referred to Bishop Sheen as none other than "an aristocrat" in the Church and in America itself.[39] Taken as a whole, these encounters demonstrate the ease with which Sheen moved through circles populated by many of the city's, if not the nation's, most affluent and influential.

This discussion reminds us that religion is neither separate nor detached from the cultures and contexts within which it operates. However, the ways in which it intersects and overlaps with concepts of celebrity and fame have often been overlooked by scholars of religion and celebrity alike. Nevertheless, celebrity studies, while still an emerging field compared to that of American religion, has been rapidly expanding its reach and scope from its niche origins. In the 2020 volume of *Celebrity Studies*, issues have focused on a wide berth of topics, ranging from *RuPaul's Drag Race* to Far-Right political performances to the body of Mary Magdalene.[40] Religion, while still on the fringes, has gradually become a more visible topic in that field, albeit with an emphasis on religious women more than their male counterparts. As discussed earlier, Nathalie Heinich and Andrea Grauss have both examined intersections of religion and celebrity, principally concerning

[37] Conniff, *The Bishop Sheen Story* (New York: Fawcett Publications, 1953), 26.
[38] Lynch suggests that Martin Sheen contacted the bishop, asking to take on his surname for his own. If this is the case, it reveals a remarkable imbalance in fame and influence whereby the future Hollywood celebrity came calling to the bishop, who happened to be the greater celebrity at the time. Lynch, *Selling Catholicism*, 27.
[39] Lynch, *Selling Catholicism*, 147.
[40] See *Celebrity Studies* 11, no. 1-4, 2020.

the lives of women religious and mystics.[41] More recently, Lucy Bolton (2020) approached the perennial virgin/whore dichotomy of Mary Magdalene from the angle of a celebrity or film star.[42] The intermixing of the spirituality and celebrity of Mother Teresa has also been the topic of several works, notably by Gëzim Alpion, who has also written about the conspicuous absence of spiritual icons being the focus of celebrity studies.[43]

And so, where fame and celebrity studies continue to lag not only concerns religious icons, but notably *male* religious celebrities, of which America has produced no shortage of in this past century. While America's Protestant preachers – televangelists and authors such as Martin Luther King Jr., Billy Graham, Vincent Norman Peale and Aimee Semple McPherson – may be the first to come to mind where religion and celebrity mingle,[44] Catholics have been equally visible. Charles Coughlin, Tom Dooley, Thomas Merton, and Dorothy Day all stand out as well-known American Catholic celebrities whose fame is intricately bound with and cannot be detached from their religious identities – even if these intersections have drawn comparatively less attention from scholars than the case with Protestant figures.[45] While there is undoubtedly more work to be done

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[41] See Nathalie Heinich, "La Consommation de la Célébrité," *L'Année sociologique*, 61, no. 1 (2011): 103-123; Andrea Graus, "A Visit to Remember."

[42] See Lucy Bolton, "Beautiful penitent whore: the desecrated celebrity of Mary Magdalene," *Celebrity Studies* 11, no.1 (2020): 25-42.

[43] See Gëzim Alpion *Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity* (London: Routledge, 2006); Gëzim Alpion, "Why Are Modern Spiritual Icons Absent in Celebrity Studies? The Role of Intermediaries in Enhancing Mother Teresa's Advocacy in India and Australia Prior to the 1979 Novel Peace Prize," *Celebrity Studies* 11, no. 2 (2020): 221-236; Gëzim Alpion, *Mother Teresa: The Saint and Her Nation* (New Deli: Bloomsbury India, 2020).

[44] For scholarly works which explicitly address the celebrity of McPherson, Graham, and Peale, see: Matthew Avery Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Grant Wacker, *America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015); Erin A. Smith, *What Would Jesus Read?: Popular Religious Books and Everyday Life in Twentieth-Century America* (Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015). While there is a plethora of recent academic and biographical works on Martin Luther King, Jr., few acknowledge his celebrity, although a passing mention does occur in Duvall and Heckemeyer as an example of the intersection of black celebrity and activism. See Spring-Serenity Duvall and Nicole Heckemeyer, "#BlackLivesMatter: Black Celebrity Hashtag Activism and the Discursive Formation of a Social Movement," *Celebrity Studies* 9, no.3 (2018): 391-408.

[45] For a sampling of literature which does address these figures' celebrity, see: Amy Henderson, "Media and the Rise of Celebrity Culture," *OAH Magazine of History* 6, no. 4 (Spring, 1992): 49-54; James T. Fisher, *Dr. America: The Lives of Thomas A. Dooley, 1927-1961* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997); James T. Fisher, *The Catholic Counterculture in America, 1933-1962* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Massa,

on those figures, I would argue that Sheen, by virtue of having been an American television star as well as a famed radio host and bestselling author, granted him a level of visibility and even presence that rises above and beyond the others. That there has been no such study on his fame and its intersections with his sanctity strikes one as a major lacuna in understanding the crossover of religion and celebrity in mid-twentieth century American culture.

Identity and American Masculinity

In the same vein that Sheen cannot be understood without analyzing his celebrity, it would be impossible to discuss Sheen's career, identity and body without also addressing his masculinity. As a celibate clergyman from a minority religious tradition, Sheen's manhood and the ways in which his male identity was constructed differed greatly from the expectations of mid-twentieth century celebrities, not to mention the average American male.

The foundational canon of men's studies and masculinities is well-established, largely rooted with the work of R. W. Connell's 1993 magnum opus *Masculinities*. Here, Connell argues against the wider cultural assumption that there is an immutable, fixed element of "true" masculinity – often rooted in the biological or somewhere deep inside a person's core – instead asserting that gender is primarily performative and not fixed in advance of social interactions.[46]

Catholics and American Culture; Francis X. Clooney, "Thomas Merton's Deep Christian Learning across Religious Borders," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 37 (2017): 49-64; Thomas Forsthoefel, "Merton and the Axes of Dialogue," *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 37 (2017), 65-72. While Henderson's article does investigate Fr. Coughlin's celebrity appeal, she does so only in passing in the context of a larger discussion of the role of radio in early American celebrity. Merton's celebrity is mentioned in Clooney and Forsthoefel, but neither author dwells upon nor explores this connotation with much theoretical depth. Slightly more substantial treatments can be found in Massa and Fisher for while Massa addresses Day's fame via an exploration of her presence and impact in American popular culture, Fisher, likewise, does not shy away from addressing Dooley's fame in his 1997 biography. Fisher also takes up Dooley's relationship to American culture and Catholic counterculture more generally in a chapter in *The Catholic Counterculture.*

[46] Connell, *Masculinities* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1993), 35.

Gender, as such, exist as a means of structuring social practices, which are organized hierarchically at the societal level. Dominating all such patterns of interaction is hegemonic masculinity, "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women."[47] While some authors, such as Michael Moller (2007) and Eric Anderson (2009) have sought to either distance themselves from Connell's theoretical models or present new structures for understanding the operative patterns of masculinity at the societal level and in lived experiences, her arguments concerning masculinity as configurations of social practices continues to inform the theoretical underpinnings of virtually all endeavours in this field.[48]

Where studies of American masculinity are concerned, Michael S. Kimmel's 2006 *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* remains a pivotal text that provides a broad framework for understanding currents and patterns in masculinity particular to the United States as it underlined certain archetypal patterns and models of masculinity of which have implicitly and

[47] Connell, *Masculinities,* 77. I am simplifying Connell's legacy and the trajectory of her own research. While *Masculinities* was the culminating work in her conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity and its operative patterns at the societal level, earlier investigations attempting to understand hegemonic patterns of masculinity in society can be reviewed in T. Carrigan, B. Connell, and J. Lee, "Towards a new Sociology of Masculinity," *Theory and Society* 14, no. 5 (1985): 551-604, and Connell, "Hegemonic Masculinity and Emphasized Femininity," in *Gender and Power*: *Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), 183-188. Connell also revisits her theoretical foundations at a later date in Connell, and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (Dec., 2005): 829-859.

[48] Anderson's *Inclusive Masculinity: The Changing Nature of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 2009), investigated the masculinity of college age fraternity members and athletes, arguing that, with the decrease in cultural homophobia, men were slowly constructing softer "versions" of masculinity that allowed room for bonding and emotional connections. While his monograph can certainly be read as both provocative and iconoclastic in the field, the extent to which he offers a cohesive rebuttal or convincing refutation of Connell's theories is another matter altogether. In turn, Moller – in "Exploiting Patterns: A Critique of Hegemonic Masculinity," *Journal of Gender Studies* 16, no. 3. (2007): 263-276 – criticized Connell for leaving little room in her theory for the lived experiences of men and the possibility for men to act in a selfless, beneficial manner. For a radically alternative theoretical stance that seeks to ground masculinity in actions rather than bodies – a stance I do not necessarily find convincing – see Douglas Schrock and Michael Schwalbe, "Men, Masculinity, and Manhood Acts," *Annual Review of Sociology* 25 (2009): 277-295.

explicitly informed American conceptions of manhood.[49] While the concept of "crisis" has been an often-repeated adage about the state of masculinity in America, Kimmel (1987), along with others such as Kathleen Starck and Russell Luyt (2018), have successfully problematized that notion by pointing to the apparently cyclical nature of anxiety perceived to be manifesting itself in society. Others, such as James Gilbert (2005) have further critiqued narratives of American masculinity for focusing on uniformity of experiences and overlooking the inherent diversity of experiences. In turn, numerous studies have also focused on various facets of the American experience. Stephen Meyer (2016) and Anthony E. Rotundo (1993) focus on blue-collar and working-class manhood, while Robin M. Boylorn (2017) and Danté L. Pelzer (2016) have focused on issues of race and identity interwoven with American masculinity.

There have also been numerous studies examining the intersections of celebrity and masculinity. Many of the recent studies in this field have also tended to focus on the secular world, engaging athletes or movie stars – such as the case with Anne Jerslev and Line Nybro Petersen (2018) and Mark McKenna (2019). Several works from the 90s – such as Roger Horrocks (1995) and Susan Jeffords (1994) – have also examined the intersection of American masculinities with popular culture. Jeffords, in particular, has isolated the ways in which the norms and expectations of *hard* masculinity – that is, patterns of masculinity hinging on demonstrations of strength, valour, and a rigidity of body and emotions – manifest themselves through popular culture at times of national crisis or instability.[50] Using films and popular culture as her primary sources, she

[49] Kimmel has argued that American masculinity is often shaped in emulation of perceived (and idealized) archetypes believed to have been formed in the early and pre-Revolution era, such as those of the noble artisan, the genteel patriarch, etc. Such archetypes acted as the repository of America's own mythologizing – notably, the potential for men to satisfy the conditions of father/providers and make a living out of their own labour or industriousness. The history of the nation and of men's bodies, of course, bears little semblance to this Golden Era mythologizing, yet the ideals would remain powerful archetypes overshadowing masculine self-understanding into the modern era. See Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[50] See Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), especially Ch. 1 and 2.

demonstrates the overlapping reciprocity between national anxieties and anxieties about male bodies that occurred during the Cold War of the 1980s – a link which holds similarly true for conversations over nation and body in the mid-century setting of this work.

In recent years, masculinity studies have intersected with studies of religion in the United States, often commenting upon how religious men's lives, bodies and actions complicate or refigure traditional understandings – both academic and popular – of American manhood. Kristin Kobes Du Mez's *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (2020), along with Kelly J. Baker's *The Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915-1930* (2011), focus on the intersections of Protestant self-identity and ideals of hardened American masculinity. Du Mez outlines how twentieth century American Evangelicalism was often infatuated with toughness, culminating in a mid-century rebranding that sought to prove Christianity was compatible with "red-blooded" American masculinity.[51] Popular figures such as Billy Graham preached for the necessity of maintaining traditional gender roles and patriarchal authority while themselves embodying these ideals in the flesh to massive audiences. For her part, Baker has demonstrated how the KKK positioned itself as a means for white Protestants to become "manly" Americans in contrast to the suspicious others (which included Catholics) in their midst, offering men the tools and means to reclaim the societal dominance they felt entitled to.[52] What these studies both seem to suggest is that shared ideals of hard, patriarchal masculinity between Protestant and secular America and fears of effeminacy have been frequently close to the heart of white, heteronormative, Protestant self-identity and self-construction.

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[51] Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020), 22-23.
[52] Kelly J. Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant American, 1915-1930* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2011), 20-22.

Catholic masculinities have not gone unnoticed in the study of American masculinities. However, as is the case with celebrity studies, American Protestants are more likely to be tied to the larger trends within the field and the nation, while Catholics tend to be read in more inward looking and devotional focused contexts. We can see this in the recent work of religious studies scholar Alyssa Maldonado-Estrada, *Lifeblood of the Parish: Men and Catholic Devotion in Williamsburg, Brooklyn* (2020). Basing her ethnographic study of the male devotees of the Our Lady of Mount Carmel, she has signalled some of the ways in which traditionally understood "male practices" overlap and are at the same time devotional acts. Notably, going against the usual demarcation of male and female spaces along the public and private, the secular and the religious, she argued for the church as "a vital site for the making of masculinity," whereby men can simultaneously perform masculine behaviour (such as construction, carpentry, etc.) and devotional acts (adornment of icons, wearing costumes, preparations for ritual procession, etc.) in the same space.[53] The Catholic masculinity examined here is largely enacted at the local and intersocial levels by making actions and spaces simultaneously devotional and masculine. In effect, we can witness not only intersections but overlaps of religion and gender as these men both embody their masculinity by performing tasks and engaging in behaviours that align with the Catholic virtues of labour, charity, and physical as well as the ideals of working-class / blue-collar masculinity. While Moldonado-Estrada's work insightfully bridges traditionally understood male actions with Catholic male devotional practices, it nevertheless continues to root Catholic masculinity within Catholic devotional contexts. This isn't to say that Catholic masculinity should be removed from all devotional elements of its enactment, but that there remains work to be done in bringing

[53] Alyssa Maldonado-Estrada, *Lifeblood of the Parish: Men and Catholic Devotion in Williamsburg* (Brooklyn, NY: New York University Press, 2020), 2.

Catholic patterns of masculinity out of their devotional ghettos and into negotiation with wider patterns in the modern nation.

There has been some work in recent years focusing on examining Catholic masculinity outside of devotional spaces and activities – albeit focusing on priests, rather than the laity. Franklin Rausch (2015) and John C. Seitz (2014; 2019) highlight the versatility of clerical masculinity in wartimes – in these cases, on the battlefields of World War II and the Korean War. Both authors note the adaptability of traditional clerical masculinity (as father figures, spiritual leaders, etc.) in these contexts and the ways in which priests can enact modified elements of *hard* masculinity. However, most of the theoretical literature on clerical masculinity continues to be rooted in the Medieval period, such as with Andrew Holt (2010) and Ruth Mazo Karras (2010). Nevertheless, despite this temporal gap, I would argue that many of the same considerations and challenges of clerical masculinity – such as sexual abstinence versus sexual conquest, spiritual fatherhood versus biological fatherhood, non-violence versus violence, household authority versus spiritual authority – continue to inform the masculinity of priests to this day.

On the surface, the clerical masculinity embodied by Sheen in mid-century America in many ways clashes with the expectations of mid-century celebrity masculinity. Though he could match the television celebrities of his day in front of the cameras where charm and charisma were concerned, as well as living through some of the behind the scenes glamour, Sheen's personal asceticism and chastity put him at odds with the sexual voracity and habits of consumption that marked the private lives of his secular peers such as Milton Berle and fellow Catholic Frank Sinatra.[54] However, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, mid-century American

[54] Milton Berle's sexual appetite was infamous, as was apparently the size of his penis which developed a mythology of its own as he frequently flashed it to his contemporaries. Needless to say, while Sheen's celebrity lifestyle brought him some of the glamour, the clerical vows took precedence over the other expectations of the celebrity male. See Dave Calvert, "Similar Hats on Similar Heads: Uniformity and Alienation at the Rat Pack's Summit Conference of

celebrity was more diverse than its more hegemonic iterations would suggest, allowing the space for men like Sheen to embody different patterns of masculinity. In addition, as will be discussed in Chapter 5, Sheen's clerical masculinity did not prevent him from negotiating some of the elements of *hard* masculinity either, and as such this study offers a contrasting understanding of hard masculinity in American religion as was proposed in the earlier mentioned studies by Du Mez (2020) and Baker (2011).

Sources

In preparation for this dissertation, I was able to work with numerous primary sources, many of which Sheen had a hand in creating either in part or entirely. Firstly, I was able to review numerous episodes of Sheen's television show *Life is Worth Living*, most of which I was able to find in whole or in part online through streaming services such as YouTube. The majority of these videos appear to have been posted from unofficial sources using digitized recordings from re-runs on Catholic television in the 90s, and then uploaded by viewers who could be counted variously (or simultaneously, in some cases) as fans and devotees of Sheen. The sheer volume of episodes uploaded, along with their views (many reaching into the hundreds of thousands) says something not only about the enduring popularity of the bishop among American Catholics, but also that new audiences continue to discover this figure to this very day.[55] While the manner of which he is discovered and the relationship formed between his mediated presence over YouTube and with

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Cool," *Popular Music* 24, no. 1 (2015): 1-21; Bradley Lewis and William Berle, *My Father, Uncle Miltie* (Fort Lee: Barricade Books Inc, 1999); Tierney Finster, "The Legend of Milton Berle's Supposedly Giant Dick," *Mel Magazine*, accessed May 9, 2021, https://melmagazine.com/en-us/story/milton-berle-penis-size.

[55] See, for instance, video of the episode "How to Psychoanalyze Yourself" posted on YouTube on June 24, 2014, which, at the time of this writing, has amassed 595,113 views. See: The Catholic World, "How to Psychoanayze [*sic*] Yourself | Bishop Fulton J. Sheen," June 14, 2014, YouTube Video, 25:40, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3rhPa7h4ro&ab_channel=TheCatholicWorld.

live viewers would make for a fascinating project, it is unfortunately beyond the scope of this current work.

As Sheen was a multifaceted creator, my primary sources from Sheen himself also include several of his written works. Over the course of this project, I consulted several of his bestselling paperbacks, such as *Peace of Soul* (1949) and *Communism and the Conscious of the West* (1948). Notably, I made extensive use of Sheen's autobiographical work *Treasure in Clay*, which features prominently in Chapter 1. As a text that relies greatly on hagiographical tropes and skims many of the most important moments of his career, Sheen's autobiography comes across oddly at times, as more of a tall-tale than an authoritative biography or even a celebrity tell-all. It should be noted, of course, that I supplemented my biographical research of the figure using secondary sources such as the critical academic biographies by Kathleen L. Riley (2004), Reeves (2002) and Lynch (1998), as well as the two insider biographies published by Sheen's former assistant Daniel P. Noonan during Sheen's own lifetime. Noonan's biographies, while often gossipy in nature and intercut with numerous personal remarks by the author himself, nevertheless act as intriguing documents owing to the dates of their composition (before and after he was fired by Sheen) and the discrepancies between the two works concerning their overall evaluation of Sheen's character.[56] Additional then-contemporary biographical sources I consulted include the initially serialized biographies put together by reporters Ken Crotty (1953), C.G. Conniff (1953) and Francis Sugrue (1959).

[56] Noonan's two accounts of Sheen's life, while overlapping in many parts, nevertheless present two radically different opinions of the man – which in turn are reflective of Noonan's own disintegrating relationship with his former boss. Notably, where the first biography regularly heaped lavish praise on Sheen, the second included fairly scurrilous criticism, bordering on ad-hominin attacks, on Sheen's character and personality, along with hearsay and gossip about the man.

I also made use of two archives that I was able to access prior to the start of 2020's global COVID-19 pandemic. The first was the Catholic University of America's (CUA) which I accessed during 2019 and 2020. Their substantial collection contains items ranging from notes taken by Sheen while at the University of Louvain, press clippings ranging from 1930-1985, documents of his from Vatican II and similar effects, all of which is currently digitized and made available through an online portal the archivist shared with me. The second was at the Archbishop Fulton Sheen Museum in Peoria, Illinois, where I spent a week in January 2020. On site, they have a modest museum with a number of Sheen's personal effects on display along with two uncategorized boxes of clippings. While there, I was also able to examine a copy of his *Positio* – the materials gathered in preparation for and submitted during his canonization process. I had also petitioned the Diocese of Rochester in 2019 with the hope of accessing their archives. However, my two requests were never answered. Initially, I found Rochester's silence odd considering the CUA and Peoria's rapid replies to my emails. Now, however, Rochester's silence appears to make more sense owing to the diocese's strained relationship not only with Sheen but his unfolding canonization process – which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. For my theoretical and methodological considerations, a more detailed list of theoretical works will be provided in the introductions of each chapter below.

Chapter Outline

Each of the five chapters in this dissertation cover one of the discerning aspects of Sheen's identity, output and body. I have arranged them topically, though there will be some thematic overlap, particularly in chapters 3 and 4. At the same time, each chapter is also an investigation into the wider implications of these themes and trends in mid-century American Catholicism and

one or more of the intersecting disciplines I referred to earlier, including but not limited to celebrity studies, masculinity studies and Irish studies.

In Chapter 1, I focus on Sheen's posthumously published autobiography *Treasure in Clay* as a primary source while investigating intersections of religious hagiography and celebrity biography. Using the conventions of the hagiographical genre, Sheen composed a novel document ostensibly providing readers with a "tell-all" of his life, albeit one that was carefully constructed in order to emphasize his sanctity and minimize his celebrity. Paradoxically, it was his own celebrity and the need to control his persona and "brand" which likely led him to crafting such a sublimated tale of his life. A serious examination of this text cannot be adequately undertaken without considering Sheen's celebrity, and I posit that this is likely the case for other mid-twentieth century American Catholic biographies. By foregrounding celebrity as a category of analysis within the examination of such works, I further posit that we can deepen our understanding of the ways in which such texts employ hagiographical tropes and demonstrate potential (auto) hagiographical intent.

Chapter 2 revolves around Sheen's still unfolding afterlife, concentrating on his cause for canonization and the regional rifts in American Catholicism it has helped expose. Using news coverage from the events themselves, I outline how Sheen's eventful and often problematic canonization process reveals a remarkably visible and ongoing divide between urban and rural Catholic interests in America. Notably, I position his canonization process as the latest iteration of a tug of war between center and periphery that has been ongoing since the first half of the twentieth century. As authors such as Jeffrey Martlett (2020; 1998) and David S. Bovée (2016; 2010) have observed, rural Catholics have faced separate challenges in terms of visibility and identity than their urban counterparts, often focusing on initiatives that root their spiritual identities to the land.

Largely rural, Peoria's efforts to reclaim Sheen's body mirror wider concerns of rural Catholics who have often struggled for visibility in the larger whole. There are subtle yet persistent efforts on their part to reclaim Sheen's identity, rooting him in his Midwestern upbringing as opposed to his career in New York. In doing so, Peoria has also re-imagined Sheen's sanctity and their own relationship to it. Such considerations serve as a reminder of the diversity of the Catholic experience in America, as well as its often-hidden rivalries.

Chapter 3 homes in on Sheen's celebrity and fame as a bestselling author and TV star, placing him in context of the Golden Age of Television which coincided with a so-called religious "revival" in 1950s America.[57] Authors such as Michele Rosenthal (2009) and Erin A. Smith (2015) have commented on how the development of new media and media guidelines enabled a new generation of religious leaders – what I dub "celebrity preachers" – in reaching greater audiences than ever before. I posit that Sheen's celebrity must be understood within the context the advent of television as a media of access that hinges on familiarity and familial relations, all the while connecting this popularity to the rise of fellow celebrity preachers who rose to superstardom in America during this era. Though clerical figures seldom make for celebrities in wider culture, Sheen's made for TV persona enabled him to bridge the gap between religious and secular modes of celebrity, pointing to the ambiguity and flexibility of each. Ultimately, this suggests that when considering mid-century religious celebrity, the rubrics we have for understand both religious

[57] The notion that a religious revival, rather than a reconfiguration of existing sentiments, occurred in 1950s America has been proposed by several scholars, including Robert S. Ellwood, *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace: American Religion in a Decade of Conflict* (Chicago: Rutgers University Press, 1997), Riley, *Fulton J. Sheen*, and David Weinstein, *The Forgotten Network: DuMont and the Birth of American Television* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004). Other scholars have questioned this notion, suggesting instead that developments in media merely lead to more widespread visibility of religion, rather than a societal change in attitudes. See James Hudnut-Beulmer, *Looking for God in the Suburbs: The Religion of the American Dream and Its Critics*, 1945-1965 (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 41, 71-78.

figures and celebrity figures are inadequate and calls for a blended definition to redefine the possibilities of mid-century American celebrity.

Chapter 4 moves into Irish studies as it examines the visual history of Irish American priests in American entertainment. I demonstrate how Sheen's television appearances, while novel, were also very much indebted to the visual repertoire and language used to depict priests on screen that was cultivated by Hollywood. As demonstrated by Irish and film studies historians such as James T. Fisher (2009) and Christopher Shannon (2010), popular films from the 1930s-1940s – such as 1944's *Going My Way* and 1938's *Angels with Dirty Faces* – not only depicted priests and safe and charismatic figures in an era of Catholic suspicion, but also helped create a framework of expectations for Sheen's future appearance. Though Hollywood in the 1950s had begun depicting priests in a more complicated, nuanced manner, such as with the character Father Barry in 1954's *On the Waterfront*, the familiarity and friendliness of television as a medium helped prevent Sheen from becoming an anachronism. As such, Sheen's celebrity must be read as part of a larger tradition of Irish American priests in visual media which was then reconfigured to the demands and expectations of the small screen.

In Chapter 5, I switch my focus to the bodies of men and the ways in which those bodies stand in vicariously for ideological and spiritual concerns. Jeffords (1994) has demonstrated how the popular and political culture of the Cold War era linked the perceived "hardness" of men's bodies with the strength of the nation and its ideologies, whereas "softness" was seen as dangerous, suspicious and ultimately detrimental to the defense of the nation both physically and ideologically.[58] Though her work is focused on the 1980s, I demonstrate how the same hard/soft dichotomy and fascination for bodies was present in 1950s America and particularly as a Catholic

[58] See Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*.

response to the Cold War. Using the bodies of two men – Fulton J. Sheen and fellow midwestern Catholic Joseph R. McCarthy – I reveal how these men embodied and were perceived to embody both bodily and spiritual hardness and reveals an overlooked element of Catholic bodily responses to the Cold War and Communism.

Ultimately, I conclude that not only is Sheen a figure worthy of more attention in the contemporary field of American religion, but that figures such as this are particularly well-suited for cross-disciplinary studies. A similar lens examining the intersections of religious, celebrity, and gender in the bodies of famous figures, along with their complications, can readily be applied to other major Catholic figures of the twentieth century who have not been the subject of similar undertakings thus far.

Chapter 1 - Autohagiography and Authenticity in the Celebrity Autobiography of Fulton J. Sheen

> *Let it be said here at the beginning, that this is not my real autobiography. That was written twenty-one centuries ago, published and placarded in three languages, and made available to everyone in Western civilization.*[59]
>
> - Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen

Celebrity and Sanctity

Celebrity has a way of being cumbersome – never created or sustained by the figure in question alone, it is a highly crafted and negotiated status. It is also fickle – the prestige of the celebrated waxes and wanes over the course of their careers, and their bodies are opened up to higher levels of scrutiny than that of their mundane peers. Within the Catholic tradition, celebrity has often functioned something of a paradox where sanctity was concerned. Although fame and charisma are often the very vehicles which drive a candidate's popular acclaim – thereby giving fuel to their cause for canonization – scholars such Heinich (2011), Grauss (2016) and Gëzim Alpion (2020) have pointed out how fame has the tendency to be viewed with suspicion by the wider institutions of the Catholic Church, with charisma and gravitas often seen as things needing to be reared in, reconfigured, or disrupted.[60] In this regard, modern sacred figures – particularly owing to developments in telecommunications and mass media – find their lives intersecting more broadly with matters of contemporary fame and celebrity than their ancient peers, a development which comes with an added set of complications.

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[59] Fulton Sheen, *Treasure in Clay* (New York: Image Books, 1982), 1.

[60] See Heinich, "La Consommation;" Andrea Graus, "A Visit to Remember;" and Alpion, *The Saint and Her Nation*. Derek Krueger has also commented on the paradoxical relationship between sanctity and celebrity, noting, "true saints seek anonymity, yet God wills their works to be 'shown forth' such that they can be known to the faithful." Krueger, "Hagiography as an Ascetic Practice in the Early Christian East," *Journal of Religion* 79, no. 2 (1999): 227.

Such complications are well-displayed in the story of Fulton J. Sheen and have led to no small shortage of delays in his canonization process.[61] Sheen was certainly aware of the complicating factors of sanctity interwoven with his own celebrity, as is partly evidenced by his longstanding practice of self-deprecation and humility whenever the subject of his fame and celebrity were raised in his presence. This awareness is, however, most prominently negotiated in his 1979 posthumously published autobiography, *Treasure in Clay*.[62] Here, Sheen distances himself from his celebrity in an often direct and purposeful manner, spending only a handful of pages discussing the aspects of career – namely, his television program and radio shows – which made him a household name in mid-twentieth century America (a recognizability which continues to some extent today). Instead, he pushes the reader towards his career as a missionary and a mentor to fellow priests, while also drawing attention to aspects of his work and life within the Church that would normally be but footnotes in the context of his larger career.[63] This move takes him away from the classic tell-all biography so commonly associated with celebrities in their later years, resulting in a text that is both implicitly and explicitly indebted to the tropes, structure and expectations of *holy writing* – making it part of a genre of literature better referred to as *autohagiography*.[64]

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[61] The specifics of his still ongoing canonization process will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

[62] While Sheen is the principal author of his autobiography, he was unable to complete the manuscript during his lifetime. After his death, his close friend Edward O'Meara, who had recently become the Archbishop of Indianapolis, hired the writer Patricia Kossman (also a friend of Sheen's) to finish the manuscript and prepare it for publication. It is therefore unclear to what extent Kossman might or might not have accented the hagiographical flourishes already embedded in the text as composed by Sheen.

[63] Sheen devotes two entire chapters to discussing his devotion to the Virgin Mother and elaborating on the "Holy Hour" of personal austerities he practiced each morning. He also spends nearly an equivalent amount of time discussing his second of two trips to the Holy Land (in 1959). Both discussions eclipse the amount of time he spends addressing his twenty-five plus year radio and television career.

[64] While the term has been used in popular culture to describe non-critical autobiographies that flatter the subject, it has found more critical use in academia. Scholar Kate Greenspan makes extensive use of the term when referring to autobiographical elements found in the larger writings of female Medieval mystics such as Julian of Norwich and Catherine of Siena. In her usage of the term, autohagiography is principally a characteristic of their writing, rather than a genre in and of itself. Others, however, have referred to it as a genre. Scholar Clarisson Atkinson has referred to *The Book of Margery Kempe* – an early autobiographical work by the 15th century English mystic of the same name

This chapter therefore sheds light on a hitherto largely unnoticed phenomena in modern Catholic autobiography – the intersection of sanctity and celebrity. Firstly, this chapter explores the usage of hagiographic tropes in autobiographical literature, focusing on Sheen's autobiography, *Treasure in Clay*, as a case study. The structure and methodology of this paper will at times mirror that of a close reading; however, where it differs from other studies of biographical matter will be with my intent. I aim not to retrace or piece together an "authentic" or "complete" biography of Sheen – such pursuits are the work of biographers and/or devotees alike.[65] Rather, my purpose here is in examining some of the ways in which Sheen's autobiography can be viewed as a carefully crafted and tightly controlled narrative work of autohagiography. In doing this, I will pay particular attention to the literary tropes Sheen employs in the telling of his life. As scholar Robert Bartlett (2015) has remarked, hagiography is a genre built on trope, convention, and expectation.[66] All works of the genre follow a structure first charted out in the gospels and reproduced faithfully throughout history, from Antiquity to the present day. As narrative works, hagiographies record and recount the stories of lives deemed to be sacred and worth remembering.[67] While Sheen's text contains numerous hagiographical tropes, I will focus on the

– as a work of autohagiography owing to its reliance on the tropes of hagiographical literature. Scholar Milo Sweedler has likewise used the term to refer to Laure (née Collete Peignot)'s *Histoire d'une petite fille* and the other works that appear her *Écrits*, due to their mystical and confessional elements. In this regard, my usage of the term hues more closely to that of Clarisson and Sweedler, but with some caveats as will be discussed later in this paper. See Kate Greenspan, "The Autohagiographical Traditional in Medieval Women's Devotional Writing," *Biography Studies* 6, no 2. (1991): 157-168; Clarissa W. Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Milo Sweedler, "Autohagiography: The Écrits de Laure," *Dalhousie French Studies* 71 (Summer 2005): 65-73.

[65] Sheen touches upon the difficulties of composing an "authentic" biography of himself. As he states in his opening chapter, "there are three pairs of eyes," each of which see a man's life under different light – there is the man in question, the eyes of others, and the eyes of God. Taken at his word, any biographer will only be working with two out of the three. See Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, Chapter 1.

[66] Bartlett remarks just as one generation of saints might take inspiration from the previous, so too does hagiography owe itself to past examples. See Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 511.

[67] Eric Brook observes that one sometimes overlooked element of hagiography is its function to preserve and perpetuate Christian *memory* from one generation to the next. See Eric Brook, "Writing the Holy Image: The Relationship between Hagiography and Iconography," *International Journal of the Image* 1, no. 1 (2011): 13.

three which I believe to be illustrative of his intentions, namely: the demarcation of childhood, trials, tribulations and suffering, and the prophetic calling.[68] I hope to illustrate how Sheen, in implementing these conventions into his biographical narrative, sought to reshape the image of his life as free from blemish and devoid of vanity – the latter being a failing which has been frequently been ascribed to his person by detractors.[69]

Secondly – by examining the often apocryphal and contradictory passages from Sheen's autobiography – I argue that he composed a novel document, one that tells not only of his life as he wished it to be viewed, but that necessarily also speaks to the precarious relationship between sanctity and celebrity in modern American Catholicism. Ultimately, it is my intention to demonstrate that a text such as this adds both a layer of depth and complication to the study of modern American sainthood and their biographies, and that similar studies would readily lend themselves to other prominent modern figures.

Theoretical Considerations

Biography, Hagiography and Autohagiography

Hagiography is not biography. While the modern celebrity biography seeks to illuminate the nature and historical truth of the figure in question – often seeking to communicate openness and authenticity – hagiography is instead concerned with expounding upon truths of a largely spiritual

[68] Though there are more hagiographical tropes which appear in *Treasures in Clay*, such as his missionary activities and certain coincidences that border on the miraculous, for the sake of brevity I will omit these until a future study takes place.

[69] Biographers Reeves and Noonan have both made frequent allusions to perceptions of Sheen's vanity. Both authors remark that Sheen was highly attentive where his image was concerned, both in the area of personal grooming and in what was being said about him by others. According to Reeves, when Sheen was asked by actress Loretta Young why he was always so well-dressed and coiffed, he replied, "We dress for God, we are his representatives." Thomas C. Reeves, *America's Bishop: The Life and Times of Fulton J. Sheen* (New York: Encounter Books, 2002), 137.

nature, taking the exceptionality of the figure in question as the vehicle for such exploration.[70] In doing so, hagiographies often avoid the wholesale chronicling of the central figure's life from birth to death, instead focusing on the pivotal moments that demonstrate the figure's sanctity, the raison d'être for the text.[71] While both birth and death bookend the story of the saint, it is much more pressing that the stories offered are thematically cohesive and present the image of the saint as they are intended to be conveyed, as well as never forgetting to glorify God's role in having singled out the figure in question.[72]

Autohagiography differs from traditional hagiography, and indeed my usage of the term differs slightly from its historical use. Historically, the *vitae* of holy men and women as definitive texts and accounts of the figure's sanctity were the products of their communities of devotees, the authors of these works often hailing from the same holy order or composed on commission.[73] In the majority of cases, then, the central hagiographic figure is without any agency when it comes to deciding how the narrative takes shape – they are, in effect, muted by having no hand in the composition. However, this is not to suggest that hagiographical authors are keen to highlight their own role in the production of the text: they often write anonymously, and in cases where their authorship is not anonymous, they often debase themselves to avoid overshadowing the saint in

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[70] Scholars Michael DeAngelis and Mary Desjardin refer to celebrity biographies as a negotiation of authenticity and intimacy between the readers and the figure in question. See Michael DeAngelis and Mary Desjardins, "Introduction," *Celebrity Studies* 8, no. 4 (2017): 490. For further discussion on authenticity in celebrity, see Sarah Thomas, "Celebrity in the 'Twitterverse': History, Authenticity and the Multiplicity of Stardom Situating the 'Newness' of Twitter," *Celebrity Studies* 5, no. 3 (2014): 242–255. Scholars of religion have previously examined the larger purpose of hagiography. In discussing Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*, Aviad Kleinberg rather succinctly remarks that that the ancient author had found a way of transforming "a sermon masquerading as biography." Kleinberg, *Flesh Made Word*, 152.

[71] It should also be noted that unlike most autobiographies, Sheen's *Treasure in Clay* contains an account of both his birth *and* his death, owing to its insertion by an editor as the manuscript was being prepared for publication. See Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead*, 518.

[72] On this note, *Treasure in Clay* is not organized purely chronologically. The first chapter opens with an essay espousing Sheen's own unworthiness as a biographer – much in the vein of classical authors – and mid-way through the book shifts to being organized by topic rather than the period of his life. See Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead*, 518.

[73] Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead*, 513-4.

question.[74] Auto-hagiography, by contrast, reverses the traditional hagiographical model in that the central figure acts as both author and subject. Largely acting alone in the shaping of their image, the auto-hagiographer thus becomes the authentic voice of their own narratives, which, paradoxically – given the hagiographical focus on sanctity – is itself an extended performance of their own celebrity.[75] While traditional hagiography is explicit in its intentions and structures, autohagiography necessitates a measured approach of caution and subtlety. Though the pursuit of holiness is intended to be the aim of every God-fearing Catholic, sanctity is something which is recognized from without, a recognition declared by popular acclamation rather than personal admission. Self-promotion is strictly forbidden, and an excess of pride is itself the death-knell for any potential cause for canonization. As such, autohagiography is at the heart of the complicated relationship between modern celebrity and Catholic sanctity.

To clarify, while I am not arguing that Sheen sought to actively promote himself as a living saint, I do assert that his invocation of hagiographic tropes was a conscious and intentional choice. After all, Sheen was an avid and well-documented perfectionist, someone who, throughout his career, actively and selectively controlled which elements of his life would be made public. He seems to have been all-too aware of how certain aspects of his fame could complicate his memory – both among Church insiders and the wider public.[76] Thus, in the same manner that Sheen acted as a gatekeeper of sorts to his public image throughout his career, in the twilight of his years he composed a definitive "autobiography" which presented his life in a manner free from controversy

[74] See Krueger, "Hagiography."
[75] It should be noted that there is an appendix in *Treasure in Clay* titled "Vita." This brief appendix reads more akin to curriculum vitae than biography, listing Sheen's many accomplishments and the honours he accrued over his lengthy career and busy life. This, however, was almost surely added by one his later editors prior to the text's publication.
[76] In the opening chapter of *Treasure in Clay*, Sheen seems to comment on the dangers of celebrity, its connection to vanity, and the resulting perception, when he remarks, "Generally, the more we accept popular estimates, the less time we spend on our knees examining conscience. The outer world becomes so full of limelight as to make us forget the light within. Praise often creates in us a false impression that we deserve it." Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 6.

and speculation.[77] The end result is that Sheen almost completely avoids the conventions of the modern celebrity autobiography, instead composing a text which selectively details his life in the uncomplicated and ultimately familiar manner of a classical hagiography. As such, a close reading of Sheen's autobiography reveals his attempts to mitigate the tension between his life as a celebrity and as a role model for fellow Christians, and, moreover, that by framing his life according to hagiographical tropes and expectations, he sought to firmly distance himself from the very dangers of adulation and fame. As such, though it attempts to maintain a distance, his autohagiography is deeply entangled with celebrity and its concerns.

Celebrity Ordinariness and Authenticity

Historians and celebrity studies scholars such as Fisher (1997), Thomas (2014) and McKenna (2019) have remarked how ordinariness along with authenticity are valuable currencies for modern celebrities looking to connect with their audiences, particularly in biographical material and moments of sharing and openness with their fans.[78] The same is true for secular celebrities as it is for sanctified ones. In his study on Tom Dooley, Fisher highlights how questions of authenticity also factored into Dooley's self-figuring as well as his legacy – including competing voices interested in reconstructing the supposedly "real" Dooley behind the celebrity figure. Dooley was hardly ignorant of his own celebrity, nor was he ignorant of the perks and complications it brought about. While engaging in lifelong and "manic self-promotion," Dooley sought, on camera and in writing, to portray himself naturally – as just another American – to his fans and devotees back

[77] There was no shortage of controversy during his lifetime, and this includes speculations about warring factions in the American Catholic Church. Most of these speculations involved either Cardinal Francis J. Spellman or Sheen's tenure as Bishop of Rochester. Several of these will be discussed in some detail at a later point in this chapter.
[78] See Thomas, "Celebrity in the 'Twitterverse,'" and McKenna, "Sylvester Stallone and the Economics of the Aging Film Actor," Celebrity Studies 10, no. 4 (2019): 489-503.

home, engendering familiarity and curating his "ordinariness."[79] However, his early post-death biographers embellished his life, highlighting elements they found extraordinary, effectively dabbling in what Fisher refers to as nothing less than "hagiography."[80] These glowing works underlined not just his perceived virtues but his celebrity, whereby many of his proponents positioned him as being a "wholesome alternative" to other young American figureheads such as Elvis Presley.[81]

Treasure in Clay shows Sheen on similar footing where the leveraging of authenticity and ordinariness against his own celebrity and sanctity are concerned, albeit with an added urgency missing from Dooley's own biographical material. Notably, McKenna has remarked how late career stars often seek to reclaim their lost cultural and economic value by either re-inventing themselves or remarketing their brand as their "true" or "real" self to their audiences.[82] While the celebrity biographer leverages these concepts to appear relatable and thereby combat their waning relevance, Sheen (writing his biography in the years just before his death) leverages them a bit differently – not in the service of staying relevant, but rather in the service of mitigating the tension between celebrity and sanctity that might complicate his hagiographical narrative. However, the fact that he does employ these conventions demonstrates the complicated link I am tracing between modern sanctity and celebrity, because they also communicate the very performance of celebrity and brand management that he is trying to downplay. Therefore, paradoxically, to distance himself from his celebrity, Sheen must rely on the expectations and tools of celebrity to do so.

[79] Fisher, *Dr. America*, 9-10; 68.
[80] Fisher, *Dr. America*, 12-13.
[81] Fisher, *Dr. America,* 7.
[82] McKenna, "The Aging Film Actor."

Auto-Hagiography

Trope One – The Demarcated Child

The demarcation of children from their peers is a common convention in hagiographical literature. Since the Gospel of Luke showcasing Jesus teaching in the temple, hagiographers have sought to portray the noticeable *difference* inherent in their protagonists from an early age.[83] As Aviad Kleinberg remarks, "'Sanctity' implies separation, demarcation. When a thing is sanctified, it is separated from other things belonging to the same category."[84] In this case, it is a separation of the special from the mundane, where the protagonist's demarcated childhood reveals their chosen nature. In many cases – whether it be Christ himself or a pious nineteenth-century schoolboy – childhood is depicted as proof of God's miraculous presence in this world, and often signals the protagonist's future greatness and place in God's larger plans and as role models for believers. For instance, the nineteenth century saint, Thérèse of Lisieux, spoke extensively of her childhood calling and obstacles to that calling in her posthumously published autobiography, which Pope Pius X referred to as a model for how *all* Catholics – and not simply the young – should practice their faith.[85] Inversely, just as there are saints with exceptionally pious childhoods, there are an equal number who are portrayed as being in conflict or opposition with the virtuous people they would become. The pre-conversion lives of ancient saints such as St. Jerome and St. Augustine are well attested in hagiographic literature, while the trope continues to be applied in the modern

[83] After losing track of their child, Mary and Joseph returned to the temple to find their boy sitting among the scholars as one might a peer. For a scholarly discussion of the remarkability of children in hagiography, see Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell*, Saints and Society*: *The Two Worlds of Western Christendom*, *1000-1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 20.
[84] Kleinberg, *Flesh Made Word*, 1.
[85] See Barbara Corrado Pope, "A Heroine without Heroics: The Little Flower of Jesus and Her Times," *Church History* 57, no. 1 (March 1988): 46-60.

area.[86] The Blessed Bartolo Longo (d. 1926) was raised Catholic but turned to Spiritualism and Occultism, apparently going as far as becoming something of a Satanic priest, before returning to the faith of his childhood.[87] Hagiographical stories such as these emphasize the transformative powers of the cross and serve to be contrasted with the future ascetic discipline and devoted life these figures later adopt.[88] The trajectory of their personal transformation thus highlights their initial fallen state and hints at their future glorification and perfection available only through Christ and the Church.[89]

In the case of *Treasure in Clay*, Sheen makes frequent narrative use of childhood demarcation, deploying it in a number of sometimes contradictory means in the first half of his autobiography. Right from the first pages, Sheen avows that he was hardly a perfect child and was someone who very much needed refinement in order to overcome his baser nature and better himself. Calling attention to the title of his book, he metaphorically refers to himself as a lump of clay in need of shaping, emphasizing his parent's conviction that a strong education was to be the "determining mold" of his upbringing.[90] As Sheen recounts it, while all of his siblings enrolled at the local parochial school in Illinois, it was he, an unruly and troublesome youth, who was most in need of refinement. He remarks that he was once locked in a closed by a teacher as a disciplinary measure, and also that he once stole geraniums from the local grocery store and was harshly

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[86] See Robert Payne, *The Fathers of the Western Church* (New York: Viking Press, 1951), 90–92; Augustine's most widely quoted citation on the matter comes from his *Confessions*, where he declares "Grant me chastity... but not yet." Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, 8:7.17, trans. J.G. Pilkington (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1886).

[87] The claims that he was a Satanic priest are likely am embellishment. Though they emerged from Longo's own post-conversion recollections, it appears that they were later accentuated by biographers to highlight the immensity of his re-conversion. See, for example, Angelo Stagnaro, "Blessed Bartolo Longo, the Ex-Satanist Who was Freed Through the Rosary," *National Catholic Register*, December 12, 2016, https://www.ncregister.com/blog/blessed-bartolo-longo-the-ex-satanist-who-was-freed-through-the-rosary.

[88] Hagiographies often play with and revel in dichotomies that reveal stark contrasts between right and wrong, good and evil. Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society,* 108.

[89] In the case of Augustine, elaborating on one's troubled or wayward youth also acts as a means of debasing himself as author, and through this debasement a form of humility and authenticity are conveyed to the reader.

[90] Referring to education as his "determining mold" is hardly an understatement when reviewing his hefty academic credentials and lengthy tenure as a professor at the Catholic University of America.

reprimanded for it afterwards.[91] He further avows to being no stranger to horsing around as a child, having on occasion broken windows on the family home while playing ball in the yard. In another instance he remarks that he never earned one word of praise from his parents, and also that he constantly 'struggled' to be a leader in class. [92]

Indeed, in Sheen's telling, he was very much a ball of rough clay in need of refinement, which certainly demarcated him from his peers and even his own siblings who were better grounded than he. However, for every instance where he highlights his unruly behavior, he follows with either an ambiguous or contradictory story that upends his own self-deprecating recollection. For example, Sheen states that he had difficulty spelling and couldn't figure out how to use the word "which" – however, when discussing his participation in a spelling contest, he avows that he lost *first place* rather than being eliminated in one of the initial rounds. [93] In pointing out how he failed at a mathematics contest later on in high school, he recounts that he only stumbled when it came to a tie-breaking problem for the top marks in the class.[94] In examples such as these, Sheen seems to be attempting to portray his childhood as demarcated in both senses common to hagiographical literature – as the child in need of refinement, and as the exceptional child who was chosen for greater things.

In this matter, Sheen's recollections of, and musings about, his childhood appear to be at odds with those of his teachers and peers – recounted by other biographers – who remember the

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[91] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 17.

[92] Lest readers think Sheen wishes to speak ill of his parents, he quickly concedes that his mother once explained that his father's lack of vocalized praise was due to his father not wishing to "spoil him" – he did, she asserts, speak of his son's accomplishments to their neighbours in secret. Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 10. Lynch, however, sees through Sheen's tacit explanation for his parent's behaviour and suggests they were in fact "firm disciplinarians." Lynch, *Selling Catholicism*, 17. For instance, Sheen admits to having been hit by his father, but plays it down in a lighthearted manner by stating "there is nothing that develops character in a young boy like a pat on the back, provided it is given often enough, hard enough and low enough." Sheen, *Treasure in Clay,* 16.

[93] Emphasis mine. Sheen further states that both he and his opponent had earned 100 per cent marks in the class up until this point. *Treasure in Clay*, 14.

[94] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 14.

young man as having been particularly bright and pious.[95] Indeed, the historical record (along with details from his own recollection) suggest that Sheen was an avid student and overachiever from the start.[96] Not only was he the valedictorian of his high school class, he also won a national scholarship competition which would have allowed him to enter virtually any university of his choice – examples which point to Sheen's early academic potential. However, on the advice of his debate coach (who also happened to be a local parish priest), Sheen declined his university scholarship in order to enter the Saint Paul seminary in Saint Paul, Minnesota. In doing so, Sheen effectively eschewed the prestige that entering a secular institution could have afforded his academic career in lieu of a humbler and ultimately more pious education.[97]

Sheen's clumsy attempts to paint himself as an underachieving, undeserving child while also being exceptionally devout may come across as puzzling for the more attentive reader, especially when his work is read as a celebrity autobiography. As noted above, celebrity autobiographers often try to relate to their readers by leveraging concepts of authenticity, closeness, and ordinariness against their more exceptional qualities and achievements.[98] As the celebrity's fame hinges upon the creation and sustenance of a highly crafted persona and brand, leveraging such concepts acts to impose "coherence and stability on a fluid and perhaps incoherent identity while engendering a belief in a private 'real' behind the public facade."[99] Taken at face value, then, one might wonder how Sheen's contradictory assertions play towards the coherence and authenticity of his character – especially as he himself is author of this work.

[95] Riley, *Fulton Sheen*, 2; Reeves, *America's Bishop*, 12.
[96] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 16; Lynch, *Selling Catholicism*, 17.
[97] Reeves, *America's Bishop*, 26; Riley, *Fulton Sheen*, 3.
[98] Katja Lee, "Reading celebrity autobiographies," *Celebrity Studies* 5, no. 1-2, (2014): 87.
[99] DeAngelis and Desjardins, "Introduction," 490.

Sheen's childhood recollections nevertheless serve clearer hagiographical purposes.[100] As stated previously, hagiographers have often extended the theme of demarcation beyond emphasizing sanctity, employing it as a wider trope to single out the uniqueness of their protagonist. By following suit, Sheen plays with some obvious symbolism: he emphasizes his rowdy, salt of the earth upbringing as he remembers it, while contrasting these themes with his later spiritual education at seminary and beyond.[101] Though he touches upon elements of his burgeoning scholasticism, structurally, Sheen appears to be more focused on depicting a mundane childhood upbringing, one that can be contrasted with his eventual recognition and celebrity. While his efforts are not entirely successful, by attempting to paint his childhood as one that was both remarkable and ordinary, Sheen is allowing his narrative to more easily adhere to one hagiographical trope, while also showcasing his transformation and foreshadowing the trajectory his own life would take thanks to his devotion to Christ – and, in doing so, avoid sounding like a braggart by lingering too much on his accomplishments or piety.

In his discussions of his youth, Sheen also recounts one episode that mirrors a gospel story. Recounting his days as a doctoral student, he states that the most brilliant professor he had ever known, a certain Dr. Leon Noel, advised him to read the works of, and then meet, a recently published scholar named Dr. Alexander. After being invited for tea, Sheen discovered that Dr. Alexander had actually set up a debate between himself and the plucky grad student in a massive auditorium in front of hundreds of students. Though Sheen avows that he was clearly out of his depth compared to the professor – as he states, he "did not yet have [his] doctorate" – he nevertheless accepted the debate and challenged the professor's views.[102] When Dr. Alexander

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[101] Sheen doesn't hesitate to remark that he adored his classes on scriptures and moral theology at seminary and would eventually pursue his education in that direction as far as it could take him. Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 20.
[102] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay,* 25.

responds by retorting that Sheen had failed to "read [his work] with any degree of intelligence," Sheen goes on to deconstruct the professor's work and elaborate on the flaws of its arguments in front of the audience.[103]

While this episode hints at the prowess of Sheen's scholastic mind and builds up to his eventual – and highly decorated – thesis defense and graduation, it is also a clear moment of autohagiography, mirroring the gospel episode where Jesus as a youth enters the temple with his parents and astonishes everyone when he sits among teachers listening and asking questions.[104] While Sheen is certainly older than Jesus was during the gospel event, the young scholar is nevertheless contrasted against the brilliant teachers he sought to emulate. Like Christ who revealed an uncanny intellect and awareness and was able to teach the teachers, Sheen not only matches the mind of the professor, but also seems to understand his own works better than the man himself. In this episode, Sheen thus seems to have found a way to envision a novel re-imagination of the Biblical story in a way that fit seamlessly into his own recollections.

Such stories of his upbringing signal the sense to which Sheen was cautiously aware of the weight of his fame and the complications it could have, while simultaneously playing it up with a wink and a nod to his future success. Notably, in one story that provides a clear contrast with his later expertise in public speaking, he avows that he was unable to properly recite the rosary on stage at school because he was too nervous and uneasy under the public gaze.[105] In another, he tells us that as a young school boy he utterly lacked the chops to become an actor, even though he had "excellent training in Shakespeare" – ultimately arguing that the fault for inadequacy lay with him.[106] As such, he was only barely able to earn a role in the school play, and this was owing to

[103] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 26.
[104] For the story of Jesus teaching in the temple while still a child, see Luke 2:41-52.
[105] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 16.
[106] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 14.

the financial support his family was giving to the project. He even recounts that three of his more talented classmates later went on to become famous radio personalities – and perhaps there was a fourth talent at that school, "if the reader is charitable."[107]

It goes almost without saying that anyone reading *Treasure in Clay* would be familiar with the much-celebrated television and radio career of its author.[108] However, by his recollection, he was hardly a man born to become a celebrity, but one enabled through happenstance or fate or God's miraculous power. Such self-deprecation is of course a common rhetorical strategy, hardly absent from the hagiographic genre, to invite sympathy from the reader and deflect any accusations of pride and vanity on the part of the author.[109] By downplaying any latent talents, training or skills he might have acquired as a youth that would hint at his future success, Sheen is effectively suggesting to his readers that his transformation from performance-shy youth to star adored by millions had little to do with his own agency and was nothing short of miraculous – making himself, as a devout man, the site of God's transformative work in the world. Sheen's self-deprecation thus follows this tradition but also finds itself mandated by the baggage his celebrity entails. In this regard, his self-abasement acts as a form of authenticity, allowing for closeness and a sense of ordinariness to emerge in his manuscript all the while keeping himself at a respectful distance.[110] And so, the performance of ordinariness helps give his readers a sense of his projected

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[107] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 12.

108. Indeed, while Sheen actively sought to distance himself from his television fame, it was through this celebrity that his fans came to know and adore him. It is no surprise that virtually all of the obituaries published in both the religious and secular press after his death open with a mention of his television career and celebrity alongside his career in the Church. A large collection of such clippings can be found in the archives of the Archbishop Fulton Sheen Museum in Peoria, Illinois.

[109] Athanasius outlined his supposed inadequacies in the opening lines of *Life of Anthony* to his readers, setting the benchmark for what would become a recuring ritualist element of the genre. See Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, trans. Carolinne White (London: Penguin Books, 1998).

[110] Sarah Thomas, "Celebrity in the 'Twitterverse,'" 246. See also McKenna, "The Aging Film Actor," 494.

"real self" and obscure the performance of celebrity control and brand management he is currently enacting.

Trope Two – Trials, Tribulations and Suffering

Opposition to saints is a benchmark element of hagiographical narratives. In the hagiographical tradition, opposition serves to highlight how the saints have been singled out from their peers for a higher purpose – one which they might not understand, but that is ultimately demanded by God.[111] Of these, the most common marks of saintly suffering are those inflicted on the body. Physical illness and injury form a bridge through the body, allowing for a more direct identification, emulation and ultimately connection with Jesus as the first and most emblematic of all sufferers, along with every holy model since.[112]

While discussing his childhood and youth, Sheen claims to have been consistently sickly – and even tuberculotic – without realizing it. He recounts how some "thirty or forty years" after his childhood he was taken to a hospital after collapsing during his radio show. There, he was informed by a doctor about the true extent of his medical history, something he had apparently been unaware of as he suffered silently throughout the years.[113] On a similar note he also recounts how he developed and suffered from ulcers when he began seminary – one of which was so severe that it required he undergo surgery.[114] Childhood illness, and tuberculosis in particular, frequently

[111] Scholar Robert Orsi remarks that for mid-twentieth century American Catholics, suffering was seen as a "thrilling" mark of divine favour, of being chosen by God. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 22-24.
[112] According to Kleinberg, stories recounting the ongoing suffering of the saints and Christian martyrs serve as "memory and example" to the Christian community. He remarked that "each generation had the moral obligation… the martyrs must not be forgotten." Kleinberg, *Flesh Made Word*, 24, 25. See also Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 24.
[113] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 9.
[114] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 20.

appear in hagiographical literature. [115] On the one hand, they serve to further the theme of childhood demarcation where the youthful saint is separated from their peers owing to the illness of their body. However, the almost ritual disempowering of the body here, like in other hagiographical material, is in fact a reversal. By placing the body and its ravages front and center in the narrative qualification of sainthood, suffering and illness point towards self-mortification, of disciplining the flesh to bow to the spirit.[116] By extension, the ongoing fascination with suffering through the bodies of the saints reflects the earlier, ancient suffering of the martyrs and Christ himself.[117] In other words, life-threatening ailments act to collapse the space separating their era from the glorified Christian past, reminding the devout of the ongoing possibilities for elevation and the potential for sanctity that only suffering affords.[118] In the American context, Robert Orsi has remarked on the prominent role illness played for mid-century American Catholics in understanding their own exceptionality, stating that "pain [had] the prominent character of a sacrament," and suffering revealed the almost "thrilling" mark of divine favour.[119] The community of the saints is therefore very much a communion bound by pain and physicality, and Sheen subtly navigates his own body to align his narrative with these saintly role models.[120]

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[115] Among twentieth century saints and saintly men and women, numerous childhood sufferers come to mind. The Venerable Arcangelo Biasi, a confident to Saint Maximilian Kolbe, was born to a poor rural family and contracted tuberculosis yet managed to overcome his illness so that he could be ordained as a priest in 1922. And perhaps most famously, the young Italian saint Maria Gemma Umberta Galgani (known more simply as "Gemma Galgani"), who passed away in 1903, perfectly epitomized the suffering child saint. Consistently sickly, she developed spinal meningitis as a teenager and later succumbed to tuberculosis at the age of 25. Even the previously mentioned Thérèse of Lisieux died of tuberculosis.

[116] Moments of suffering and ascetic discipline in hagiography inevitably serve as reminders of ideal Christian behaviour to the faithful. See Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, 85.

[117] Kleinberg remarks that, in his suffering and death, Jesus became for future Christians the "ultimate, the one true model." *Flesh Made Word*, 15.

[118] During times when there are relatively few martyrs, Christians have historically found new ways to "change the present to make it more like the past." Kleinberg, *Flesh Made Word*, 34.

[119] Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 22.

[120] In the conclusion to his lengthy study on hagiography, David Williams ponders the question of ancient precedents being remade in the twenty-first century. As he remarks, "it is the essence of tradition to minimize change. Faith communities by the nature of their shared beliefs…are capable of transcending the differences that the historical process introduces without, however, needing to negate them." Williams, *Saints Alive: Word, Image, and the Enactment in the Lives of Saints* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 200.

Suffering doesn't only occur in the physical sense, and Sheen extends it along with the wider theme of demarcation during two notable moments of his adulthood. The first of these is during his tenure as a lecturer at the Catholic University of America (CUA) in Washington, DC. The historical record suggests that, although Sheen was an enduring fixture at the university, he was frequently at odds with his peers and the administration, his willfulness and strong ideas causing him to butt heads more than once. In recounting his tenure, Sheen describes himself as having been branded an "outcast" almost immediately into his posting.[121] He suggests that he faced opposition among his fellow members of the Faculty of Theology after advocating for changes that would re-invigorate the faculty, but which were strongly opposed by his colleagues and the rector.[122] In another incident, the succeeding rector decided that all professors in the Faculty of Theology needed to have a Doctorate of Divinity under their name in order to continue teaching.[123] One of the popular professors, a certain John A. Ryan, did not have this credential, and a document circulated demanding that he be removed from his post. Sheen refused to sign it, feeling it was "unfair." However, soon after he found himself punished for his stance by having his classes suspended. To make matters worse, while Sheen swears that he stood by Ryan, a "rumour" circulated that Sheen had been the one to oppose Ryan and speak to the rector about removing him

[121] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 44.

[122] According to Sheen, the rector of the university – Bishop Shahan – met with the faculty to discuss whether they should open undergraduate courses to complement their graduate offerings. Apparently, there were few grad students, and, in Sheen's own words, the faculty was "not sufficiently occupied and challenged." Sheen proposed instead to expand their graduate offerings and seek prospective students and priests from across the country to come study. The immediate reaction was seemingly hostile by both his peers and the Bishop, resulting in a quick end to their meeting. See *Treasure in Clay*, 43-44. While Sheen is overall sparse and selective with his details, other biographers provide a more detailed account of his tenure at the CUA – see Reeves, *America's Bishop*, and Riley, *Fulton Shee*n.

[123] The matter of the Doctor of Divinity (DD) requirement at the CUA is likely more complex and nuanced – perhaps even embarrassing – than what Sheen is suggesting took place. While Sheen has earned himself a Doctorate of Sacred Theology, he never acquired a DD. However, in his biography of Sheen, Reeves notes that Sheen may have claimed to have been awarded such a degree as, for a time, a DD would appear (either through falsification or clerical error) on his resume. Reeve's conclusion is not that Sheen necessarily sought to mislead people of his credentials, but rather that he couldn't bear being also being singled out for having different credentials to his name. See Reeves *America's Bishop*, 66-69.

from his post. The end result saw Sheen feeling ostracized by his peers as well as the colleague he sought to defend.[124]

The second time in his life where he found himself surrounded on all fronts occurred in the twilight of his career during his largely disastrous tenure as the Diocesan Bishop of Rochester. Like many of the chapters in *Treasure in Clay*, the details here are sparse, and the historical record has considerably more to say than our narrator.[125] Rather than closely chronicle his event-filled three years in Rochester, Sheen fills the first half of this chapter with solipsistic musings about the nature of the priesthood, jokes about eating chicken, and praise for seminarians. He makes it seem as if his time there was no more than an afterthought, yet we know from the historical record that he came in with big ideas from Vatican II and sought to implement his vision immediately. He renamed the chancery office the Pastoral Center, formed councils of priests and laypeople to share a voice in diocese governance and priest selection, appointed an urban vicar to address poverty in the city, and opened an ecumenical dialogue with the local Protestant divinity school.[126] He would also give joint talks with Rabbis and address crowds and synagogues in effort to inculcate a sense of ecumenism in the community.[127] Although many of his ideas bore fruit, even more did not, and it is only within one of the final pages of that chapter that he cautiously avows he ran into some difficulties in Rochester. He mentions that his plan to reform the local Catholic press – which required months of planning before being summarily declined – failed due to a technicality, and

[124] Sheen details, in his often-grandiose fashion, the extent to which these rumours apparently spread. At some unspecified point Sheen's name was floated to be the rector of the university, but he was blocked by Archbishop McNicholas, who stated that after what he did to Ryan he would "not let Sheen in charge of a doghouse." The rumours flew so high up the chain of command that apparently even Cardinal Pacelli – the future Pius XII – asked Sheen for details of the situation during a meeting. Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 46-47.
[125] Reeves provides a detailed exposition of Sheen's troubled time in Rochester, aptly titling his chapter in his biography of Sheen as "Exile." See Reeves, *America's Bishop*.
[126] Lynch, *Selling Catholicism*, 28.
[127] Reeves, *America's Bishop*, 307.

simply states it that "it had to be abandoned."[128] He had also planned to launch an emergency ambulance service for the city's poor, however when no hospital volunteered any medical staff, he states that his idea simply "proved to be more clay than gold" and moved on.[129] As well, in speaking of his plan to rent space in town where he could dedicate a small chapel to Mary, such as at a grocery store, he states that it "it was impossible to find [a place] to rent" rather than his handling of the initiative.[130]

While there is a hint of authenticity in admitting his failings, in virtually every case, Sheen would have it seem that the fault for his failures lay elsewhere, owing to chance or circumstance. He does, nevertheless, avow that he personally "failed in the area of housing."[131] However, simply stating that his plan failed obscures the larger story of what transpired. According to the historical record, Sheen put together an ambitious plan to expand social housing for the city's poor by donating an older parish and all of its structures to a federal program.[132] In total, the donation would have provided several hundred housing units and alleviated the burden already placed on the federal program. While planning, Sheen spoke with Robert C. Weaver, the Secretary of Housing, who gave the plan his enthusiastic blessing.[133] On paper the plan seemed strong, and there had been talks by the priests of closing the parish since the 1950s due to its low attendance. However, while Sheen worked out the logistics and received permission from all the necessary boards and delegations – including from Rome itself – he failed to consult the people who

[128] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 178. Here, Sheen also remarks in an off-handed manner that once the plan was devised, it came up that the local press had an existing contract that locked them into previous obligations for two more years. That no one raised this earlier in the months of investigative work into the project points to a remarkable oversight.
[129] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 178. Again, this was another plan that Sheen worked hard to implement without actually consulting any of the hospitals beforehand.
[130] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 178.
[131] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 178.
[132] The land was valued at $680,000 and included a church, a rectory, and a school which would be demolished or refurbished as needed. See Noonan, *The Passion of Fulton Sheen*, 163.
[133] *Treasure in Clay* includes verbatim a letter Sheen apparently wrote the Secretary. In his letter Sheen uses very Vatican II inspired language, declaring the Church's responsibility in the world and outlining his plan to provide a free gift of Church property to be used for housing for the poor. See *Treasure in Clay*, 179.

frequented the parish. When he finally presented his plan, he discovered, "to [his] great surprise, there was opposition," coyly adding that protestors even chucked "pebbles" at his car.[134] While Sheen downplays the reaction to his plan, the sense of betrayal felt by the parishioners was palpable and well-recorded.[135]

It is understandable, however, that Sheen would rather not revisit the pain and utter failure of Rochester in his memoirs – particularly as the tragedy of his administration may not have painted the most flattering image of himself. Nevertheless, Sheen does find the means of inverting his failures to serve an auto-hagiographical purpose. Regarding the sum of his failures in Rochester, Sheen makes a curious observation, referring to his plans as "clay vessels that broke in my hands as they did in the hands of the potter whom Jeremiah visited."[136] In drawing a comparison between himself and that episode from the book of Jeremiah, it would appear that Sheen is suggesting that in the same manner that the people of Israel were not ready to follow God's plans, neither were the people of Rochester with his. Such a comparison puts Sheen on a similar playing field as the prophets of old, of tireless men sent by God to turn an often-rebellious people around. That the prophets and their work met failure just as often as success is surely how Sheen hopes that this episode will be remembered. In this case, though Sheen was unsuccessful in

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[134] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 180.

[135] It should be noted that it wasn't just the parishioners who opposed the idea. A letter of protest was drafted and signed by 130 of his priests, declaring that the parish already served the poor through its outreach and sermons. One outspoken critic went so far as to accuse Sheen of hypocrisy and attacked what he saw as markers of Sheen's aristocratic status, by stating that "If the bishop wants to make some grand gesture, he could move in with the poor and live among them. Then maybe he would be selling his books instead of giving away Church property." One of his closest allies during the early months of his posting – a parish priest named Father Finks who was known for his eager social activism and earlier support of Sheen – turned against him and led the call urging Sheen to backtrack. Sheen eventually retracted his offer, but by then it was too late to make amends with his clerics and community, and he resigned shortly afterwards. See Reeves, *America's Bishop*, 301-320; *Selling Catholicism*, 29-30; Noonan, *The Passion of Fulton Sheen*, 166.

[136] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 180–181. In this excerpt, Sheen is referring to several passages from Jeremiah 18. In the Biblical story, Jeremiah is sent by God to visit a potter. There, the prophet witnesses how the craftsman can tear down and remake his pots when they do not fit his expectations. God then informs Jeremiah that he does the same thing to kingdoms when its people refuse to listen to listen.

enacting his plans at Rochester, he was nevertheless successful and obedient in attempting to implement them. After all, if his actions were directly influenced by the Church's reform attempts through Vatican II, Sheen was effectively attempting to get his parishioners to follow these same God-ordained reforms – but to no avail.[137]

Sheen, ever the perfectionist, also further absolves himself of his failures at Rochester by remarking that "a wrong impression would be created by dwelling on failures which were generally outside the general practice of episcopal administration."[138] It is an interesting statement, as it at once suggests these failures were outside of his control, but also that the initiatives themselves were outside of the norm – hinting at his ambition and innovation. It follows that he doesn't want his readers to linger on his failures there or wonder whether he still bore any hard feelings with what happened in Rochester. By dismissing his failures with a quick turn of phrase, it not only tells his readers that he does not wish to cast blame, but also that the whole matter was much more trivial than it was perhaps made out to be.[139] Instead, similarly to how he depicted himself during the chapter discussing his tenure at the CUA, Sheen is eager to linger on the positive and present himself as something of an ambitious, innovative outsider – as a man who wasn't afraid to challenge the existing order if the order could be re-arranged for the greater good. Indeed, when considering the historical record, there is no reason to believe that Sheen arrived in Rochester with anything other than optimism and a head filled with good ideas and interesting initiatives he planned to implement. He had, after all, participated in Vatican II and his appointment was at the time considered to be the first diocese in America that would attempt to live up to the reforms of

[137] If Sheen's posting at Rochester was meant to be a litmus test for the applicability and viability of Vatican II's reforms and new approach to bringing the Church into the world, his failures and resignation from his posting can only be read as foreshadowing what would become ongoing issues of disconnect between the Church and its parishioners which continue to this day.
[138] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 181.
[139] As mentioned previously, Sheen's time in Rochester has been unanimously referred to as a failure by biographers and commentators. See Reeves, *America's Bishop*; Lynch, *Selling Catholicism*; Noonan, *The Passion of Fulton Sheen.*

the council. That he came to Rochester with all the promise of Vatican II – of the Church's plans to throw open the doors and air out its ancient institutions – and it resulted in failure is telling of the aftermath of that council.

When reviewing Sheen's recollection of events within *Treasure in Clay*, the subtle picture that appears to be painted is that Sheen was not only a prophet figure fighting to turn the eyes of the people back towards God's plan, but also, by his failure, someone who experienced a certain allegorical martyrdom. Curiously, though suffering is a mark of emulation, and martyrdom is the epitome of suffering – for there is no greater form of emulation than to shed their blood for the Church – Sheen largely brushes over these events in his book and or refers to them in a cryptic manner.[140] For instance, in the opening chapter he refers to enigmatic "scars" that he received in his later life.[141] Later, in a chapter entitled "Things Left Unsaid," Sheen implicitly comments on his experiences at Rochester where he remarks that Christians are shaped through three purifications: crosses, cups and tensions – each one pointing towards Christ's martyrdom. The crosses are the burdens placed on us that we did not deserve, but that we are forced to carry; the cups are those burdens handed to us that we cannot pass; and the tensions are those that "come within the Church."[142]

That Sheen was at the heart of possible tensions within the American Church was hardly a secret. In *American Bishop*: *The Life and Times of Fulton J. Sheen*, Reeves entitles his chapter about Sheen's time at Rochester "Exile," and remarks that while Sheen put on a strong face, after his resignation he seemed to many to be a "broken man."[143] For his part, two-time biographer

[140] Kleinberg, *Flesh Made Word*, 13. See also Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 22.
[141] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 3.
[142] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 309–310. Here, Sheen clearly references Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, and his approaching passion. See also Luke 22.
[143] Rochester has been referred to as a "Diocesan Siberia" owing to its relative remoteness and cold weather. After Sheen's resignation, Reeves remarks that he had the appearance of a "broken man." *America's Bishop*, 321.

Noonan notes that "few saw Sheen's appointment as a promotion," and he questions whether Sheen was being "kicked upstate" on Spellman's behalf.[144] In his second work on Sheen, Noonan refers to Sheen's posting in Rochester as his personal "Calvary" – again drawing a comparison to Christ's suffering and martyrdom.[145] Considering Sheen's cautious approach to his trials and tribulations – and also how these have been viewed by his biographers – the picture of his later life and career is one that seems to mirror the betrayal and abandonment of Jesus before the cross. Sheen, after all, steadfastly refused to comment on his suffering in any great detail, and uses his autobiography to re-imagine these episodes, repainting them in a lighter, more accepting light than one might have imagined. In doing so, Sheen makes it appear that he cheerfully went to Rochester carrying his cross and suffered largely in silence.[146]

Sheen's refusal to speak directly about his negative experiences in Rochester and elsewhere may seem odd – especially considering the eagerness to which he deploys other hagiographical tropes in *Treasure in Clay*. However, this very hesitancy highlights the precariousness of Sheen's position and his own need to demonstrate obedience to the institution – and to the memory of Cardinal Spellman, in particular.[147] As such, these episodes of trials and tribulations demonstrate

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[144] Noonan, *The Passion of Fulton Sheen*, 161. Even if their relationship was not as strained as sources suggest, in all of *Treasure in Clay* Spellman is mentioned by name less than a handful of times – despite having a personal and working relationship with Sheen of over twenty years – and the Cardinal's face was also conveniently cropped out of a publicity photo of Sheen that was used to grace the cover of his 2004 critical biography by Riley. The original photo can be viewed in the photograph section of Noonan's *The Passion of Fulton Sheen*.

[145] Noonan, *The Passion of Fulton Sheen*, 161.

[146] Sheen was certainly given the opportunity to voice his concerns about his experiences. When asked by Mike Wallace during an interview on *Sixty Minutes* why he was never offered a cardinal's hat, Sheen replied that he would have gladly moved up within the Church but that he refused to "pay the price" demanded of him. Noonan, *The Passion of Fulton Sheen*, 67. Sheen further remarked that it was "God who made certain people throw stones at me" and that "the curious would like me to open healed wounds; the media, in particular, would relish a chapter which would pass judgement on others." Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 314; 310. Again, rather than seize upon a controversial moment which would be worth more than its weight in gold in any celebrity biographical account, Sheen is conspicuously silent, reminding his reader instead that "any discussion of conflicts within the Church diminishes the content of the Christ… as the hand excessively rubbing the eye diminishes vision." Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 312.

[147] Sheen's relationship with Cardinal Spellman over the years seems to have had two sides. Publicly the two men put on a pleasant face and spoke politely of one another. In New York, Sheen was feted as the successor to the Cardinal for a time and saw his career flourish. However, all that initial goodwill seems to have crumbled shortly after Sheen's program hit its peak. Between 1950 and 1966 Sheen acted as the national director for the SPOF, placing Sheen in yet

that the bishop was devoutly loyal to the Church until the very end, carrying his own "cup" as it was handed to him without refutation and avoiding any potential revenge he could have had in exposing his side of the story in his autobiography.[148] Thus, these chapters of Sheen's autobiography may come across as inauthentic and guarded from a critical standpoint of a celebrity bio, he refusal to address them acts as means of tacitly enacting his own austerity without necessarily having to draw attention to it.

Trope Three – The Prophetic Calling

The third and final element of hagiography that I will be now briefly addressing in this chapter is that of the central figure's prophetic calling. In hagiographical literature, the protagonist's destiny is often made evident to the character and reader alike through moments of anointing and prophecy.[149] In *Treasure in Clay*, Sheen is twice made the focus of such moments. These not only act to single him out from his peers – they also foreshadow the fact that he has been chosen for God's plan. The first occasion occurred while Sheen was still a boy. According to Sheen, one Sunday after Mass while he was serving as an altar boy, Bishop Spalding asked him to help carry a wine cruet. Sheen promptly and unceremoniously fumbled and dropped the item on the floor,

another position under Spellman's direct authority. While Sheen's natural charisma lent itself well to his fundraising efforts – he managed to secure $200 million in sixteen years, double what the rest of the world had raised during that same period – this success opened the door for Spellman to dip into Society funds for his other "pet charities," as with the infamous "milk incident." In 1957 Spellman used the Society to distribute a surplus of milk donated by the federal government, later insisting that he had paid the government for the surplus and that he was owed a refund from the Society. Sheen, knowing Spellman had received the milk for free, refused. In the end Pope Pius XII had to personally intervene, settling the "milk incident" in Sheen's favour and trapping Spellman in a lie. This would mark the first and only time Sheen could claim a victory over his superior, and Spellman, for his part, would have none of it. Sheen's show was soon taken off the air, and he was removed as director for the SPOF. Not long after, Spellman had Sheen assigned to Rochester. See Lynch, *Selling Catholicism*, 22; Noonan, *The Passion of Fulton Sheen*, 82.

[148] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 309–310.

[149] Weinstein and Bell have outlined how, since Urban VIII's reforms to the canonization process in the seventeenth century, the ideal candidate for sainthood will often have moments of prophecy attached to themselves in their hagiographies. *Saints and Society*, 147.

comparing the apparent catastrophe to "atomic explosion." Although Sheen feared he would be punished, Spalding instead surprised him by coming over and kneeling by his side. In an apparent non-sequitur, he asked Sheen: "Young man, where are you going to school when you get big?"[150] Sheen's rather coy answer was that he envisioned attending the Spalding Institute – a local high school the priest had been instrumental in founding.[151] Unperturbed by this sycophantic response, Spalding pushes on and asks Sheen whether he had ever heard of Louvain, to which he replied he had not. In response, Spalding told Sheen – in what he explicitly refers to as a "prophecy – to "go home and tell your mother that I said when you get big you are to go to Louvain, and someday you will be just as I am" – signaling that Sheen would too one day become a priest and a bishop of some renown.[152] The "prophecy" was later fulfilled: in 1919 Sheen would be admitted to the University of Louvain to complete his doctorate (and then again in 1921 for his post-doctoral *agregé*), and in 1951 would be consecrated as a Bishop.[153]

The second moment occurred during his troubled tenure at the CUA. I previously discussed how early in his tenure, Sheen was branded an "outcast" and reprimanded by the rector for proposing reforms which no one viewed favourably and which would have increased the faculty's workload. Following this event, Sheen remarks that he spent a week or two feeling insecure before the rector called him to his office. There, rather than receive a fresh series of reprimands, the rector apparently had Sheen follow him to his room where he put on his cassock, zucchetto, and other ceremonial regalia. Then, according to Sheen, the rector said to him "'Kneel down, young man.' I knelt before him and he put his hands on my head and said: 'Young man, this university has not

[150] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 12; Lynch, *Selling Catholicism*, 15.
[151] Bishop Spalding oversaw the founding of numerous schools and had a role to play in the establishment of the Catholic University of America. Sheen would indeed attend the Spalding Institute in Peoria and later the CUA (Lynch, 16). See also Dolan, *In Search of American Catholicism*.
[152] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 12; Riley, *Fulton Sheen*, 2.
[153] It has also been observed that childhood encounters with holy figures who serve as models for the protagonist are a common element of hagiography. Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, 56.

received into its ranks in recent years anyone who is destined to shed more light and luster upon it than yourself. God bless you.'"[154] Whether such an event took place or not is irrelevant. After Sheen's tenure at the CUA, he would go on to achieve national fame with his television series and be recognized across America. The placing of the rector's hands on his head can thus be seen as a process of anointing, whereby Sheen the outcast is further demarcated by his superior. As such, the story highlights to the reader than while Sheen was ostracized, the highest authority at the university nevertheless took his side in private, ultimately showcasing that he was in the right all along and was destined to continue to be in the right even when opposed.

Prophecy is rarely inconsequential in the lives of saints.[155] As a narrative trope, it foreshadows where the story will go, and also places a certain importance on the character receiving the prophecy. In the Gospels, notably that of Matthew, the reader is presented with all the myriad ways in which Jesus fulfilled prophecies, while also being presented with the events which would foreshadow his eventual crucifixion. The same convention continues into the Acts of the Apostles and the larger traditional of hagiographical literature as a whole, where pivotal narrative moments – such as impending martyrdom – are suggested to the reader or broadcast to the saint through a vision, dream or other revelation. Of course, the importance of prophecy as a hagiographical trope also extends beyond the narrative realm and serves as a means of highlighting the chosen nature of the protagonist and their part in God's master plan. In this case, Sheen's prophecy not only proposes a future career within the Church (where he would attain the rank of Archbishop, exceeding Spalding's expectations), but also singles him out as a person *chosen* to have their life's trajectory prophesied for him. In doing so, Sheen paints himself as having

[154] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 44.
[155] Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, 147.

something in common with both the apostles and saints before him – as someone who God had a carefully constructed plan for that the world would see come to fruition.

While Sheen is quite keen on incorporating hagiographical tropes and conventions into his autobiography, he nevertheless departs from classic hagiographic conventions in a manner that is simultaneously rather subtle yet somewhat blunt. Hagiographical authors generally allow the prophecy to remain implicit, counting on the knowledge and expectations of their reader to fill in the blanks and connect the dots to the Biblical parallels. Sheen, however, *explicitly* labels Spalding's speech as "prophecy." That Sheen chooses to bluntly state the trope he is deploying suggests that he did not entirely trust his readers to make this connection without his guidance. Like the celebrity actor who exerts control over their image and brand, Sheen is clearly demonstrating his control over the narrative, leaving little to chance and ensuring that his reader does not deviate from the larger message being imparted – nor fail to notice the hagiographical elements within.

Conclusion

Treasure in Clay is a text that sits uncomfortably at the intersection between celebrity and sanctity, hagiography and biography. Ostensibly a celebrity autobiography, its structure and reliance on certain tropes and Biblical parallels push the book towards the hagiographical. Yet, as mentioned earlier, hagiographies are seldom composed by the figure in question. In most cases, the agency of the saint themselves is deflected. Though their actions graze the pages of hagiography, as actors they are typically passive in its generation, reception and spread. Works like *Treasure in Clay* problematize this traditional rubric of holy writing, owing to its autobiographical nature and reliance on the author controlling their own image of sanctity. Rather

than see this as a contradiction, I argue instead that such works (along with their composing figures) cannot be properly understood or contextualized without also considering their intersections with modern celebrity.

Modern celebrities are public figures, open to the adoration of their fans but also the scrutiny of the wider public. Scholar Katja Lee remarks that, when writing of themselves, celebrity autobiographers "not only represent but embody in style and content the very terrain they negotiate."[156] Such works don't simply offer insight into the individual celebrity in question; they also offer insight into the way such texts are produced and consumed.[157] The same holds true for hagiography, where each text explores themes that extend beyond the life of the saint and into the larger cultural context surrounding them.[158] In this case, the control Sheen exerts over his persona and narrative, shaping it to fit hagiographical conventions, adds to the construction of both his image and reception as a modern celebrity and holy figure. In this case, ordinariness and authenticity are leveraged much differently than by the secular celebrity. Ordinariness for the sacred celebrity is, on the one hand, about demonstrating familiarity with hagiographical tropes and conventions and highlighting how one's life adheres to these standards. At the same time, using self-deprecation to emphasize ordinariness downplays both his celebrity and claims to sanctity. Paradoxically, this draws attention to his humility which is itself a virtue of the sacred.

Sheen's text can be seen as a continuation and adaptation of this historic and religiously significant genre.[159] I might venture as far to suggest that autohagiography can be read as a sign

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[156] Lee, "Reading Celebrity Autobiographies," 87.

[157] In discussing the Autobiography of St. Ignatius of Loyola, itself an early modern precedent for autohagiography, scholar Ulrike Strasser echoes this observation, remarking how the act of interpreting such works hinge on the reader and their familiarity with or expectations of the genre. See Ulrike Strasser, *German Jesuits and Pacific Journeys*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 50.

[158] See Krueger, *Hagiography*, 221.

[159] I would note that due the brevity of the nature of this study, as a chapter in this larger dissertational work, I was not able to touch upon other aspects of the text that support my central thesis. In *Treasure in Clay* there remain numerous elements of autohagiography waiting be explored in future studies, such as his focus on ascetic disciplines,

of change in the category of modern saint-making, one which allows the longstanding precedent of third-party authorship to be subverted and chronicled by the would-be saint themselves.[160] Ultimately, this case shines a light on a text largely overlooked by academia outside of a handful of critical biographers. As *Treasure in Clay* is a decidedly modern work, it is a key textual resource in understanding the broader making of would-be saints in the contemporary era, and of this era of American Catholicism in particular. Notably, Thomas Merton's *The Seven Story Mountain* (1948) and Dorothy Day's *The Long Loneliness* (1952) both come to mind as other major mid-twentieth century autobiographical works that could be read under the joint light of celebrity and religious studies. In the following chapter, we shift from the biographical to the post bio-graphical, moving from the life of the would-be saint to his remarkably eventful afterlife.

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the ongoing emphasis on his humility and obedience to Church hierarchy and orthodoxy, and the telling of his numerous (and typically successful) attempts as a convert-maker and missionary in the vein of the apostles.

[160] See Krueger, *Hagiography*, 221.

Chapter 2 – Locating the Saint: Regionalism and Identity Making in the Afterlife of Fulton J. Sheen

Cold Weather in Peoria

It's a typical winter morning on January 21st, 2020. There's fresh snowfall from the night before, and the sidewalks are already covered in ice. I've just arrived at the local airport in Peoria, Illinois having flown in from my connecting flight in Chicago. After collecting my bags, I hail an Uber and wait several minutes for "Dana" to arrive and help me load my things in his trunk. As we pull away from the airport and Dana drives me to the city proper, I'm able to survey the area. Peoria is a small city in a mostly rural part of the American Midwest. The homes along the highway are modest and spread out. It's a far cry from New York City – from the dense, urban metropolis where Sheen spent most of his life and made his career. By the time the airport disappears from view, hidden behind small crops of trees and snowed-over farm fields, Dana looks up in the rearview mirror and asks what brings me to Peoria.

"You're here for Caterpillar, right?" he asks, referring to the construction giant whose headquarters are the city. I gather over the coming days from other local Peorians that most visitors are there on business matters related to the construction industry, and little else. "No," I reply. "I'm here to visit the diocese. It's about Fulton Sheen. Are you familiar with him?"

"Sheen?" he takes a second to recall the name. "Yeah, Sheen. He's kind of a big deal around here, isn't he?"

"If you're Catholic, he certainly is."

"Right. There was this whole thing about getting his body over here recently. Guess they got it done?"

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In 2019, the remains of Fulton J. Sheen were removed from the crypt under St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City where they had rested since 1979 and moved to a modest shrine in St. Mary's Cathedral in the small city of Peoria, Illinois. Encased in a marble tomb beneath a gilded portrait of the Virgin Mother (a figure to whom he was particularly devoted to his whole adult life) Sheen's remains are identified by a small plaque on the tomb bearing his name, the title "Venerable Servant of God" and the initials JMJ – Jesus Mary Joseph, which he was known for writing on the blackboard at the start of each episode of *Life is Worth Living* (see figure A).

(Fig. A)[161]

As a resting place, the shrine is quiet and modest, largely free of the ostentatiousness which surrounded Sheen during his illustrious life in New York City.[162] However, that Sheen's remains should come home to rest in the rural Midwest was hardly a given. Peoria first petitioned New York to relocate Sheen's remains to their current resting place in 2014. After apparently being given verbal assurances that there would be no issues with the request, the archdiocese abruptly refused the transfer, even as Peoria was in the midst of planning for Sheen's beatification ceremony

[161] Photograph taken on January 23, 2020, at The Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Peoria, Illinois. Author's own.
[162] Sheen's ambiguous relationship with his celebrity is discussed in more detail in Chapters 1 and 3.

to be held locally. While Sheen hailed from nearby El Paso before his family relocated to Peoria, he spent a far greater portion of his life away from America's Heartland, enjoying a thriving career in Washington, DC, and later New York City, where his career reached the heights of celebrity for which he became widely known. During that time, Sheen became something of an urban aristocrat, one who socialized with the elites from both America's celebrity circles and the upper echelons of America's Catholic hierarchy. He owned property in the city and even purchased a burial plot for himself in Queens, which would ultimately remain unused.[163] Yet, it was the Diocese of Peoria who initiated Sheen's canonization proceedings, and whose decade-long toil was responsible for Sheen earning the title of "Venerable" and meeting the technical requirements for his to-be scheduled beatification. Nevertheless, the resulting disagreement between the two dioceses over Sheen's remains would become a veritbale tug of war and make its way to the American courts system before finally being resolved in Peoria's favour nearly five years later.

Theoretical Considerations

Urban and Rural Catholicism in America

The story of Sheen's afterlife is more than the story of a man and the recognition of his sanctity. It is also a story about an oft-neglected area in the field of American religion: the struggle for visibility among rural Catholics. While there are scholarly studies focusing on rural Catholicism, the majority of works continue to focus on urban parishes and the lived experience of Catholic immigrants and their descendants in America's cities.[164] Classic works such as Ellis's *American*

[163] Sharon Otterman, "Tug of war for Archbishop Fulton Sheen's body, or its parts, delays sainthood," *The Seattle Times*, September 13, 2014, https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/tug-of-war-for-archbishop-fulton-sheenrsquos-body-or-its-parts-delays-sainthood/.

[164] See Jeffrey Marlett, "Strangers in Our Midst: Catholics in Rural America," in *Roman Catholicism in the United States*, ed. Margaret M. McGuiness and James T. Fisher (Fordham University Press, 2019), 86-107; Jeffrey Marlett,

Catholicism (1965) set the stage for approaches like this, while with more recent ones such as McGreevy's *Parish Boundaries* (1996), Orsi's *Madonna of 115th Street* (1985) and even O'Toole's annotated collection *The Faithful* (2008) have perhaps inadvertently helped reinforce the perception that American Catholicism is primarily rooted in urban neighbourhoods rather than the remote and often sparsely populated farmlands of the American Midwest and American South. Part of the reason for the lack of scholarly interest in rural Catholicism, I would assume, has to do with demographics. At their peak, rural Catholics never made up more than a fifth to a third of the total Catholic population in the United States, translating to only a small fraction of the total American population at any given time.[165] However, I would also argue that the prevailing presence and influence of Northern urban centers in the narratives of American Catholicism have themselves contributed to overshadowing rural stories, effectively turning small rural diocese such as Peoria into veritable underdogs in David and Goliath-like struggles for visibility, claims to identity, and negotiations of sanctity. [166]

While this chapter does not concern itself with providing a history of rural American Catholicism, it does concern itself with how this theme – the urban/rural divide and the influence urban regions hold over rural ones – relates to the afterlife of Fulton J. Sheen. The competition

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"Harvesting an Overlooked Freedom: The Anti-Urban Vision of American Catholic Agrarianism, 1920-1950," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 16, no. 4 (Fall, 1998): 88-108; David S. Bovée, "The Middle Way: The National Catholic Rural Life Conference and Rural Issues of the 20th and 21st Centuries," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 75, no. 3 (May 2016):762-808; David S. Bovée, *The Church & the Land: The National Catholic Rural Life Conference and American Society, 1923-2007* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010); Seth Smith, "Implemental Vatican II in Two Rural, Southern Parishes," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 30, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 93-114; Steven M. Avella, "Catholicism in the Twentieth-Century American West: The Next Frontier," *The Catholic Historical Review* 97, no.2 (April, 2011): 219-249.

[165] Bovée, "The Middle Way," 766; David Andrews, "The Rural Ministry Collegium," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 8, no. 3 (Summer, 1989): 231-234, 231.

[166] Numerous scholars have commented on the influence of urban parishes not only in American Catholic culture, but also within academia. Of this, scholar Timothy Matovina has commented how Catholic historians and historians of Catholicism have tended to focus on urban centers and primarily immigrant stories, particularly in Boston, Chicago and New York City, while ignoring other Catholics further in the peripheries. See Timothy Matovina, "Remapping American Catholicism," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 28, no. 4 (Fall 2010): 31-72.

between New York City and Peoria over Sheen's bodily remains highlights issues related to ongoing regional tensions between the center and the periphery, as well as their resulting complications. Of particular note is how the Empire State's move to prominently insert itself into Sheen's canonization narrative has contributed to issues and delays which may ultimately derail the entire process, and also how the conflict of interests surrounding Sheen's body has created an opening for Peoria to re-map Sheen's relationship with his rural upbringing and re-imagine his body, identity and very sanctity. The tension between these competing pulls underlines the complex and ultimately amorphous nature of the would-be American saint's memory and identity and demonstrates how competing regional factors and interests can introduce complications and flux into existing narratives of sanctity.

Place, Identity and the Body

Since ancient times, Christianity has largely been focused on bodies – and not simply those of the living. Dead bodies – particularly those of the people proclaimed saints – have played a crucial role in negotiations and interpretations of sanctity, space, sacred authority and identity.[167] Historically, the tangibility of relics has allowed Christian devotees to locate sanctity in the material as well as the spatial, transforming mere physical geography into a sacred landscape.[168] Such places emanate both spiritual and temporal authority, and, through various associations and interactions with these sacred landscapes, devotees come to shape their identities and understanding of sanctity. Though the power channeled by the saint is understood to come directly

[167] See Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead*, especially 239-324; Charles Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).
[168] For a foundational discussion on the cult of saints and their connection to space, power and sanctity, see Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

from God, in practical matters, their relics have acted as bridges between this world and the unseen, the sacred and the mundane, the normal and the miraculous. As will be demonstrated in this chapter, the relationship between relics, space and sanctity is not just historical, but continues to inform issues of identity and power in American Catholicism to this day.

In situating these concerns within the modern era – and also within the geography that constitutes present-day America – this chapter is indebted to the work of Emma Anderson and her 2013 monograph, *The Death and Afterlife of the North American Martyrs*, as well as Kathleen Sprows Cummings' 2019 monograph *A Saint of Our Own: How the Quest for a Holy Hero Helped Catholics Become American*. Anderson's work – which explores how the identities of saints are tied to the identities of the people revering them – showcases how the cultural, historical and religious meanings of sainthood are as fluid as they are contentious, particularly when the legacy of the saint is claimed by multiple parishes or dioceses, across regional or national boundaries.[169] Anderson thus highlights how sanctity acts as a point of reference, a tool to make possible the formulation and reimagining of specific cultural identities and differences. Referencing the longstanding drive American Catholics have had for finding and making saints of their own, Cummings' work focuses on the ways in which these figures can act as a reflection and validation of American culture and values.[170] Drawing from the themes presented in the work of Anderson and Cummings, I use this chapter to explore how Sheen's afterlife exemplifies, not only the tension between rural and urban Catholicism in America, but also the complicated, messy – and at times contentious – navigation of identity that accompanies Sainthood and indeed sanctity itself.

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[169] See Emma Anderson, *The Death and Afterlife of the North American Martyrs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), particularly 214-254.

[170] See Kathleen Sprow Cummings, *A Saint of Our Own: How the Quest for a Holy Hero Helped Catholics Become American* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019), particularly 1-14.

Additional Sources

In the following pages, I will outline the tangled events of the canonization tug of war that took place between the rural diocese of Peoria and the metropolitan of diocese of New York, a tug of war which has yet to reach its conclusion. In this regard, I will be citing heavily – so, predominantly, but not exclusively – from Catholic newspapers and statements issued by the diocese of Peoria.[171] I would note at this juncture that the volume and variety of news articles and reporting on the conflict between the dioceses is itself both telling and remarkable. Rarely have internal conflicts within the normally tight-lipped modern Church spilled over into the public's gaze quite like this series of events.

In my theoretical discussion, I will be drawing out themes of identity and sanctity from rural Catholicism and applying them to the remapping of Sheen's body and geographic identity. Of particular interest is how the connection between labour, land and sanctity – espoused prominently in mid-century America by organizations such as the National Catholic Rural Life Council (NCRLC) – continues to influence Peoria's imaging of Sheen in subtle ways. This discussion will also be supplemented with first-hand observations from the Fulton Sheen Museum in Peoria, Illinois, where I completed my fieldwork in January 2020, as well as with references to primary sources found within their collection and modest archive – notably in the form of images and clippings made available to me.[172]

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[171] There were previously more documents available online from the diocese of Peoria, but at the time of this writing they have since been removed. When speaking with curators at the Fulton Sheen Museum and volunteers at St. Mary's Cathedral in Peoria in January 2020 about these events, the consensus appears to be one of "let bygones be bygones." As the matter concerning Sheen's remains has been resolved, there seemed to be little desire to revisit that lengthy episode in his canonization process. However, a certain candid comment, spoken to me in confidence, was that the whole affair with New York had been nothing short of "ridiculous."

[172] "Modest" may be a mild overstatement. The museum is currently managed by two Franciscan Sisters of St. John the Baptist (FSJB). Within its collection are two filing boxes filled with uncategorized and unsorted folders and loose clippings. From what I was told, most of their material not on display was sent in by devotees of Sheen and locals over the years from their own personal collections. In many cases, there was simply text clippings taken from

Sheen's Cause

A Window into American Regionalism and the Urban / Rural Catholic Divide

The first concrete steps towards Sheen's canonization were taken in 1998 when The Archbishop Sheen Foundation was launched by Gregory J. Ladd and Lawrence F. Hickey. That same year, Ladd and Hickey approached Archbishop John O' Connor, a friend of Sheen's who had by then become a cardinal, for permission to begin the steps towards opening the cause for canonization.[173] O'Connor granted the foundation the right to begin amassing data, while his successor, Cardinal Edward Egan, pointed the foundation towards Peoria as a home for the cause. Bishop Daniel R. Jenky of Peoria accepted the request, became the principal actor, and petitioned the Vatican for permission to open the cause towards Sheen's canonization.[174] By 2008, after six years of work, the diocesan phase of the investigation was completed, and 22 volumes of testimony and other records were transmitted to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome.

In September 2010, Sheen's journey towards sainthood took an unexpected and optimistic leap forward. At a hospital in Peoria, a boy was born without a heartbeat. Refusing to accept the inevitable medical diagnosis made by the attending medical staff, the child's mother found herself turning to prayer. She directed her petition towards Sheen, who seems to have been an unlikely figure, but one she nevertheless revered and considered to be saintly. Miraculously, before the hour was up, the child's heart began beating and returned to life. The doctors, amazed at what

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newspapers and magazines without any identifying material concerning the publication and the author. Nevertheless, the museum was able to collect and put on display a fairly remarkable quantity of materials given their limited resources.

[173] "History," *The Archbishop Fulton John Sheen Foundation*, http://www.archbishopsheencause.org/the-cause/about-the-cause/history.

[174] Bishop Jenky continues to be, at the time of this writing, the prelate of Peoria. Interestingly, he was appointed to his current posting in 2002, making the opening of Sheen's cause one of his first official acts. While the history on the foundation website makes it appear as if he was approached without any awareness of the foundations actions, as they refer to his involvement only as a "possibility" prior to coming onboard, his rapid petitioning for the cause makes it seems unlikely that he would not have been aware of the foundation's work prior to his appointment.

transpired, confirmed that the child was now healthy and would survive with no permanent ills or ailments. The boy was promptly given the name James Fulton in honour of his intervening patron.[175]

In 2011, a Vatican panel of medical experts advising the Congregation ruled that the event at the Peoria hospital with the resuscitated child closed its investigation into Sheen's miraculous intervention, provisionally clearing the cause of one of the greatest hurdles towards beatification and sainthood.[176] In 2012, Pope Benedict XVI announced that the Congregation had recognized Sheen's life as one of "heroic virtue" and he was proclaimed as a "Venerable Servant of God." Bishop Jenky of Peoria held a mass at the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception in celebration, a fitting choice considering this Cathedral was where Sheen received his first communion, was ordained as a priest, celebrated his first Mass, and where his remains would eventually come to rest.[177]

Despite the promising and rapid initial progress of his cause – including meeting the miracle requirement for beatification – all further progress ground to a halt when the cause was suddenly and indefinitely suspended by the diocese in September 2014. In an official (and notably somber) news release,[178] the diocese stated that although the cause had been progressing quite well

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[175] Haley Stewart, "She prayed to Fulton Sheen and her baby was saved. Meet Boonie Engstrom," *America*, July 28, 2019, https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2019/07/28/she-prayed-fulton-sheen-and-her-baby-was-saved-meet-bonnie-engstrom.

[176] The miracle would later be officially recognized by Pope Francis on July 6, 2019.

[177] That Sheen was ordained in Peoria would become a major fact in the diocese's case for housing his remains and shrine, as well as play a role in the diocese's own self-perception and relation to the would-be saint. More on this will be elaborated later in the chapter.

[178] The press release stated that "The bishop is heartbroken not only for his flock in Peoria, but also for the many supporters of the Sheen cause from throughout the world who have so generously supported Peoria's efforts." The original document was previously available at the Diocese of Peoria website (https://cdop.org/post/PostFeatured.aspx?ID=3490, last accessed October 14, 2014) and the Fulton Sheen Foundation website (http://www.archbishopsheencause.org/, last accessed February 3, 2019) but it has since been removed in both locations. See Peter Jesserer, "New York Archdiocese Stalls Fulton Sheen Canonization Process," *National Catholic Register*, accessed June 24, 2020, http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/new-york-archdiocese-stalls-fulton-sheen-canonization-process.

and they had anticipated holding the beatification ceremony in Peoria in 2015, a dispute over Sheen's remains had brought the proceedings to a halt. Despite apparent verbal assurances given to Bishop Jenky, the archdiocese of New York refused to honour the request to transfer Sheen's remains, arguing that it was not necessary to have his remains in Peoria in order to hold the beatification ceremony and that Sheen's remains belonged in New York.[179] Peoria, in turn, categorically refused to hold the beatification ceremony without the transferal of Sheen's remains, arguing that that Sheen had no desire to remain buried at St. Patrick's Cathedral – least of all, one would suspect, in the same crypt where the remains of his longtime rival Francis Spellman also lay – and that he desired to return to his true home in Peoria. [180] Neither diocese, however, gave any ground, and the issue of the translation of Sheen's remains became a matter for the secular courts to settle.

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Peoria's decision to suspend the beatification ceremony in in 2014 in light of New York's refusal is, in hindsight, hardly surprising. While New York was technically correct in stating that having the remains transferred to the diocese was not a prerequisite for the ceremony to take place,[181] their sudden refusal points to larger matters than a technicality. It was the relatively minor and geographically remote diocese of Peoria that had toiled for Sheen's canonization for the better part of the previous decade. Had they continued with the ceremony in absence of Sheen's remains, the diocese of New York would have become the custodian of the relics of a beatified American

[179] It appears that the Archdiocese of New York may have reached out to the Vatican to seek confirmation that their refusal to move Sheen's remains would in no way impede the beatification ceremony.
[180] Though both Sheen and Spellman's remains reside in the same crypt, they were carefully interred at opposite ends so as not to rest next to one another in the afterlife. Reeves, *America's Bishop*, 361.
[181] While the ceremony of beatification is normally held at the saint's "home" diocese (in this case Peoria), there is no requirement that their body be present in the diocese at the time of the ceremony. For more information on the technicalities of the canonization process, see: Msgr. Robert Sarno, "Saints," *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*, accessed February 11, 2021, https://www.usccb.org/offices/public-affairs/saints.

figure.[182] In other words, New York would have directly benefitted from Peoria's efforts, efforts which were on track to make Sheen's remains more spiritually valuable than they had been in the decades before, a spiritual valuation which would continue to increase should the little diocese attain its goal of making Sheen number among the saints. Among Catholic circles, it was hardly a secret that the matter – and value – of relics was on the minds of the actors in both dioceses. As James T. Keane, the senior editor of *America*, the Jesuit Review, observed in 2017, Bishop Jenky openly petitioned New York explicitly for the "collection of relics."[183] Rather remarkably, however, the archdiocese of New York issued a public statement that they stood against "the dismemberment of the archbishop's body."[184] Peoria's decision to pause the beatification proceedings can thus be read as a means of regaining control, both over the proceedings and the remains of Sheen, their beloved native Peorian. After all, the act of reclaiming relics has long been understood as an act of political and cultural self-assertion, and in modern times the repatriation of relics continues to be a frequent feature of struggles for cultural rights and political recognition across the globe.[185]

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[182] It bears reminding that even in the modern world, relics continue to remain multivalent sources of sacred power, political charisma, and fiscal profit, whether it be in explicitly religious settings or religious-like settings (such as Soviet-era devotion-like activities pointed to the body of Lenin). Hardly a Medieval phenomenon, modern people continue to be fascinated by dead bodies and recognize the power inherent in them. See Alexandra Walsham, "Introduction: Relics and Remains," *Past & Present* 206, no. 5 (2010): 9-36.

[183]James T. Keane "What is to be done with the body of Fulton Sheen?," *America*, October 11, 2017, https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2017/10/11/what-be-done-body-archbishop-fulton-sheen.

[184] "New York and Peoria in Tug of War Over Archbishop Fulton Sheen's Body," NBC News, Sept 5, 2014, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/new-york-peoria-tug-war-over-archbishop-fulton-sheens-body-n196721. One would be hard pressed to find occasions of Catholics referring to the collection of relics negatively as "dismemberment." However, it seems hardly a coincidence that New York would use such harsh language in their public rebuke against Peoria. As the quote was picked up by mainstream American news outlets, I would surmise that it was a means of smearing the Peoria's request among wider American audiences who may be unfamiliar (and hence more uncomfortable) with Catholic practices around bodies of the dead.

[185] For instance, indigenous peoples of North America, Australia and New Zealand have sought to reclaim bones and material possessions of their ancestors confiscated and placed in foreign museums. In reclaiming their relics, they effectively reclaim some of their lost agency and identity. See Walsham, "Relics and Remains."

New York's refusal to transfer Sheen's remains and the resulting public spat between the two dioceses is revealing of the power imbalance between these two regions in the American Church. New York has historically eclipsed all other dioceses in the influence it wields over the lives of American Catholics and the perception of Catholicism within the wider culture of the nation. As the largest city in the United States and the largest port of entry, New York was the hub through which millions of Catholic immigrants from across the Atlantic entered into the continent, a reality which created large pockets of ethnic parishes and Catholic neighbourhoods in the city.[186] Many of the Church leaders who have held the seat of Bishop (and later Archbishop) of New York since the early 1800s have been wildly influential, [187] perhaps none more so than Francis Spellman, whose mid-twentieth century tenure lasted nearly 28 years and oversaw the radical demographic shift that occurred when New York's urban Catholics began moving from the ghettos to the suburbs in droves. It was during Spellman's time that New York solidified its place as the center of American Catholicism, largely due to his influence amongst Catholics and wider American society, as well as his active campaigning in the canonization causes for American-born saints.[188] The archdiocese of New York has also largely dominated the academic discourse of American Catholicism, and this scholarly preoccupation with themes pertinent to the New York context –

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[186] Ryan D. Dye, "Leo R. Ward, C.S.C.: Irish America's Rural Man of Letters," *American Catholic Studies* 118, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 22-23; see also Steven Avella, "Catholicism in the Twentieth-Century American West: The Next Frontier," *The Catholic Historical Review* 97, no.2 (April, 2011): 219-249.

[187] Of particular note is the fiery John Hughes, who fought tooth and nail against ninteenth century Nativism for Irish immigrants and American-born Irish – earning him the moniker "Dagger John." His influence would continue to exert itself through his successor, John McClosky, who would go on to become the first American cardinal. For more on John Hughes, see Thomas J. Shelley, "Founding Father," *Fordham, A History of the Jesuit University of New York: 1841-2003* (New York: Fordham University, 2016), 5-27; William J. Stern, "How Dagger John Saved New York's Irish," *City Journal*, Spring 1997, https://www.city-journal.org/html/how-dagger-john-saved-new-york%E2%80%99s-irish-11934.html.

[188] Spellman was, after all, made Apostolic Vicar for the United States Armed Forces during the Second World War and later founded the annual Al Smith Dinner charity even which continues to be frequented by sitting Presidents of the United States. Spellman was also one of the main campaigners pushing for Elizabeth Ann Seton's canonization, who became the first American-born saint. See Cummings, *Saint of Our Own*, 126.

immigrant narratives and identities, ethic parishes, etc. – has threatened to eclipse the experience of Catholics elsewhere in the nation.[189]

Unlike the dense urban parishes found in America's major metropolises – such as New York City, Chicago and Boston, which were at times largely comprised of immigrant communities – rural Catholics found themselves vastly outnumbered by their Protestant peers. Success and survival in rural America often relied on having a dependable family unit and savings to purchase and maintain farming land, both of which were luxuries the majority of America's Catholic newcomers lacked.[190] Despite intermittent attempts at drawing more Catholics to rural living and the heralded spiritual benefits of working off the land, these efforts have largely failed.[191] Rural parishes have also found themselves facing historic shortages of priests, hospitals, schools and other Catholic institutions and resources.[192] Nevertheless, Peoria – once part of the colony of Louisiana – has long had roots as a Catholic center for the region. After the colony of Louisiana formally became a part of the United States in the early 1800s, small communities of Catholic immigrants began to settle in the Great Lakes region of the largely agrarian Midwest.[193] Germans and Poles represented the largest demographic of Catholics settling in America's rural farmlands, with a small but not insignificant number of Irish immigrants also relocating to the Midwest.[194] Today in Illinois – much like the country overall – Catholics make up the single largest Christian

[189] See Matovina, "Remapping American Catholicism."
[190] While the majority of the Catholics to settle in rural America were of German origin, many of whom arrived in far superior financial straights than other nationalities, there were nevertheless a number of Irish family units that opted for the Midwest over the urban centers. Though small in number, these communities formed tight-knit bonds with their peers and the land. Dye, "Leo R. Ward", 22-25.
[191] Bovée, "The Middle Way," 777; Bovée, *The Church & the Land*, 358.
[192] John Bieter, "'Lay People Can Teach': Rural Life, Edwin O'Hara, and the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, 1920-1960," *American Catholic Studies* 120, no. 2 (Summer, 2009): 54.
[193] Jay P. Dolan, "Catholics in the Midwest," University of Notre Dame, accessed July 28, 2020, https://www3.nd.edu/~jdolan/midwest.html
[194] Dolan, *The American Catholic*, 130-136; Dye, "Leo R. Ward," 22-25.

denomination, even if their numbers can't compare to the total number of Protestants of various denominations.[195]

In holding religious convictions that set them apart from their neighbours, rural Catholics in America – like their urban counterparts – have had to contend with the experience of otherness. Like all newcomers, they sought to maintain their traditions while at the same time finding themselves in and identifying with the larger patchwork of American culture. Scholar Jeffrey Marlett remarks that rural Catholics faced an additional existential challenge by belonging to "a church self-identified with the cities where a largely immigrant, second and sometimes third-generation membership staked a most conspicuous claim."[196] As such, one of the largest challenges was to demarcate their identity from that of their fellow Catholics in urban centers, something largely accomplished by tying their sanctity to the land itself. Catholic clerics and lay leaders alike were strong advocates of the agrarian life, arguing that farm work could suitably instill "whole virtues" through labour.[197] They argued that Catholics would find satisfaction in working the land, and, owing to the communal nature of many rural communities, that Catholics could also hope to foster traditional family values, encourage mutual aid, and keep the population close-knit and focused on "God at all times and in all places."[198]

The attachment these Catholics felt to the land, their spirituality, and bodies was reinforced visually. Rural Catholics freely drew upon Biblical imagery and applied it more directly to their situation than their urban counterparts. For instance, several of A. de Bethune's woodcut prints of biblical images – such as "The Sower" and "Christ the Tree of Life" – emphasize the connection

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[195] According to the Pew Research Center, in 2014, Catholics made up approximately 28% of the state's population, compared to 43% for all Protestant denominations. Pew Research Center, "Adults in Illinois," *Religious Landscapes Study*, accessed July 28, 2020, https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/state/illinois/.
[196] Jeffrey Marlett, "Strangers" 86.
[197] Bieter, "Lay People Can," 63.
[198] Dye, "Leo R. Ward," 24.

between rural living and Biblical virtues and were embraced by rural Catholics, while the Liturgical Movement endorsed a wide visual repertoire of explicitly rural Catholic images that rooted their spirituality to the land.[199] The National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC) – an organization that promoted rural living and values to Catholics in American city centers – also promoted the iconography of saint Isidore, the patron saint of farming.

Ultimately, the Catholic emphasis on rural living can also be read as a backlash against the perceived ills and dangers of the modern world, which were more prevalent in the cities than the countryside. As Jeffrey Marlett puts it, "Catholic anti-urbanism encompassed both people and the land itself."[200] As such, rural pride would also fuel anti-urbanism among Catholics, a sentiment which would become more prominent in through 1930s with the activism and tacit influence of the NCRLC and its "crusade" against what it saw were the vices of the cities.[201] The NCRLC cultivated a widespread belief that urban Catholics were falling away from the faith, and that the values of the city were incompatible with their spiritual lives. The countryside, in contrast, offered

[199] Pastoral motifs appear to have featured prominently into rural Catholic imagery and pride, finding rather direct parallels in the life of Christ with their own labour in the American Midwest. Marlett, "Strangers," 98. Such imagery was also often gendered, focusing on male physicality and the authority of the male body over the land itself. As historian J. L. Anderson has observed, rural imagery has the tendency to show physically capable and sturdy men whose masculinity is rooted in their body and the practices they perform on the land. Sociologist Katie Holmes also remarks that a quintessential feature of rural imagery "position[s] men as dominating nature and conquering the landscape" and that "the entangled relationships between men's bodies, animals, machines, and the land they worked are in turn connected to broader understandings about nationhood, settlement, and the Judeo-Christian imperative to subdue the wilderness." See J. L. Anderson, "'You're a Bigger Man': Technology and Agrarian Masculinity in Postwar America," *Agricultural History* 94, no. 1 (Winter 2020): 14; Katie Holmes, "Making Masculinity: Land, Body, Image in Australia's Mallee Country," *RCC Perspectives* 2, no. 2 (2017): 43; 39.

[200] Marlett, "Overlooked Freedom," 102.

[201] The NCRLC also sought to "ruralize" the wider Church in America, imprinting what it saw were the superior values of the countryside on urban centers, albeit to little success. For a history and scholarly analysis of the NCRLC and its anti-urbanism, see Bovée, *The Church & The Land*, and Marlett, "Overlooked Freedom." As historian Geneviève Zubrzycki remarks, similar sentiments were also seen further north in Quebec. Quoted an oft repeated proverb in favour of Catholic ruralism and opposition to urbanization that reads "Church steeples will always be higher than factory chimneys." She remarks that late nineteenth and early twentieth century French Canadians were keen to "renounce the luxuries of city life and the lure of industry for a simple but enlightened life on the land... locating heavenly virtue in the simple act of tilling the soil." Geneviève Zubrzycki, *Beheading the Saint*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 62;56.

fewer dangers and allowed Catholics to better connect manual labour with their spirituality.[202] Rural leaders such as Christian Winkelman, the Bishop of Wichita, were often much blunter, railing against the intrusion of vices he identified as "urban tendencies" attempting to despoil the more purified spiritual existence of rural America.[203] Others also argued that rural life allowed Catholics to more "purely" live their faith than they would in the cities.[204] Ultimately, "rural America offered the nation a comprehensive answer to a plethora of questions raised about modern life. Most significantly, American rural life offered both physical and spiritual security."[205]

Peoria's refusal to give in to New York's obstructions in Sheen's canonization process should therefore be framed within the wider scope of rural Catholicism's ongoing history of rebuke against the urban hegemony.[206] In asserting themselves against New York with their claim for Sheen's remains, Peoria can be read as asserting itself against the Empire State's dominance over American Catholic matters as well as the values and identities associated with the urban metropolitan. As such, while Sheen's bodily remains certainly figure into the center of their disagreement, his body – like the bodies of would-be American saints before –has also become the site where wider tensions and regional imbalances in the American Church continue to be played out.

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[202] Hamlin and McGreevy, "Greening of America," 466.
[203] Marlett, "Strangers," 96.
[204] Marlett, "Overlooked Freedom," 102.
[205] Marlett, "Overlooked Freedom," 89.
[206] While the NCRLC's influence quickly faded post WWII along with much of the earlier anti-urbanism, awareness of rural differences continues to permeate in rural parishes and dioceses. See Bovée, *The Church & The Land*, 258-366; Marlett (1998); Smith, "Implemental Vatican II."

Urban Hegemony and American Canonization

In 2016, Peoria's legal struggles to have Sheen's remains transferred to their diocese took a positive turn when Joan Sheen Cunningham – Sheen's niece and closest surviving relative – became involved and advocated for Peoria's side in the matter. Her petitions as a relative of the deceased appear to have held some weight in the matter, as the Manhattan Supreme Court Justice Arlene Bluth initially granted Cunningham's request to have the body transferred to Peoria. However, as soon as the *translatio* was granted the Archdiocese of York filed for an appeal, once again halting any proceedings until the case could reconvene at the appeals court.[207]

The following year, at the New York Court of Appeals, Cunningham testified, reiterating that Sheen had little desire to be buried in New York City. Though much of his career had taken place in that city – including his widely celebrated television and radio career – she remarked that her uncle had purchased a burial plot outside of the city, in Queens. Echoing Peoria's argument from a few years earlier, she argued that the purchase demonstrated that her uncle had no desire to be entombed within St. Patrick's Cathedral, and that while he never explicitly stated he desired to be buried in Peoria, it suggested that he would have preferred to have been buried anywhere except for in New York City.[208] As his current burial location went against his earthly wishes, the Archdiocese's desire to claim Sheen's body had superseded the man's own desires. Thus, seeing as Sheen's desire was ignored, at the very least, the wishes of the family should be honoured.[209]

While the court ruled that she had provided a "good and substantial reason" for the disinterment and transfer of Sheen's body, attorneys for St. Patrick's also had their fair share of

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[207] Catholic News Service, "New York State court rules Sheen remains should be transferred to Peoria," *America,* November 18, 2016, https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2016/11/18/new-york-state-court-rules-sheen-remains-should-be-transferred-peoria.
[208] James T. Keane, "What Is to Be Done With the Body of Archbishop Fulton Sheen?" *America*, October 11, 2017, https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2017/10/11/what-be-done-body-archbishop-fulton-sheen.
[209] Keane, "What Is to Be Done."

ammunition to expend in the battle. Their argument primarily revolved around the matter of the canonization process. Though the transfer of Sheen's remains has been called a "key factor in the continuing progress of his sainthood cause" by Peoria, the Archdiocese' attorneys made this statement something of a sticking point,[210] arguing that, as there is no guarantee that Sheen's canonization cause will be successful, and the transferal of remains for inspection does not need to occur in the diocese where the process is being championed, any such removal of a body without sufficient cause, such as in this case, was tantamount to desecration.[211]

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The tug of war over Sheen's cause was not the first to occur in modern America, nor was it the first to occur between New York and another diocese.[212] Elizabeth Ann – who in 1975 became the first canonized saint born in what is now the United States – founded several schools and religious congregations in the rural townships in and around what would become the archdiocese of Baltimore.[213] Yet, during her canonization proceedings in the twentieth century, she became popularly known as "Elizabeth of New York" as Cardinal Spellman and others from New York City inserted themselves into her cause and sought to lay claim to her legacy.[214] Though New York City ultimately failed to lay claim to her cause and body beyond a nickname, the

[210] Keane, "What Is to Be Done."
[211] Despite the tense atmosphere at the proceedings, the hearing wasn't without some lighter moments that Sheen himself might have approved of. When arguing his final point, Mr. Callagy, the principal attorney for the Archdiocese, argued that it would be a shame for Sheen to be removed from the high altar of St. Patrick's Cathedral and brought all the way to distant Peoria for no good reason. "'Eh,' interrupted Justice Dianne Renwick, who was overseeing the case, 'Peoria's not that bad.'" Keane, "What Is to Be Done." See also "New York's Highest Court Dismisses Legal Appeal, Says Sheen's Body Can Go to Peoria," *National Catholic Register*, May 7, 2019, http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/civil-appeals-court-dismisses-legal-challenge-says-sheens-body-can-go-to-pe.
[212] It is perhaps worth noting that of the twelve recognized American saints, at least half of them featured New York prominently in their hagiographical materials.
[213] Following the re-opening of Maryland to Catholics and the end to the penal laws in 1774, Seton founded Saint Joseph's Academy and Free School, an academy for girls, followed by Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's, the first religious congregation founded in the United States. For more on the penal laws of Maryland and the Catholic exclusionary policies, see Maura Jane Farrelly, *Papist Patriots: The Making of an American Catholic Identity*, (Oxford University Press, 2011).
[214] Cummings, *Saint of our Own*, 126.

metropolitan was more successful in its influencing of the cause of Mother Frances Cabrini, an Italian immigrant who became the first U.S. citizen to attain sainthood. Though Cabrini established herself in the Midwest and died in Chicago, New York also sought to claim her legacy, arguing that, since she entered the country through their port, they represented the doorway for what rendered her "American."[215] While her body was initially interred in Chicago after her canonization, her remains were later exhumed, the majority of which were moved to New York City in the 1930s.[216] In Chicago, where her national shrine is still located, all that remains as a relic is one of her arms.[217]

New York's claim to the sanctity and resting places of these women raises questions about geographical identifications and the role they can play in shaping and re-imagining the saint in their afterlife. While one has to wonder whether Cabrini would have associated herself with New York city – she spent little time there, and her charitable work and hospital building seem to have been stronger points of reference in her identity formation than her immigrant status – New York's claim to her sanctity would suggest that geography plays a major role in the shaping of a saint's afterlife.[218] However, similarly to Sheen, Mother Cabrini's case highlights an imbalance between the east coast and the midwest, while also pointing to a secondary layer of competition between the national and universal levels of Catholicism. Where Rome had advocated for Mother Cabrini to be recognized as a universal saint in the Church, Americans largely viewed her canonization as

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[215] Cummings, *Saint of our Own*, 109.

[216] Most of her body would be interred first at a chapel in Mother Cabrini High School, and then moved in 1959 to their current resting place at the St. Francis Xavier Cabrini Shrine in Upper Manhattan. Her head, however, was sent back to Rome to the motherhouse in Rome and her heart to Codogno, Italy, where she founded her order. Michael T. Luongo, "In Upper Manhattan, Restoring the Golden Halo of Mother Cabrini," *New York Times*, Feb 6, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/08/nyregion/in-upper-manhattan-restoring-the-golden-halo-of-mother-cabrini.html.

[217] Luongo, "Restoring the Golden Halo."

[218] It seems that after her death, Cabrini's American devotees saw in her narrative an affirmation of her Americanness and an embrace of her immigrant origins, whereas her Italian devotees saw her as a devout Italian working amid a foreign culture. Differences such as this showcase how devotees seem themselves in the figures they revere while simultaneously affirming their own identities and positionality. Cummings, *Saint of Our Own*, 110.

a "triumph" of American Catholicism – not only would having a saint of their own put them on equal footing with their European counterparts, they also believed that having an American saint could help ease lingering tensions between Catholics and Protestants, particularly the latter's doubt that the former could ever be considered truly American.[219] Her American devotees and postulators therefore thoroughly emphasize her Americanness and her citizenship, aiming to make her cause an American event and celebration, and not simply a Catholic one. For them, her decision to take on American citizenship not only demonstrated that she was enamored with the country, but also that she identified with fundamentally with the nation's particular founding values.[220]

As these examples demonstrate, geographical identifications are complex and can generate questions about hierarchies (such as whether which geographical identification should hold precedence) as well as fractures (such as split identifications to various regions). National identities have a tendency to supersede universal or global identities, while regional and local identities can then challenge ongoing or previous national ones. A similar process can be highlighted by the changing geographic relations and spatial identities that occurred in the afterlives of the North American Martyrs.[221] Initially, the various actors in the cause rallied around their shared North American identities to differentiate themselves from the wider global community. As Anderson remarks, "[in] the nineteenth century, both French Canadian and, for the first time, American Catholics would utilize the dimly remembered legacy of the small group of seventeenth-century

[219] Cummings, *Saint of Our Own*, 119.
[220] While devotees are quick to declare that Mother Cabrini saw something in American life which mirrored her own Catholic devotionalism, hence moving her to seek citizenship, the historical rational behind her move towards citizenship was quite possibly much more mundane. In order to facilitate her constant border crossings and to help secure the funding and construction permits to plant the MSC's numerous institutions across the country, U.S. Citizenship was likely the means to expediting what might otherwise amount to larger legal issues for a foreigner. Cummings, *Saint of Our Own*, 109.
[221] The eight Jesuit missionaries grouped together were martyred during the mid-seventeenth century among the Iroquois people in what was at the time part of colonial Canada, but which now encompasses areas presently located in both Ontario and upstate New York.

Jesuit martyrs to articulate their own sense of collective identity in their negotiation with more dominant groups within their respective societies."[222] In other words, when Catholics first arrived to North America they developed a temporary and cross-national sense of unity as the result of a shared sense of otherness in a Protestant majority context. However, as time went on, that sense of pan-Catholic unity in the New World grew more divergent and competitive as Canadian and American nationalism strengthened along with their claims to the body and sanctity of the martyrs. Ultimately, the geographic identity of the saints gradually pushed them further North, whereby the North American Martyrs would come to be known more frequently as simply "the Canadian Martyrs."[223]

Speaking to the complexity of geographical identifications, Cummings observes that "canonizations and their precursors, beatifications, have special meaning for those who feel particular affinity with the new saint by virtue or a shared profession, state of life, or geographic location."[224] In other words, the geographic factors in a saint's narrative are more than markers, as they contribute not only to the saint's identity, but also to the affinity shared between the figure and their devotees. Shared geography thus fosters a shared sense of recognition:[225] though the saint and their devotees may be separated by time and other factors, a shared geography identifies them as coming from the same stock. However, in cases where saintly figures have multiple locations associated with their life and actions, it does raise questions about which locations carry the most

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[222] Anderson, *Martyrs*, 104.

[223] As Anderson remarks, shrines not only establish geographic markers in the holy landscape of a given nation, they also establish the identity of that location and its people within the larger patchwork of the nation. Accordingly, "French Canadians utilized the martyrs to symbolize their cultural distinctiveness," as the suffering and tragedy of the martyrs mirrored their own self-perception as French Canadians whose identity was (and continues to be) tied to the trauma of the eighteenth-century Conquest and annexation by the British. As a result of this strong French-Canadian identification with the martyrs, the saints, though still rooted to New York via their hagiographical traditions, had their identity with the States diminished. Anderson, *Martyrs*, 104.

[224] Cummings, *Saint of Our Own*, 2.

[225] On the Sheen foundation's website, it suggests that one of the major contributing factors for Bishop Jenky's decision to spearhead the cause was because he "[recognized] Sheen's mid-west roots." See "History," *The Archbishop Fulton John Sheen Foundation*.

importance in their narrative, and which hold the most weight in laying claim to their cause and identification.

In the case of Sheen, fixing him to a single location raises numerous challenges. He was born and raised in the midwest, was partly schooled in Europe, travelled extensively across the globe, and made himself known for his work in New York City and his time as a Bishop in Rochester.[226] Sheen's life, like those of many others, reminds us that a body rarely remains rooted in one place, which, in turn, problematizes the notion of fixing one's identity to a single locale or region. When no simple solution present itself, the issue then becomes one of imagination and negotiation.

A Body Imagined and Re-Imagined

In February 2018, the trial came to a close. The Appellate Court ruled in a three-two decision that Sheen's body would remain in New York City for the time being. In their statement, the judges declared that there was insufficient evidence to demonstrate that Sheen wanted to avoid being buried at St. Patrick's Cathedral. Furthermore, the Appellate court noted that the previous court ruling had ignored the testimony of one Monsignor Hilary C. Franco, a witness who claimed Sheen had explicitly told him in person of his strong desire to be buried in the crypt of St. Patrick's Cathedral. The court therefore ordered a fresh hearing to begin on Sheen's "true" wishes."[227]

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[226] Sheen dedicates a lengthy chapter of his autobiographical *Treasure in Clay* to his travels. See Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 127-168.

[227] While there is no hard reason to doubt Msgr. Franco's testimony, it does seem oddly convenient for New York that Sheen should have expressed such personal wishes in confidence to a single source who then went public. Meaghan M. McDermott, "Bishop Fulton Sheen's Bones at Center of Raging Court Case," *Democrat & Chronicle*, Feb 11, 2018, https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2018/02/11/bishops-bones-center-raging-court-case/327174002/

After the ruling, the Archdiocese of New York urged Peoria to resume the canonization process, stating that "there is no impediment to his cause progressing, as the Vatican has told us that there is no requirement that the earthly body of a candidate for sainthood reside in a particular place."[228] Peoria again refused to back down and resume proceedings, continuing on their path to have Sheen's remains legally transferred to their Diocese. By June 2018, the courts held another hearing that sought to provide a "full exploration" into the archbishop's desires. This time, they ruled in favour of Cunningham's request only to have the ruling immediately appealed by New York. However, on March 5th, 2019, the appeals court unanimously ruled that Sheen's remains should be transferred to Peoria.

The Diocese of Peoria welcomed the decision and issued a fairly blunt public statement imploring the Archdiocese of New York "to end their failed contestation which has only resulted in three rulings against them... now is the time to end the legal tug-of-war and begin the final stages of the Cause of beatification of Archbishop Fulton Sheen."[229] A spokesperson for the Archdiocese stated the trustees of the cathedral strongly disagreed with the court decision and were "considering their next steps." To no one's surprise, those next steps were the immediate appeals of the ruling. However, on May 2nd, 2019, their request was rejected. "After almost three years of litigation, the New York Archdiocese' legal arguments have been rejected at all three levels of the New York court system," read a statement issued by the Diocese of Peoria on May 6th, 2019.[230] Just two weeks later, the Archdiocese filed for a second appeal. "Yet again, the New York Archdiocese is

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[228] New York was technically correct in this assertion, as mentioned previously in this chapter. "Case on transfer of archbishop's body is returned to original N.Y. court," *National Catholic Reporter*, Feb 13, 2018, https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/case-transfer-archbishops-body-returned-original-ny-court.

[229] "Appeals court says Fulton Sheen's body should go to Peoria," *Catholic News Agency*, March 5, 2019, https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/appeals-court-says-fulton-sheens-body-should-go-to-peoria-71875.

[230] "New York's Highest Court Dismisses Legal Appeal, Says Sheen's Body Can Go to Peoria," *National Catholic Register*, May 7, 2019, http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/civil-appeals-court-dismisses-legal-challenge-says-sheens-body-can-go-to-pe.

trying to stop Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen's remains from being moved to Peoria," read in a news story covering this development.[231] It would seem then that even the media was growing tired of the back-and-forth drama surrounding Sheen's body.

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Sheen's body as imagined and remembered is one of the major focuses at the Archbishop Fulton Sheen Museum in Peoria. The museum takes up a few small rooms at the Diocesan Museum and archives and is accessible through a wide doorway right next to the entrance. Though it is not much larger than your average studio apartment, there is no lack of materials both on display and in the handful uncategorized crates of clippings and photographs kept in storage. Numerous photographs, posters and placards – some of them life-sized – are strategically placed around the space, designed to give the viewer a certain impression of the man whose cause they are championing. When added up, these materials form a visual bricolage that represents the many aspects of Sheen's life, including the regional tension that had so recently defined his cause.

Take for instance a trio of black and white promotional photographs that highlight the aspects of his career for which he is best known (See figure B). In the first image, a young and handsome Sheen stands behind a microphone with the logo of NBC emblazoned on the front. In the photo adjacent, Sheen is dressed like a priest at mass, standing in the control room of a radio station (or possibly a television station) in New York. In the third, an older and greying Sheen, dressed in cassock and zucchetto, works a camera emblazoned with the DuMont Television network logo – also based in New York – and in the background, we can see the slightly blurred presence of the set for *Life is Worth Living*. When placed alongside one another like this, these

[231] Phil Luciano, "New York Archdiocese files another appeal to keep Fulton Sheen's remains," *Journal Star,* May 20, 2019, https://www.pjstar.com/news/20190520/new-york-archdiocese-files-another-appeal-to-keep-fulton-sheens-remains.

three photographs seem to act as a triptych that emphasize his legacy as the self-proclaimed "electric bishop" – as the American cleric who embraced the potential of technology and understood it better than most (and who happened to find this aspect of his career and identity very much rooted in New York).

(Fig. B)[232]

Despite the prominent placement of images and objects which point to Sheen's celebrity identity and career in New York, a subtle tension seems to surround them, perhaps echoing Sheen's own awareness of (and unease over) the tension surrounding his celebrity status.[233] While the diocese and the materials it displays prominently champion Sheen's television and radio careers, their unease is not so much related to Sheen's career, but the locale where it was based. In other words, although much of the visual media on display inevitably highlights and expounds upon his television career in New York City, a counter narrative can also be felt running through the museum, one which doesn't seek to deflect the narrative away from his career and accomplishments in New York, but rather to rewrite the nature of his relationship with that city by

[232] Photograph taken on January 21, 2020, at The Archbishop Fulton Sheen Museum, Peoria, Illinois. Author's own.
[233] More lengthy discussions on the ambiguity of Sheen's celebrity are found in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3.

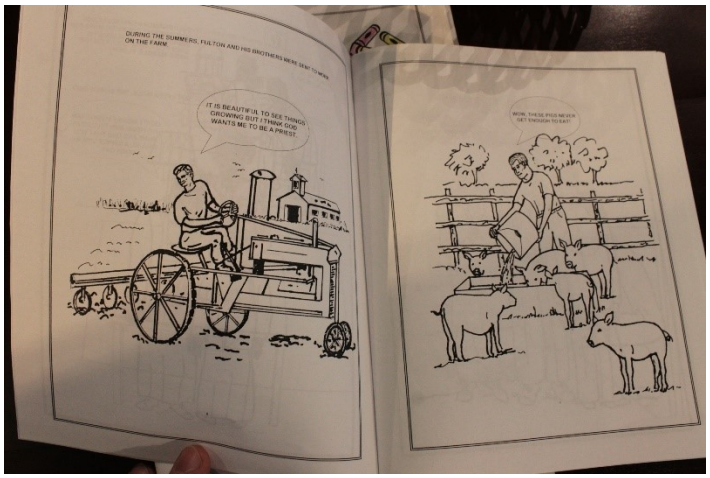
emphasizing to visitors that Sheen was in fact a country boy at heart who never forgot his roots even while he was in the big city.

This is highlighted throughout the museum, where there are audio-visual cues that characterize Sheen as a salt of the earth Peorian. In a cozy corner along several couches, a television plays a DVD documentary titled *Archbishop Fulton Sheen: Servant of All* on continual loop. In the opening segments there is a discussion of Sheen's character and upbringing, and country-folk music plays in the background while Fr. Andrew Apostoli, who acted as the Vice Postulator in Sheen's cause, refers to Sheen as a country boy who never forgot his upbringing. Nearby, there in a small but dedicated children's corner, where one can find a table with a handful of colouring books produced by the diocese called *Fulton's Coloring Book* that purportedly depict scenes from Sheen's early life in Illinois (see figure C below). [234] The most notable of the images are a pair in the middle of the book that showcase scene's life on the family farm. There is a caption at the top of the first page, informing the young readers that "During the summers, Fulton and his brothers were sent to work on the farm." In the image below, we see a strapping young man with a square chin and a broad chest behind the wheel of a tractor, looking back with pride as he plows the family field.[235] Sheen has a speech bubble floating above the barn in the background, where he declares that "it is beautiful to see things growing but I think God wants me to be a priest." Like a true Catholic agrarian, Sheen highlights the beauty of rural Illinois and the attachment to the

[234] Apostoli, like many of the members of the cause, had been friends with Sheen and knew the man prior to his death. He first came into acquaintance with Sheen in the 1960s and was ordained as a priest by the then Archbishop shortly before his death. "Founding member of CFRs and EWTN host Father Andrew Apostoli dies at age 75" *Crux,* Dec 15, 2017, https://cruxnow.com/obituary/2017/12/founding-member-cfrs-ewtn-host-father-andrew-apostoli-dies-age-75/ .

[235] It bears noting that images of this sort, imagining the saints during their youths and depicting them in idealized and gendered manner, in this case masculine, with accompanying setting and activities are hardly unique in resources and visual media aimed specifically for children and adolescents - particularly in the modern era. After all, in American Catholicism, we have witnessed the creation of baseball cards, comic books and even feature-length animated movies recounting the lives of saints for younger audiences. Sheen's masculinity, and specifically his *hard* masculinity, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

land, while also signaling his faith and dedication to God through his calling. In the image adjacent, we see Sheen again at work, this time pouring feed into a trough for pigs. Once again, he is depicted as a strapping young man with a square jaw and a broad chest. He has a bubble over his head that remarks – with a sense of wonder that would seem to contradict his own recollections – "wow, these pigs never get enough to eat."[236]



(Fig. C)[237]

While little details such as these might appear to the casual visitor as innocuous or trivial, they nevertheless point towards a subtle re-imagination of Sheen's relationship with space and his body by prioritizing his rural connections. Notably, the images of the physically fit young Sheen in the colouring book can be contrasted with the older, softer looking man in the photographs from New York. In the colouring book, Sheen visually embodied rural masculinity as he dominates the land with his tractor and provides for the animals by pouring a massive bucket of feed for the pigs.[238] By association, by connecting his body to the land they also root his spirituality in that

[236] While not necessarily at the same level of Biblical woodcuts, audiovisual resources such as these can be seen as a modern, if somewhat diverse, continuation of the prominent use of pastoral motifs among rural Catholics looking to lionize their spiritual identity and sacred connection to the land.
[237] Photograph taken on January 21, 2020, at The Archbishop Fulton Sheen Museum, Peoria, Illinois. Author's own.
[238] Illustrations such as this depicting Sheen as a cheerful and able farmhand contradict the way he depicted himself in his autobiography. He remarks that while his brothers enjoyed working the fields, he "suffered" it and felt "ashamed… at having to wear overalls." As well, in a colourful anecdote, he remarks how a friend of his father's,

same geography. And so, in both the ever-present documentary and the available materials for children, Sheen's Peorian devotees have created material that speaks to the rural, agrarian life of upbringing, an upbringing which reflects their own rural identity and reconfigures their relationship with him. In other words, Peoria subtly refutes the importance of New York City in generating Sheen's fame and recognition, staking a claim instead to Sheen's "true" identity – that underneath all the fame and the glamour, he was bodily and spiritually one of them.

Peoria's imagining of Sheen's body, however, is imperfect. After all, it would have been impossible to present an image of Sheen that didn't also highlight elements or episodes from his life, fame and career which were defined in New York City. Though the diocese goes to some length to paint him as a country boy who never forgot his origins even when living it up in the big city, they cannot avoid visually showcasing and emphasizing his radio and television career in New York which established him to the level of fame and widespread acclaim that has helped push him towards sainthood in the first place. Thus, Peoria's attempts to re-emphasize (or perhaps re-inject) Sheen's rural "ordinariness" amid the celebrity in some ways mirrors Sheen's own apprehensions towards his celebrity and his attempts to downplay them in *Treasure in Clay* as discussed previously in Chapter 1. As such, the image we receive of Sheen is both an aggregate of many parts and one replete with contradictions. He was at once the New York television star, auxiliary bishop to St. Patrick's – the same Cathedral where he would later be interred – and the country boy who happened to be destined for greater things. With so much ambiguity at the core of his identity, it seems little wonder that multiple dioceses would stake claims to his memory and the control of his afterlife.

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upon noticing young Sheen struggling in the fields, remarked that "Newt, that boy of yours, Fulton, will never be worth a damn." Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 18.

Expediency and Embarrassment

On June 27th, 2019, after roughly five years of legal proceedings, Sheen's remains arrived in Peoria, settling the dispute between the two dioceses.[239] Bishop Jenky wrote to the Vatican, informing them that the civil litigations had come to an end. On July 8th of the same year, Pope Francis officially confirmed the miracle that took place at the hospital nearly nine years earlier and encouraged the diocese of Peoria to begin formally planning for the beatification of their patron.[240]

Sheen was scheduled to be beatified on December 21st, 2019. However, his cause was once again placed on indefinite postponement owing to a fresh roadblock, this time from the diocese of Rochester, also in the state of New York. Rochester declared that several predatory priests may have held assignments in the diocese during Sheen's tumultuous tenure there and have urged that the proceedings pause until an investigation is concluded concerning Sheen's potential knowledge of their behaviour. However, lest they be accused of smearing Sheen, the diocese of Rochester was also careful to add that "in our current climate it is important for the faithful to know that there has never been, nor is there now, any allegation against (Archbishop) Sheen involving the abuse of a minor."[241]

Peoria's response to Rochester's intervention into the process has been blunt. Spokesperson Monsignor James Kruse accused the diocese of Rochester of attempting to "sabotage" the beatification ceremony.[242] Peoria's own previous investigation into the matter found no wrongdoing by Sheen, yet Rochester has requested additional time to conduct and conclude an

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[239] "Fulton Sheen's remains arrive in Peoria; sainthood cause resumes," *Catholic News Agency*, Jun 27, 2019, https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/fulton-sheens-remains-arrive-in-peoria-sainthood-cause-resumes-40990.
[240] See Jennifer Willems, "Miracle confirmed in Fulton Sheen cause for beatification," *Catholic Register*, July 8, 2019, https://www.catholicregister.org/faith/item/29868-miracle-confirmed-in-fulton-sheen-cause-for-beatification.
[241] "Beatification for Archbishop Sheen postponed," *National Catholic Reporter*, Dec 3, 2019, https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/beatification-archbishop-sheen-postponed.
[242] David Crary, "Two Catholic dioceses in public spat over Sheen sainthood," *Crux*, Dec 13, 2019 https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-usa/2019/12/two-catholic-dioceses-in-public-spat-over-sheen-sainthood/.

investigation of their own. To Peoria's fiery remarks, Rochester has replied with an equally blunt statement, declaring that "this is absolutely a false statement and lacks an appreciation for our diocese's genuine concern for Archbishop Sheen's cause."[243] However, while Rochester strives to suggest that they are being genuine and thorough in their investigation, it bears being reminded that the diocese of Rochester has gone through several tumultuous years, notably as it is one among dioceses in the USA that has become the focus in the Church's ongoing sexual abuse crisis. In September 2019, the diocese filed for bankruptcy protection after New York passed a law granting victims of sexual abuse a year in which to come forward with claims that may have previously been too old to file.[244]

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In bringing fresh delays to the cause, Rochester has become the second city in the state of New York to obstruct the proceedings. Like New York City, it appears that they are again working with a technicality to delay the beatification. One supposes that it is entirely possible that Rochester is taking the route of caution, as any mark on Sheen's record during his tenure may well translate into another mark on the already battered diocese. However, the current lack of any credible evidence of wrongdoing on Sheen's behalf and the vague nature of their concerns that Sheen in some way could have been aware of issues in his diocese suggests that their hesitancy may lie with the beatification of Sheen itself rather than any potential misconduct. After all, Sheen's record at Rochester is hardly a matter worth celebrating. He made numerous enemies within the diocese itself during his tenure and certainly left as one of the least popular bishops to have ever held the

[243] David Crary, "Catholic dioceses spar over Archbishop Sheen sainthood," *ABCNews*, 12 December, 2019 https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/catholic-dioceses-public-dispute-sheen-sainthood-67697541.
[244] John L. Allen Jr. "Church now faces 'Sheen dilemma' in evaluating saints and their halos," *Crux*, Dec 8, 2019 https://cruxnow.com/news-analysis/2019/12/church-now-faces-sheen-dilemma-in-evaluating-saints-and-their-halos/.

position.[245] Perhaps the diocese would have rather avoided the additional attention brought by the cause, while it continues to wallow in a legal and ethical quagmire of its own.

The delays brought about by Rochester are perhaps themselves emblematic of changes made to the canonization process in the modern world. The modern world has radically altered the ways in which the process unfolds. The days of tireless monks travelling across continents to gather documents or seek witnesses are far behind us. Where previously every element of a candidate's life had to be meticulously documented and archived by hand, technologies of communication, travel and transportation have opened up and connected the world, allowing for innumerable clerical matters to be resolved in months rather than lifetimes. However, as the recent string of sexual abuse allegations has shown, modernity has very much become a double-edged sword for the American Church. It is no longer taken for granted that dioceses where scandals occurred nor churchmen with skeletons in their closet will be kept under wraps, leading to the very real possibility of embarrassment and anxiety should they be made public. In a way, this fear about potentially less than virtuous behaviour among its parishes acts as a reluctant clamp on the proceedings for canonizations, preventing them from progressing too quickly. Still, the recent string of popes seated in the Vatican have themselves endeavored to expedite the process. Pope John Paul II, in particular, sought to reaffirm the necessity of saints in the modern world as role models and beacons of hope by initiating what some inside commentators have called a "fast-track" process.[246] Of course, with rapid canonization comes the risk of rapid embarrassment.

[245] It perhaps bears reminding that during his tenure at Rochester – specifically during the fiasco with the parish donation – Sheen faced a nearly full-fledged revolt of his parish priests, some of whom had notably less than kind things to say about him on the public record. For more on his tumultuous tenure in Rochester, see Reeves, *America's Bishop*, especially 291-327.

[246] JPII removed the longstanding norm of keeping a five-year period of wait between a person's death and the initiation of their canonization process in 1999. During his lengthy tenure, it is well affirmed that he encouraged and approved the canonization of 482 saints across 110 causes - roughly as many as all his predecessors in several centuries prior (For comparison of his proficiency when it came to canonization, all the previous popes of the twentieth century canonized a grand total of 98 figures.) His successor Benedict XVI thought less prolific, nevertheless canonized 45

Commenting on the extraordinarily rapid sanctification of Pope John Paul II, John L. Allen Jr., editor of *Crux*, remarks "at the time, some critics warned that an accelerated sainthood process risked embarrassment, depending on what a later review might unearth about the way abuse cases were handled on the late pope's watch."[247] The surfacing of long dormant sexual abuse allegations within the church can in part be attributed to modernity, to the difficulties of keeping things hidden in an era of access to information that has never before been seen. What might have once been kept private, has a tendency now to be made public.

As it stands, the desire to avoid controversy has itself been a recurring these in Sheen's canonization. Rochester's decision to interject themselves into the proceedings and cause a delay over potential concerns of a scandal is perhaps but the most recent event of this nature to unfolding in Sheen's journey towards potential canonization. As previously discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, Sheen's desire to take hold of his narrative and refashion it while drafting *Treasure in Clay* was certainly intentional, as was his conscious and stated intention not to get into any of the details involving the feud between himself and Spellman, nor into any other potentially unflattering or querulous events that could have taken place behind the scenes and the public's gaze. Should Sheen have voiced any opinions against his superiors, or the wider hierarchy of the Church, it would certainly have the potential to be damaging to his cause if uncovered during the proceedings, or embarrassing it aired afterwards. This very possibility appears to have been a concern of the interviewer collecting witness testaments in a massive tome prepared by the cause

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saints in his eight-year reign before retirement. The death of Mary Teresa Bojaxhiu, more commonly known as Mother Teresa, in 1997 seems to have been the impetus for John Paul II to make the changes to the convention. That she was canonized in 2003, a mere six years after her death, makes her cause the emblem of holy expediency. Anna Stadick. "Saint Patrons: The Role of Archives in the Roman Catholic Process of Canonization," *Archival Issues* 24, no. 2 (1999): 123. See also: Steven Gertz, "John Paul II's 'Canonization Cannon,'" undated, *Christianity Today* https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2008/august/john-paul-iis-canonization-cannon.html.

[247] John L. Allen Jr. "Church now faces 'Sheen dilemma' in evaluating saints and their halos," *Crux*, Dec 8, 2019 https://cruxnow.com/news-analysis/2019/12/church-now-faces-sheen-dilemma-in-evaluating-saints-and-their-halos/.

to be shipped to Rome with the proceedings, as the questions asked to those who knew Sheen frequently turned to Spellman and whether the witness had ever heard Sheen make disparaging remarks against the man in private.[248] Whether any potentially embarrassing material related to Sheen does exist is a question beyond the scope of this paper, but it would seem that all those involved in the canonization process do, to some extent, fear the *possibility* of embarrassment. This in itself speaks to the complexity and ambiguity in Sheen as a figure on the road to canonization.

Conclusions

In the making of saints, popular piety, personal industry, and structures of power are all negotiated – often across vast reaches of space and time. As Anderson remarks, the recognition of sanctity is an interpretive process, not historical fact.[249] It relies on the perceptions and recognition of others in order to be understood, accepted and approved. Cummings similarly remarks that saints are not recognized as saints simply because they were holy people who lived holy lives; saints are canonized "because a dedicated group in and subsequently beyond their inner circles wanted them to be *remembered* as holy people—and were willing to expend a considerable amount of time, effort, and resources to ensure that they would be."[250] She adds that "all causes for canonization begin when a group of ordinary people lift up the holy heroes who populate their

[248] While in Peoria, I was given the chance to read the testimonies prepared by his cause, but was made to promise not to include any quotes from the volume nor name the people given testimonies. However, I can relate that a recurring theme of numerous questions asked of the witnesses sought to ensure that there would be no embarrassing details that could be brought to light. Notably, witnesses were questioned about his relation with and feelings about Cardinal Spellman, potential instances of Sheen succumbing to pride or vanity, his feelings for his family (including his Protestant grandparents), and how he behaved around his own wealth and that of the charities he ran. That his cause has been proceeding suggests, however, that no impropriety was discovered.
[249] Anderson, *Martyrs*, 8.
[250] Cummings, *Saint of our Own, 3*.

everyday lives; successful ones end when the holiness of the candidate is validated, first by local church authorities and finally by the Vatican."[251]

In this case, Sheen's canonization process reminds us that the story of Catholics in America isn't solely relegated to its urban metropolitans but is also in the process of being told by the smaller minority pockets in rural regions whose identities are tied to and shaped by their connection to the land beneath their feet. In this case, we have seen how markers of rural Catholicism have clashed with urban society whereby Sheen's memory has been slightly reworked to emphasize and solidify his connection with the local where his body now remains enshrined. Of course, the success of Peoria's endeavours and the extent to which they have been willing to emphasize Sheen's rural connection is mixed. The tension noted above between the various images of Sheen's body and the imagined ways in which they reflect elements of his identity – while paralleling certain contradictions and ambiguities of his career – nevertheless injects an element of flux and uncertainty into his proceedings.

Ultimately, Sheen's ongoing canonization process has a way of drawing attention to numerous facets of modern American saint-making. Notably, Sheen's celebrity appears to have added an additional layer of complication and ambiguity to the proceedings. In the case of figures who push the boundaries of what it means to become public figures, Ana Stadick remarks that, "although diocesan archives and those of religious communities play an essential role in the process of canonization for ordained candidates and members of religious and secular institutions, a broader range of archives is necessary for thorough proof of biographical details, historical milieu and, possibly, reputation of sanctity."[252] As New York City and Rochester's interventions have shown, the more public a figure, the more care is needed to navigate the exhumation, not only of

[251] Cummings, *Saint of Our Own*, 5.
[252] Stadick, "Saint Patrons," 136.

their body but of their wider careers. In this, I would steer us back to a remark made by Cummings, whereby competing regional claims to a saint have the capacity to generate competing narratives of their lives, posing what could become a "dangerous encumbrance" to their cause.[253] In this case, Sheen is a troubling figure as his sanctity is interwoven with his fame, neither one detachable from the other. However, by calling attention to and highlighting his rural upbringing and salt of the earth Americanness at the museum – much as Sheen attempted to do with his autobiography – Peoria is advocating a vision of Sheen partially stripped of celebrity and embodying the values of rural American ordinariness. Both components nevertheless remain within his character, highlighting once again one of the many ambiguities of the figure, and it is precisely this ambiguity at the center of Sheen – his sacred celebrity – to which we now turn in Chapter 3.

[253] Cummings, *Saint of Our Own*, 10.

Chapter 3 – Celebrating the Sacred: Fulton Sheen, Stardom, and the 1950s Celebrity Pastor

Our Mystery Guest

In a 1956 episode of the popular and long-running game show *What's My Line?* host John Charles Daly turned to the star-studded four-member panel. The composition of panelists was typical for the series, made up from recognizable celebrities, and several show regulars. Included among them this particular night were Hollywood actor David Niven, radio personality Arlene Francis, journalist Dorothy Kilgallen, and publisher Bennett Cerf. Daly informed them that it was time for the special feature of the program and asked his panelists to blindfold themselves in order to keep secret the identity of the soon to enter "mystery celebrity." After the blindfolds were set, the camera turned to a blackboard as a familiar hand used the chalk to spell out the name of the guest. Applause erupted as the mystery celebrity was revealed to be none other than Bishop Fulton J. Sheen. As Sheen settled himself down alongside Daly, long-time panelist Cerf—still blindfolded—remarked that he'd just witnessed "the most solid round of applause I have ever heard at one time" on the program.[254] Even without knowing the identity of the mystery celebrity, it was evident to the panelists that a persona of some magnitude had entered the stage. That the celebrity happened to be a Catholic Bishop, recognizable to American television audiences, was never questioned.

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This chapter examines intersections of celebrity, popular culture, and religion in 1950s America, focusing on the power and prominence of television as a medium of access between the American public and the figures in question. Television, I argue, offered a complex and crowded

[254] *What's My Line?* Produced by Mark Goodson and Bill Todman, CBS, October 21st, 1956, available online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T74qnT7WFZw&ab_channel=What%27sMyLine%3F.

arena where celebrity was formed, and identities were negotiated in surprising ways as Americans familiarized themselves with the soon to be culturally dominant visual media of choice. Using Sheen as my case study, I will examine how television, as a new visual medium, facilitated the creation of a new kind of celebrity that differed from earlier visual archetypes, notably those previously established by Hollywood.[255] I will demonstrate that the "lower" visual media of television, by virtue of being played in people's homes, enabled Americans to embrace a more familiar and familial form of celebrity which Sheen and his fellow celebrity preachers, notably Norman Vincent Peale, offered. Following this, I will discuss the reception of these figures, including the controversy they generated by being both spiritual leaders and television celebrities, roles which, at the time, were largely viewed as incompatible. However, I will argue that overlaps between celebrity and sanctity are longstanding, and that the examination of their intersection in the likes of Sheen and his ilk enables a greater understanding of, not only both concepts, but also their flexibility and ambiguity, as well as the appeal of their particular confluence in mid-twentieth century America. Ultimately, it is my intention to piece together a rubric for examining and understanding a different kind of celebrity, one which blended the attributes, demands and expectations of American religion and stardom into a single composite figure.

Theoretical Considerations

Postwar Celebrity

That Fulton Sheen, a Catholic Bishop, would find himself counted among the first generation of American *television* celebrities may seem surprising. In the mid-1950s at the height

[255] Hollywood celebrity and depictions of Catholic priests in Hollywood films will be the focus of the following chapter.

of television's Golden Age – which is considered to have begun in 1947-1948 with the introduction of the live variety show format, and ended in 1960 with the rise of pre-filmed and scripted content[256] – it was widely assumed that only "dethroned film stars" and celebrities past their prime appeared on television, a medium that many referred to as the lower form of entertainment.[257] Such a popular misconception, of course, obscures the fact that the majority of the medium's celebrities were figures who came with a prior celebrity standing and fan base, many of them having established themselves as vaudeville-style performers, nightclub singers or stand-up comedians.[258] In this regard Sheen does bear some similarity to fellow Golden Age celebrities, for when his television career began he was already a rising star with a burgeoning recognition attached to his name both at home in America and abroad.[259] However, focusing on Sheen's lengthy resume and celebrity credentials alone overlooks how Sheen's rise to national television celebrity occurred in conjunction the rise of another form of celebrity that was coming to prominence early post-war America: that of the celebrity *pastor*.[260]

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[256] See Anthony Slide, ed., *The Television Industry: A Historical Dictionary* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 121.

[257] Examples of Hollywood veterans "descending" to television are varied. Some were purely promotional, such as James Cagney appearing on *The Ed Sullivan Show* to tout an upcoming film, while others were indeed celebrities engaged in a sort of migration from one medium to another, such as James Mason hosting NBC's *Lux Video Theatre.* See Christine Becker, "Televising Film Stardom in the 1950s," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 26, no. 2, (Fall 2005): 5.

[258] Many of the most popular prime-time television programs during the 1950s were adaptations from their charismatic hosts' earlier stage productions or club routines. It wasn't uncommon for a successful Broadway star or club performer to count themselves among not only the first generation of television personalities, but also among the more successful. Even Sheen can be included in this, as his routine was notably similar to the way he approached his radio program as well as his lectures at the CUA. See Dave Calvert, "Similar Hats on Similar Heads: Uniformity and Alienation at the Rat Pack's Summit Conference of Cool," *Popular Music* 24, no. 1 (2015): 4.

[259] As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Sheen had preached in Europe, had been an immensely popular lecturer at the CUA, was the well-known host of radio's *The Catholic Hour*, and his 1949 monograph *Peace of Soul* had recently become a bestseller, making him something of a household name across the nation. Of course, in his transition to the visual medium of television, it hardly hurt Sheen's cause that he was an immanently *charismatic* figure who could hold an audience in rapt attention with only the sound of his voice and the power of his eyes – two qualities which would serve him well and be remarked upon by commentators both inside and outside the Church.

[260] I use the term "pastor" here not in any overt denominational sense, but rather as a neutral term that can be used to group together various preachers and religious leaders across religious traditions, including priests, rabbis and their ilk.

As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, post-War America was a transitional moment in the nation's history. With hundreds of thousands of soldiers returning from oversees from the horrors of the war and society-wide economic and social changes happening as result of the GI Bill, America experienced a rising demand for spiritual guidance, tranquility and hope. Television, along with mass-market paperback publishing, allowed America's religious leaders to make use of previously unavailable technologies to meet this demand and encounter wider audiences than was ever before possible. Men like Harry Emerson Fosdick, Rabbi Joshua Loth Liebman and Norman Vincent Peale – the latter of whom also became a television personality, as will be discussed further in this chapter – joined Sheen in transmitting their message, establishing their authority and cementing themselves into household names. While earlier precedents such as Aimee McPherson and Billy Sunday attracted wide followings and more than their fair measure of celebrity, religious leaders from across ecumenical lines rose to fill a new category of highly *visible*, nation-wide religious stardom. As such, understanding the confluence of celebrity and spiritual guidance is necessary to understand and unpack this era of American religion.

New Media, New Possibilities

In 1948, the *Texaco Star Theater* made its commercial debut in the United States, effectively establishing the weekly TV format that would come to dominate the medium until the advent of streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon prime.[261] Broadcast live – as were the majority of the programs during that era, following the lead set by radio – the *Texaco Star Theater* was the first to offer viewers an hour of television in a consistent format repeated during primetime

[261] Technically, the weekly program *Kraft Television Theatre* beat *Texaco Star Theatre* to the air by several months, first airing in 1947. However, it was *Texaco Star Theatre* that dominated the early ratings, and the popularity of host Milton Berle helped television become the "national medium" for entertainment in America. See Muriel G. Cantor, *Prime-Time Television Content and Control* (London: SAGE Publications, 1980), 15.

every Tuesday night from 8:00PM to 9:00PM.[262] The first four episodes of the program were hosted by Milton Berle, who was originally envisioned as being one among a rotating cast of hosts. However, Berle's success and charisma helped him become the permanent face of the program after only a few months, and – given that *Texaco Star Theatre* was the most popular show on television at the time – the defacto face of television itself, something which earned him the nickname of "Mr. Television." Following the success of his program, other networks scrambled to get similar programs on the air dominated by similarly charismatic leads. In the following years, dozens of competing programs replete with their own celebrity hosts and guests, fought for ratings.[263] These early variety shows – and the charismatic personalities of their hosts – were a staple of early 1950s American visual media, and they established many of the conventions which would be adapted by rival forms of programming – including Sheen's own soon to air *Life is Worth Living*.

Unlike the variety shows, Sheen's program was originally envisioned as a government mandated public service broadcast. At roughly the same time when variety shows and their hosts were transitioning from radio and vaudeville to television, the FCC mandated that all stations in America air at least a minimum amount of religious programming. Perhaps envisioned as a means of uniting Americans as "one nation under God," religious broadcasting was decided to be in the public interest and mandated to be available free of charge for viewers on both public and private broadcasting.[264] While the commission did not require a specific number of programs be aired

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[262] Primetime is typically designated as taking place from 8:00PM to 11:00PM on weeknights. Cantor, "Prime-Time Television," 12.

[263] Numerous programs – such as *The Jackie Gleason Show*, *Cavalcade of Stars*, *The Morey Amsterdam Show*, and *Broadway Open House*, among others – came and went as audiences acclimatized themselves to the formats being offered and the expectations they created. Few programs survived longer than a handful seasons (the notable exception being *The Red Skelton Show*, which endured until the 70s).

[264] Michele Rosenthal, "This Nation Under God: The Broadcast and Film Commission of the National Council of Churches and the New Medium of Television," *Communication Review* 4, no.3 (2009): 38.

each week, they nevertheless required that each station submit a list of their religious programming every three years (coinciding with their license renewal forms), softly suggesting that the quantity of religious programming could be a factor in staying on the air.[265] As such, the predominantly Catholic DuMont Network became an early leader of sorts in this regard, beginning in 1948 with their choice to broadcast African American minister Solomon Michaux, accompanied by his Happy-Am-I gospel choir, on screen. By 1951, one of the first successful programs, *Morning Chapel*, offered viewers a daily a cross-denominational program that featured a rotating list of Jewish, Catholic and Protestant clergymen who performed religious services and held discussions primarily detailing how "spiritual values could be applied to practical everyday living" while avoiding any outright evangelism.[266] Sheen's *Life is Worth Living* would hit the air the following year, becoming by and large the most successful of the nation's initial run of public-service religious programming.

When it came onto the air, the format and presentation of Sheen's program was at once novel and familiar for viewing audiences – while it was familiar as a piece of religious programming, by centering around the charismatic host (Sheen), it also borrowed from the variety show format in way that was novel for religious programming at the time. Staged in New York's Adelphi Theatre in a carefully decorated studio set designed to look like the office of either a professor or a university rector, Sheen relied only on a piece of chalk, a large blackboard, and his own person to hold his audience's attention. Shot in intimate proximity with Sheen using the personality-centered format of variety show programming – albeit, without the extravagant routines, guests, or manic energy for which those shows were known – the setup for Sheen's show would have been both accessible and comforting in format for audiences still getting accustomed

[265] Weinstein, *The Forgotten Network*, 162.
[266] Rosenthal, "This Nation Under God," 47.

to the possibilities of what television could offer. Sheen approached every episode the way he might have approached a lecture back at the CUA in Washington, breaking down complex ideas into bite-sized and highly digestible morsels for his audience on topics ranging from communism, to morality, to history, all the while finding ways to relate them to the present moment. Lecturing in English, rather than the Latin which would still have been the norm in pre-Vatican II sermons, Sheen's presence may have been startling for some: rather than speaking to his audience as an authority figure at the pulpit – someone to be revered but not necessarily related to – Sheen spoke as if close friends, family or even a room full of students were seated just out of view behind the cameras filming him. [267] There was an immediacy to his program which was achieved by never forgetting the presence of the audience. With his natural good looks and the well-trained voice of a radio host, Sheen might have passed for another American vaudeville entertainer making the transition to television were it not for his obvious and accented Catholic dress, associated visual imagery, and tenor.

The initial run of *Life is Worth Living* lasted for five seasons (three on DuMont and two on ABC) before being taken off the air, likely at the behest of Cardinal Francis Spellman.[268] Long after Sheen's departure from mainstream entertainment media, commentators continued to refer favourably to the celebrity that he accrued – and was continuing to enjoy – thanks to that program. For example, in 1969 Rochester's *Democrat and Chronicle* ran a piece on Sheen recounting his

[267] Lynch has observed that many would have found Sheen's performances both intimate and compelling, being that he, a member of the clergy, was talking to them as one might a friend, rather than as a distant, almost untouchable figure meant to be viewed with awe. *Selling Catholicism*, 133.

[268] Refer back to chapter one for a more robust overview of the feud between Spellman and Sheen. As an alternate reading, Lynch suggests that economic factors and ratings might have been contributing factors in the decision to end his show. By 1957 television had evolved, and audiences were perhaps expecting more from a half hour of entertainment than an elderly man with a piece of chalk. By that time Sheen's old rival, Milton Berle, had fallen to relative obscurity, a slew of similar programs had been cancelled, and advertisers were seeking new ways of increasing revenues, including returning to Hollywood in search of sponsorship. Lynch, *Selling Catholicism*, 158; Cantor, *Prime-Time Television*, 27.

many achievements and accomplishments – including a discussion of his celebrity[269] – and a 1977 newspaper clipping preserved and affixed to the wall at the Archbishop Fulton Sheen Museum in Peoria remarks that "everywhere he goes, Archbishop Sheen is immediately recognized."[270] Even after death Sheen's television fame remained a focal point of discussion. The *Washington Star*'s obituary of Sheen, for example, reminds readers that "many industry experts predicted a short run when Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen first decided to go on television in 1952."[271] In fact, in virtually every obituary and later retrospective looking back at his life, the authors either opened with or were careful to include a reminder of the bishop's celebrity and television fame.[272] Such praise heaped on Sheen in the press, while to be expected for a celebrity, was perhaps uncommon for a Catholic priest.

Sheen's fame was also underscored in Catholic publications, where Sheen's television stardom was highlighted alongside his spiritual qualities. An obituary in the *Twin Circle*, for example, exclaimed that his show was a "Nielsen Hit" and "one of the highest rated shows on TV," even outranking secular stars such as Frank Sinatra.[273] *The Wanderer* also commented on his television fame in their remark that it "won him great popularity," and the Jesuit review *America* published a piece in their *Vantage Point* series twenty years after his death, referring to Sheen's

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[269] The clipping in question was located in an uncategorized box from archives at the Diocese of Peoria. Unfortunately, most of the article is missing and all that remains is a small scrap with the text in question but missing the byline and the title of the piece. *Democrat and Herald*, Sept 20, 1969.

[270] Vincent J. Nugent, "He Strikes from the Pulpit," *The Catholic Post*, October 2, 1977. News Clippings 1970-1979, Catholic University of American Archives, Washington, D.C., USA.

[271] The Washington Star's obituary of Sheen, for example, reminds readers that "many industry experts predicted a short run when Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen first decided to go on television in 1952." In addition, ten years after his funeral, Vintage released a retrospective remarking that Sheen's biggest "triumph was... when he began television's 'Life is Worth Living'." See "Archbishop Sheen Dies at Home in New York," *Washington Star,* December 10, 1979, News Clippings 1970-1979, Catholic University of American Archives, Washington, D.C., USA; Bill Adams, "Milton Berle took a back seat to Bishop Sheen," *Vintage*, September 18, 1989, uncategorized box, Fulton Sheen Museum Archives, Peoria, Illinois, USA.

[272] See also: William McFadden and George James, "Bishop Sheen Dead at 84," *Daily News*, December 10, 1979, uncategorized box, Fulton Sheen Museum Archives, Peoria, Illinois, USA; *The Tablet*, "The World Says Goodbye to Uncle Fultie," December 13, 1979.

[273] *Twin Circle*, December 23, 1979, uncategorized box, Fulton Sheen Museum Archives, Peoria, Illinois, USA.

television and radio broadcasting career as a "triumph."[274] *The Catholic Post* – in a 2009 piece commemorating the thirty-year anniversary of Sheen's death – remarked that he was a man "whose radio and television programs drew audiences in the millions."[275] That similar references to his celebrity can be found in virtually every publication or piece pertaining to Sheen showcases the excitement and intrigue his figure generated, not just among Catholics but among wider American audiences as well. If the audience's reaction to Sheen on *What's My Line*? – referenced at the beginning of this chapter – is anything to go by, his persona was immediately recognizable to large swaths of the American public, both Catholic and non-Catholic alike. [276]

Catholic and Non-Confrontational

Like the other early religious programs on American television, Sheen's program shied away from evangelism and leaned towards a pre-Vatican II sense of ecumenism. However, there was no mistaking that Sheen's program was not only religious, but *Catholic*. On screen, Sheen did nothing to hide his denominational difference from America's majority, and in fact did as much as he could to accentuate it. Every episode he appeared before the cameras not in a tuxedo or dinner jacket – as was common for most television hosts at the time – but in the full ceremonial regalia of a Catholic bishop, replete with cape, cummerbund, massive pectoral cross and a red zucchetto

[274] "Archbishop Fulton J Sheen dead at 84," *The Wanderer*, 1979, uncategorized box, Fulton Sheen Museum Archives, Peoria, Illinois, USA.; Bill Adams, "Milton Berle took back seat to Bishop Sheen," *Vantage Point*, September 18, 1989, uncategorized box, Fulton Sheen Museum Archives, Peoria, Illinois, USA.

[275] Claudia McDonnell, "Sheen Remembered, Celebrated," *The Catholic Post*, December 20, 2009, uncategorized box, Fulton Sheen Museum Archives, Peoria, Illinois, USA.

[276] A study referenced by Christopher Lynch indicates that of his audiences, 75% of households tuning in were Catholic, roughly 13% were Protestant, 7.9% were of mixed affiliation, and 2.2% were Jewish. See Parker, Barry, and Smythe, *Television-Radio Audience*, 211; Lynch, *Selling Catholicism*, 8. Studies citing Sheen's denominationally-inclusive base would later assist the proponents of his cause for canonization, who enjoyed highlighting the importance Sheen held, not just for Catholics, but for all Americans. One notable example of this comes from Father Andrew Apostoli (the vice-postulator for Sheen's cause until his death in 2017), who once stated – somewhat optimistically, albeit cryptically – that Sheen's audience was mostly "Jewish, with Protestants second and Catholics third." See: *The Journal Star*, November 24, 2002, uncategorized box, Fulton Sheen Museum Archives, Peoria, Illinois, USA.

atop his silvering head. At the start of every episode, he inscribed the initials JMJ for "Jesus – Mary – Joseph" in the corner of his blackboard, as if to consecrate it along with the contents of his lectures to the Holy Family. Nestled in an alcove on the wall near the doorway also happened to be a statue of the Virgin Mother, which Sheen humorously referred to as "Our Lady of Television" and who was generally visible in the background while he lectured.[277] When his blackboard became overfull from his scrawls, he would carefully pace away and allow the camera to pan after him, thus giving his little guardian "angel" – as he dubbed the off-camera stage hand – enough time to miraculously clear the board. Though Sheen made no mention of any homilies, encyclicals, or any other explicitly dogmatic proclamations from the Church he represented, any casual viewer tuning in to his station while his show was on the air would have no allusions about the religious affiliation of this figure. Those that weren't turned off by his overtly Catholic presentation would soon discover that the tenor of his show was a far stretch from the pulpit in that it contained no rituals, no mysterious sermonizing in Latin, and no other markers that might have fed into the stereotypes and superstitions many Americans harboured about Catholics.

Although Sheen's program was obviously Catholic, it was also remarkably down to Earth, often dwelling upon and diving into the mundane – as Catholic historian and Jesuit Mark S. Massa has remarked, Sheen gave speeches that were "essentially ecumenical and nondogmatic but unmistakably theological in character."[278] Lynch also notes that, although Sheen was the National Director for the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in America, he consciously deployed a rhetoric of inclusion.[279] For example, in an episode entitled "Signs of Our Time," Sheen optimistically approaches America's own lingering nativism by remarking that "there are not one

[277] Lynch, *Selling Catholicism*, 87.
[278] Massa, *Catholics and American Culture*, 84.
[279] Lynch, *Selling Catholicism*, 63-64.

hundred people in the United States who hate the Catholic Church, but there are millions who hate what they wrongly perceive the Catholic Church to be."[280] To Sheen, the issue wasn't that America's religious traditions were at odds with one another, but rather that some were simply misunderstood. Elsewhere, he goes further in reminding viewers of their shared similarities and heritage. In the episode "Angels," Sheen criticizes the modern world for its lack of belief in the spiritual, and in "Our Modern World," he asserts that it "happens to be rather materialistic."[281] The Soviet Union, he avows, is the worst offender, taking that attitude to an extreme by scrubbing all need for the spiritual. Such folly, he argues, lies in atheism, whereas *all religions* – grouped together as Jews, Muslims, and Christians, regardless of denomination – know better.

He continues this vein of thought in "How to Compare World Religion," where, after stating that "there are lots of ways for man to become in tune with God," he goes on to discuss practices of self-mortification and other religious practices and philosophies that appear across the world, indicating that all religions have some good in them and that we can find commonalities everywhere if we bother looking. The uniqueness of Christianity, regardless of denomination, he avows, is that "we brought to the world the only religion that began with defeat… we have a God who stumbled to his throne."[282] Thus Sheen's program, though visibly Catholic, didn't seek to emphasize that difference through the content of his lectures but instead spoke to the shared Hebraic-Christian heritage of his audience and sought to cautiously draw attention the shared religious foundations which grounded the nation.[283]

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[280] *Life is Worth Living*, "Signs of Our Times," DuMont Network, Written by Fulton Sheen, 1954.
[281] *Life is Worth Living*, "Angels," DuMont Network, Written by Fulton Sheen, 1953.
[282] *Life is Worth Living*, "How to Compare World Religion," DuMont Network, Written by Fulton Sheen, 1953.
[283] Concerns for ecumenism pre-Vatican II appear to have largely been concentrated on the USA as a multi-cultural society where Catholics were but one denomination among many. While Sheen's views on ecumenism are limited in the way he conceptualizes the category of "world religions" – he valorizes the primacy of the Abrahamic faiths while largely excluding any mention of non-Abrahamic faiths – Sheen's take on the uniqueness of Catholicism and its relationship to other world religions can nevertheless be read as part of a wider progressive stance witnessed in pre-Vatican American Catholicism. For further discussion on pre- and post-Vatican II Catholic understandings of religious

That Sheen didn't shy away from discussing the theological – and that audiences didn't turn away either – is itself telling, not only of Sheen's capacity to endear audiences with topics that might not necessarily come up at the dinner table, but also of the American appetite for such content. Looking at how the beginning of twentieth century unfolded, America's desire for comfort and reassurance in the late 40s and early 50s was hardly coincidental, as the Second World War had fundamentally changed America as a society and its inhabitants as a people. America went from a society struggling to pull itself through the Great Depression through lavish government spending and construction programs to the world's foremost industrial power leading the rebuilding and refinancing of a shattered continent overseas.[284]

While America's military and economy emerged stronger than ever before, it wasn't without cost. The horrors of the conflict left its marks on the bodies and minds of America's servicemen and their families. As Erin A. Smith remarks, scores of postwar Americans came home or went about their day carrying scars – both physical and emotional. [285] The Holocaust had exposed the true extent of Nazi depravity to the world, while the atomic bombs dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki revealed the extent to which human life could be extinguished instantaneously. Countless others were filled with grief over lost loves ones. Rather than leaving the horrors and trauma of the conflict behind and settling into a post-war world of peace and stability, rising tensions between America and the Soviet Union found a way of inserting themselves into the everyday lives and mindsets of Americans. During the so-called "Red Scare" and McCarthy's associated crusades within the State Department, Americans were either

pluralism, see: Patrick W. Carey, "American Catholic Ecumenism on the Eve of Vatican II, 1940-1962," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 28, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 1-17; John A. Radano, "Contributions of Americans to Vatican Ecumenism: The Critical Period, 1960-1978," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 28, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 19-38.

[284] Smith, *What Would Jesus Read?*, 136.

[285] Smith, *What Would Jesus Read?,* 145.

persecuted for their potential Communist sympathies or made to fear the hidden presence of social and sexual subversives who had infiltrated society.[286] And atop of all other concerns loomed the very real threat of total worldwide nuclear Armageddon.

Americans, in effect, had numerous fears, worries and other insecurities to overcome, and it is precisely this postwar atmosphere that facilitated the rise of figures like Sheen, Peale and their peers. These men offered not only comfort, solace and purpose, but touched upon something that many Americans felt was missing and yearned to hear.[287] That audiences would crave programming that emphasized moral and religious matters is itself perhaps a purely American phenomenon. In a 2009 article, historian James M. Patterson comments on the "ecclesiastical foundation" which defined American citizenship according to the nation's shared membership in various religious congregations. One of Sheen's biographers, Thomas Reeves, echoes this in his remark that both Protestants and Catholics prided themselves in the perceived sacrality of the rights and liberties enshrined into the nation by the founding fathers.[288] By the mid-1950s American patriotism and spirituality became tightly bound, something which was used as a means of distancing themselves from their ideological opponents on the world stage, effectively creating the conditions for a binding strand that had the potential to tie all Americans together regardless of denominational differences.[289]

Despite the doctrinal, ethnic and denominational differences that could divide Americans, the belief in a common ethical foundation rooted in Judeo-Christian teachings had the capacity (at

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[286] The so-called "Red Scare" and McCarthy's personal crusades will become a subject of discussion in Chapter 5.
[287] Mark S. Massa offers a slightly different take on the role of Sheen, Peale and their ilk. Rather than view them as pastors who catered to a need, he suggests instead that they helped create the need by raising the visibility of religion in American in the late 1940s and early 1950s. See Massa, "A Catholic for President?: John F. Kennedy and the 'Secular' Theology of the Houston Speech, 1960," *Journal of Church and State* 39, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 300.
[288] Reeves, *America's Bishop*, 126.
[289] See James M. Patterson, "The Cross or the Double Cross: Roman Catholicism, Anti-Communist and the Political Theology of Venerable Fulton Sheen," *Perspectives on Political Science* 45, no. 1 (2016): 47-58.

times) to overshadow difference and lend itself to the formation of a common, shared identity as God-fearing Americans. During this period, while there continued to be significant anti-Catholic sentiments in America, it was thus possible for more Protestants to push aside feelings of dread or ill-will towards Catholics by focusing on their shared patriotism and identity as Christians. As Lynch remarks, "what bound [Sheen's] audiences together was that they were Americans, claiming a shared moral heritage."[290] Sheen's lectures therefore acted to connect Americans across ecumenical divides and draw them closer together as a single family in a sort of ecumenical "revival."[291] As a result, historian Robert S. Ellwood writes that "in the decade of the Fifties, religion was, and was perceived to be, in a profound upswing. The market was good. Religious institutions were growing substantially year by year in numbers, wealth, and real estate; seminaries and novitiates were full; the influence of religion in people's thoughts and lives was considered to be increasing. Polls said that 99 percent of Americans believed in God." [292] Indeed, it was the perfect moment in time for men like Sheen to find acclaim, provided they had the means.

New and Familiar: Celebrity Reconfigured

Owing to its novelty, television didn't carry the cultural or historical gravitas associated with cinema, which, as historian Christine Becker remarks, was seen as the higher form of visual

[290] Lynch, *Selling Catholicism*, 24. Of course, it bears qualifying this statement, as while Sheen's audiences were not entirely Catholic, Catholics nevertheless made up roughly three quarters of his viewers.
[291] Riley uses the term "revival" to describe the apparent surging interest in religion in America. She points to the increased material presence of religion in the form of bookstores packed with bestsellers and new churches being built as a sign of a society wide change of attitude in religion. See Riley, *Fulton J. Sheen*, 187.
[292] See Ellwood quoted in Weinstein, *The Forgotten Network*, 167. See also Robert. S. Ellwood, *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace: American Religion in a Decade of Conflict* (Rutgers University Press, 1997). In a separate study, James Hudnut-Beulmer cites a Gallup poll that suggested that 96% of Americans believed in God in 1954. Nevertheless, Hudnut-Beulmer contends that some critics have questioned the nature of the apparent upswing in American religiosity, suggesting that the actual situation may not have been as remarkable as painted by the polls, nor even measurably different than attitudes a decade prior. See Hudnut-Beulmer, *Looking for God in the Suburbs*, 41; 71-78.

media in America at the time.[293] If cinema was the high society of visual entertainment – a medium of craft and of celebrity-making – then television was its earthy, plebian and blue-collar cousin. As such, celebrities who had made their name on the silver screen had decidedly mixed feelings about the new medium. At its inception, some of Hollywood's biggest names, including Clark Gable, Cary Grant and Katherine Hepburn, chose to shun the medium, believing it was "well beneath the stature of a true film star" to appear on a television program.[294] To Hollywood insiders and agents – figures who exercised firm control over the presence, visibility and career opportunities of the stars they represented – the regular weekly screening of television shows was a dangerous affront to the model of celebrity they had spent so long building up.[295]

As Becker remarks, "overexposure was especially viewed as a potential blow to a star's status, in terms of both rarity value and economic value. In fact, it was common for the major studies to forbid their contract stars from appearing on the small screen in the early 1950s based on the assumption that television viewers would not show up at the box office if they could regularly see stars at home for free."[296] See, for example, the following statement issued during this period by an MGM agent, who remarked that top billed Hollywood stars "shouldn't appear on television. They are too big and important. Such exposure would only dilute [their stardom]."[297] Celebrity was thus almost viewed as resource or material substance; something that risked drying up if left out in the light for too long. If audiences grew accustomed to seeing their celebrities on a regular basis, then some of their magic and mystique would be lost or forgotten. A celebrity in

[293] Christine Becker, "Televising Film Stardom in the 1950s," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 26, no. 2, (Fall 2005): 5.
[294] Christine Becker, "Televising Film Stardom in the 1950s," 6.
[295] Nathalie Heinich also adds fans to the list of those who played a role in shaping the identity of celebrities during this time. See Heinich, "La Consommation de la Célébrité," 112.
[296] Becker, "Televising Film Stardom in the 1950s," 6-7.
[297] Dan Moldea, *Dark Victory: Ronald Reagan, MCA and the Mob* (New York: Viking press, 1986), 150.

this sense was one to whom the public could only enjoy the occasional, fleeting glimpse, leaving them hungering for more.

While Hollywood celebrities often held the status of remote and untouchable gods and goddesses, the first television stars came across as realistic characters and fellow humans.[298] As such, the first television hosts were viewed as friendly faces that the whole family could come to trust and recognize, like extended family members.[299] In discussing the act of watching television during this era, historian Tony Wilson argues that viewing television was a social and even familial process, and, as such, was something quite different from cinema going.[300] Viewing television acted as a family gathering of sorts, one that re-affirmed the patriarchal and nuclear bent of families, as the father was the one who generally decided the viewing activities.[301] When viewing television, it was not uncommon for participants to talk amongst themselves, come or go from the room where the show was on, and engage in other similar behaviours that would not have been socially permissible at the cinema. [302] In addition, unlike cinema – which qualified as an activity or even a special event – television was defined by its comfort, its simplicity, and its familiarity as a pastime. As Wilson puts it, television watching in this era was "uneventful," and the draw of television lay in its "affirmation of the ordinary."[303]

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[298] Lynch, *Selling Catholicism*, 10.

[299] This feeling of familial recognition is communicated well in the fact that both Berle and Sheen were popularly referred to as "Uncle Miltie" and "Uncle Fultie" – nicknames which highlighted their familiarity and regular presence in the intimate space of America's living rooms.

[300] At the cinema, individual strangers gather together quietly in a darkened room where they refrain from talking or disturbing those around them, whereas television is primarily viewed at one's home or in the home of one's friends or family. As Wilson remarks, "the subject interpolated by television has been always already familiar." See Tony Wilson, *Watching Television: Hermeneutics, Reception and Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 24.

[301] Wilson, *Watching Television*, 24. See also Cantor, *Prime-Time Television*, 49.

[302] Wilson's theory of television as applied to this period is thus at odds with structuralist understandings of television from within communication studies, which portray it as being a medium of 'pure conveyance.' For Wilson, viewers cannot be understood as passive vessels who simply receive whatever message is being broadcast. Rather, a viewer's decision to tune into a program is an active and even reciprocal process, in that the viewer's choice watch or not watch a particular show affects both the viewer and the show itself (its ratings, renewals, etc.)."

[303] Wilson, *Watching Television*, 28.

Television thus offered the viewer a recognizable horizon, a "normative background" grounded in the familiar.[304] While audience members might have enjoyed elements of novelty or surprise in their programming, the structures and fundamental offerings of their favourite programs nevertheless appealed to something familiar.[305] Programs sustain their audience through the audience's recognition of the program and its ability to meet their expectations – for example, when fans of Sheen's television show tuned in every week, they came with certain expectations and generally had those expectations met. While the topic of discussion indeed changed from week to week – jumping from philosophy to Cold War politics to angels – the format and character of the show, including the personality and character of the host, remained unchanged. And so, just as television relied on notions of the ordinary and expectations of the familiar to build audiences, television itself was also symbiotically responsible for helping to construct these very same expectations.

As a means of mass communication, television rapidly became the default visual medium for conveying *information* to the American populace. While some information could be overt and intentional, much of what was passed on was far more implicit and subtle. Watching the figures who dazzled the screen and consuming their presence on a regular basis inculcated and reinforced numerous values in the American mindset that many may have taken for granted. As historian James Hudnut-Beulmer remarks, television during this era was primarily a middle-class medium that transmitted middle-class values to the American middle-class.[306] In this period, the normalization of television as a medium and the "ordinariness" of the television celebrity can thus be understood as catalysts for helping to institute and familiarize audiences with changing norms

[304] Wilson, *Watching Television*, 24.
[305] Wilson, *Watching Television*, 26.
[306] Hudnut-Beulmer, *Looking for God in the Suburbs*, 16.

– the acceptance of Catholics, yes, but also the need for spiritual guidance, and also (albeit more implicitly) narratives about gender, sexuality, race, identity, wealth and poverty, on a far grandeur scale than any medium that came before it.

In the case of Sheen, his "ordinariness" was highlighted via a performance of intimacy. As a way of easing his audiences into his program each week, Sheen began virtually every episode with an icebreaker, often in the form of a joke – one which was either self-deprecating or which was set in everyday American life – before getting into the topic at hand. Doing so gave his audience a moment of levity, the sense of being in the presence of close friend who couldn't wait to tell you about the funny thing that happened to them that week.[307] Cementing this sentiment, he began virtually every episode with the welcoming incantation towards his audience by addressing them simply as "friends," signaling both the tenor of the program and the open spirit of ecumenicism, a move which communicated to his viewers that they were all equal regardless of their faith. For Catholics, there was surely an added significance of the invocation, as it signaled that this wasn't some distant prelate pontificating from behind the podium, nor a distant personal acquaintance, but someone who was their equal, a confidant even. In doing so, Sheen helped inculcate a shared sense of humanity and with it a sense of intimacy between himself and the viewer that was expected of the early television hosts.

The Age of Reassurance

Sheen wasn't the only successful pastor to take to television in the early 1950s and become a celebrity and part of the mid-century cultural and religious phenomenon taking place in America.

[307] Of the many jokes Sheen used, my favourite comes from the episode "Angels." Here, Sheen begins with a story of a child asking her mother why there are no angels with beards or moustaches, wondering if men could even make it into Heaven. The mother responded with "yes child, but they get in by a close shave." See *Life is Worth Living*, "Angels," DuMont Network, Written by Fulton Sheen, 1953.

Following Sheen to the studios not long after his own show was launched to acclaim was the often-controversial Protestant pastor Vincent Norman Peale. Peale, along with his wife, became recurring hosts of the television show *What's Your Trouble*.[308] Peale, like Sheen, hailed from the Midwest, and was very much an innovator and early adopter of new technologies, adapting to media such as radio and television as they became available and thereby expanding his audiences.[309] Like Sheen, Peale had also acted as the host of a religious radio program. Called *The Art of Living*, this show combined Christian sermonizing with do-it-yourself self-help messaging. In 1952 – a time when Sheen's book, *Peace of Soul*, continued to be discussed and rabidly consumed – Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* was published and remained on the *New York Times* bestseller list for 186 consecutive weeks and sold several million copies.[310] At the height of his popularity, he too was reaching an audience of millions through his various media.[311]

In commenting on Peale's success, Sarah Forbes Orwig refers to several distinguishing qualities of his genre of presentation and lecturing which could just as readily apply to Sheen: "Peale's genius – and the key to his success – was in grasping themes that were alive in the culture and then offering them in a practical, entertaining form that helped people achieve results *for themselves."*[312] Orwig adds that Peale sought to help "the individual navigate through the often-lonely byways of modern life. his sermons were peppered with lively anecdotes of people who overcame obstacles and achieved success – and Peale insisted that such success could be had by

[308] *What's Your Trouble* began as a radio show before transitioning onto television.
[309] Timothy H. Sherwood, *The Rhetorical Leadership of Fulton J. Sheen, Norman Vincent Peale, and Billy Graham in the Age of Extremes* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), 49.
[310] Russell Chandler, "Norman Vincent Peale, 'Minister to Millions,' Dies: Religion: Mixing faith and Psychology, Author of 'The Power of Positive Thinking,' Spread Inspiration Worldwide," *Los Angeles Times*, December 26, 1993, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-12-26-mn-5771-story.html..
[311] Sherwood*, Age of Extremes*, 54.
[312] Sarah Forbes Orwig, "Business Ethics and the Protestant Spirit: How Norman Vincent Peale Shaped the Religious Values of American Business Leaders," *Journal of Business Ethics* 38, no. 1/2 (June 2002): 82. Italics in original.

anyone."[313] Sheen has received similar comments in academia. "Sheen promised that religion could bring practitioners personal fulfillment and happiness," writes Weisman.[314] His bestselling book *Peace of Soul* did just this, arguing how true inner peace, happiness – and to a lesser extent, personal accomplishment – can only come by turning one's conscience towards God rather than human solutions, such as psychoanalysis. Happiness, peace, and even prosperity were all regular topics touched upon by Sheen and his contemporaries. Effectively, these programs suggested that religion was not primarily concerned with soteriology and the unseen, but that it was intimately grounded in the material concerns of the viewers and their own interests in the here-and-now.

Despite hailing from across denominational lines, Sheen, Peale and the other leading pastors of the day who joined them on the bestseller's lists and on early television, were not so much competitors but complimentary voices in America. As Erin A. Smith suggests, "the same readers who read Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* were also quite likely to watch Catholic Fulton Sheen's primate-time television program, *Life is Worth Living*, write fan letters to the Jewish Liebman, listen to liberal Protestant Fosdick's sermons on the radio, and/or follow Graham's enormous evangelical Christian revivals through the media."[315] Where denominational lines had previously been defining factors in the identification of Americans – an identification often related to ethnic boundaries – the atmosphere had markedly changed by the 1950s. The GI Bill, massive demographic shifts, and the suburbanization of America in the aftermath of the Second World War had helped break down many of the previous barriers that physically and spatially divided Americans. It also helped that none of these figures were overly concerned with

[313] Similar remarks could be made about Sheen's program, which Christopher Sheen describes as being focused on "people's problems" – a sentiment echoed by Weinstein who observes that Sheen primarily spoke about the "everyday problems" of Americans. See Orwig, "Business Ethics," 84; Lynch, *Selling Catholicism*, 124; Weisman, *The Forgotten Network*, 166.
[314] Weisman, *The Forgotten Network*, 168.
[315] Smith, *What Would Jesus Read?*, 158.

highlighting the particularities of their respective traditions or suggesting their superiority, but instead sought to highlight the common ground represented by the "triple melting pot" of their shared Judeo-Christian heritage and the ecclesiastical foundations of the nation.[316] They thus excelled at disseminating what Smith refers to as a "middle-brow" theology that was immanently accessible and inoffensive, and which targeted lay people, labourers and workers among America's public, rather than its theologians or learned elite.[317] In effect, as a remedy for the spiritual and political malaise of their day, these men sought to position religion as a an easy-to-understand but ultimately transformative force, one that could aid individuals in letting go of their fears and insecurities.

Both Sheen and Peale appear to have struck gold with their timing, as Americans during this period were remarkably receptive to this type of messaging. In 1950, nearly half the books on the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald Tribune* bestseller lists were "religious books,"[318] and newspapers and magazines effectively "battled each other for ministers who could write advice columns in language accessible to ordinary laypeople."[319] In light of this meteoric rise in interest in religious publications, radio, television and other media, historian William McLoughlin has referred to the post-war years as the "Fourth Great Awakening," arguing that these men encouraged Americans to "return to the cultural values" that preceded the rise of modernism, liberalism and atheism – suggesting that a spiritual and religious core grounded in Christianity was at the heart of the American way of life.[320] However, the religious core being disseminated by celebrity preachers often appeared to be a distant cousin of the version of Christianity being

[316] Smith cites this concept from Will Herberg. Smith, *What Would Jesus Read?* 162. See also James M. Patterson, "The Cross or the Double-Cross," 49.
[317] In some cases, their messages also acted in contrast to those provided by learned members of society, such as psychiatrists. Smith, *What Would Jesus Read?*, 160.
[318] Smith, *What Would Jesus Read?,* 135.
[319] Smith, *What Would Jesus Read?*, 135; Weinstein, *The Forgotten Network*, 168.
[320] Massa, *Catholics and American Culture*, 85.

preached from the pulpits of Churches across the nation, a version of Christianity that was often looked down upon by scholars, intellectuals, fellow clerics, and at times even the devout community itself.

Criticism

As popular as celebrity preachers were among the American public, neither Sheen nor Peale were immune to criticism – both concerning the shape of their message and the medium of its delivery – and each were, at times, accused of distorting the very traditions from which they sprang. In the case of Peale, commentators criticized how his message of self-fulfillment was subsumed by America's ultra-elite, effectively finding within his brand of Christianity justification for their financial endeavours and status.[321] As Smith remarks, "the particular offense committed by Peale and his ilk was that they distorted Christian doctrine into an apology for pursuing self-interest."[322] In other words, all of Peale's focus on the power and strength of the individual – i.e., one's ability to pull oneself up by the bootstraps – didn't leave very much room for God in the equation, and all but negated the primary soteriological beliefs of Christianity. If the only thing a person needs to overcome their inadequacies is a bit more belief in oneself, then one begins to wonder what the purpose of prayer is, and whether one even needs be dependent on the almighty. Sheen too was criticized, albeit in a very different manner. The main criticism was directed towards Sheen's position as a bishop. Rather than maintaining and honoring the ecclesiastical hierarchy he represented, the criticism goes, he essentially flattened it. By writing and speaking in the vernacular and participating in the low mediums of paperback novels and television, Sheen was

[321] See Jade Scipioni, "How this 1950s self-help guru shaped Donald Trump's attitude towards life and business," *CNBC*, July 10, 2020, https://www.cnbc.com/2020/07/10/how-self-help-author-norman-vincent-peale-influenced-donald-trump.html.
[322] Smith, *What Would Jesus Read?,* 139.

guilty of taking religion out of the churches and cathedrals – away from the baroque and the grandiose – and reducing the prestige of Christianity into morsels for the masses. In other words, Sheen was criticized for being guilty of offering an "easy religion" which lacked the grandeur, trials and sacrifice that true religion demanded.[323] Much of the criticism levelled against Sheen, Peale and their ilk is, curiously, not unlike the criticism which was leveled against the medium of television itself – just as the medium of television was initially viewed as a "lower" form of visual media than the cinema, the "easy religion" of Sheen and Peale was viewed as a "lower form" of religion than what was offered at the pulpit.[324] Put differently, just as the medium of television was thought to lower the prestige of a celebrity, so too was it thought to lower religion. Critics thus understood Sheen and Peale not as repackaging Christianity for the American context, but rather as repacking America's faith in the individual using theological language.[325]

While Sheen remained firmly rooted in the orthodoxy of the Church as it applied to the human experience and its challenges, the same cannot necessarily be said for all of his peers.[326] Peale's Protestantism, in particular, appeared to give him a certain leeway that Sheen as a Catholic was either uninterested in pursuing or unable. In *The Power of Positive Thinking* and his talks, Peale often focused on helping people achieve their personal goals – whether they be tied to career, finance or other elements of their livelihoods. In what one could argue was a precursor to the Protestant Prosperity Gospel, Peale argued that, in order to become successful, individuals had to unlock their God-given drive from within; not give and expect more in return. For all his success

[323] Smith, *What Would Jesus Read?*, 140.
[324] It is worth mentioning that while Peale was also a pastor at a non-episcopal church, Sheen was a bishop at an institution that thrived – and continues to thrive – on hierarchy and the mysteries of the Eucharist.
[325] While Sheen was criticized for delivering a more individualistic faith than pre-Vatican I Catholics may have been expecting, he was not accused of equating wealth with happiness and spirituality the way Peale was.
[326] Lynch comments on the double nature of Sheen, both as a television host and as a member of the clergy. As a host, he inevitably acted as a familiar, intimate figure and yet owing to stature within the Church, he was at the same time a figure of authority. Lynch, *Selling Catholicism*, 155.

in promoting a gospel of success, Peale would describe himself in public as a salesman, and would even go on to win a Distinguished Salesman Award in New York City in 1957.[327] It is no wonder that Peale became the favourite pastor of America's businessmen and other self-starters, included among them none other than Donald Trump and his Father Fred.[328] Nevertheless, that these men could rise to the status of celebrity speaks volumes about the societal need for stability and answers in the confusing and often frightening post-war world Americans found themselves in. "Americans wanted to be reassured," writes Timothy H. Sherwood of the era in a remark that is readily applicable to both Peale and Sheen.[329]

Despite the ecumenical appeal of their messages, their success in reaching audiences across denominational lines was perhaps more anecdotal and optimistic than grounded in the data.[330] Regardless, I would argue that what matters more than whether these claims about the ecumenical nature and diversity of audiences were factually grounded or not, is that commentators and proponents of Sheen *imagined* and *desired* them to be true. After all, the belief that an American cleric from a minority faith could so effectively unite Americans of all backgrounds under a single, simple message, was effectively also a belief in America itself and its possibility of more fully

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[327] Sherwood, *Age of Extremes*, 5; 70.

[328] A politico piece from 2015 reports that Fred and Mary Trump were particularly attracted to Peale's message, and would attend the Marble Collegiate Church where he preached on Sundays. Donald himself had one of his weddings held there, and both his parents their funerals. Gwenda Blair, "How Norman Vincent Peale Taught Donald Trump to Worship Himself, *Politico*, October 6, 2015, https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/10/donald-trump-2016-norman-vincent-peale-213220.

[329] Sherwood, *Age of Extremes*, 4.

[330] Then-contemporary articles and proclamations about Sheen's wide-reaching and universal appeal consistently focused on his ability to reach audiences of other ecumenical backgrounds – and notably, Jews. One TV critic remarked that Sheen "talked of life and philosophy and God, all pretty large subjects, with such charm and humor and assurance that many people, Catholic and Protestant and Jew alike, began listening to him." True, Sheen had among his supporters a number of Jewish voices: Saul Abraham – the manager of the Adelphi Theatre where *Life is Worth Living* was filmed – was open about his praise for Sheen, as was Jewish magazine *The Tablet*, which ran a number of stories on him over the years, including a favourable obituary. However, media historian David Weinstein argues that "of the five religious television programs polled, *Life is Worth Living*… was [but] one of several programs that attracted viewers of all faiths," and, moreover, when the data was considered, the actual percentage of Sheen's extra-denominational viewers was likely never more than a minority among his audiences. Weinstein, *The Forgotten Network,* 167.

becoming a nation built on democratic pluralism. Finding strength in Sheen's apparent ability to unite Americans is itself a far cry from the discourses touted a generation prior, which communicated messages of suspicion and distrust about minorities wielding too much national influence – something epitomized in the backlash to the Smith presidential campaign.[331] While in the 1920s and 30s it was untenable to imagine that a Catholic spokesperson could unite all Americans around a similar, shared identity as Americans, by the 1950s, not only had it become a viable prospect, but one in which commentators sought to assert and solidify. Weinstein shares this sentiment, arguing "articles about Sheen's far-reaching appeal reflected a popular pride that Americans were becoming more religious and more tolerant."[332] Reeves similarly states that "Bishop Sheen's phenomenal success on television was a sign that millions of Americans had gone beyond the crude caricatures so familiar in the nation's history and were willing to accept Catholics as Christians and friends."[333]

Sheen, however, had additional issues to contend with as a Bishop. Though he was widely admired across denominational lines, lingering nativism flared up when *Time* magazine featured him on the cover of one of their issues. The magazine received a flurry of protest letters from Protestant ministers, one of whom railed that Sheen's cover was a symbol of "Roman Catholic totalitarianism."[334] Among his fellow Catholics, numerous columnists noted their "mixed feelings" about the Admiral corporation not only sponsoring Sheen's program, but having the man himself pitch their products.[335] While it was understood that companies with substantial financial resources

[331] In the 1928 United States Presidential Election, the Democratic Party chose four-term New York mayor Al Smith as their candidate. Smith, a Roman Catholic, came to be on the receiving end of massive and widespread anti-Catholic nativism and fear-mongering that sank any chance he might had at winning the election. Smith and his presidential aspirations will be discussed further in Chapter 4.
[332] Weinstein, *The Forgotten Network,* 167.
[333] Weinstein, *The Forgotten Network,* 168.
[334] Lynch, *Selling Catholicism*, 7; Weinstein, *The Forgotten Network,* 169.
[335] Weinstein, *The Forgotten Network*, 166.

afforded many smaller religious programs the funding they needed to run and secure reasonable airtime, the mingling of consumer goods with discourses aimed at soothing a person's soul were seen as intrusive.[336] Sheen was likely aware of this tension and the possible issues it could lead to. In one episode he promoted Admiral by giving it a tongue-in-cheek appraisal: "At the end of this television program, there is going to be a great burst of applause... You will have heard something the likes of which is not given on any other television program. You will have heard something that delights every father in the United States, that thrills every mother, that pleases every child. Namely, a commercial about an Admiral refrigerator."[337] Still, to defer any criticism that he was profiting from his celebrity during what was ostensibly a public service broadcasting program, Sheen frequently reminded his viewers that all proceeds generated by the sponsorship and his own salary would – in an act of personal austerity – be sent to charity rather than his personal coffers.[338] And so, where the presence of a Bishop appearing to shill for a corporation certainly raised some eyebrows, Sheen nevertheless found ways in which his celebrity could contribute to his own personal sanctification.

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[336] According to Weinstein, one reviewer remorsefully described his issues with the sponsorship as follows: "*Life is Worth Living* was a half-hour oasis that afforded a pause and a moment for individual contemplation free from all the desperately urgent salesmanship so common on TV. It was an invitation to the spiritual plane that allowed a personal re-examination of one's heart and mind. That experience is not something to be made to serve as a cue for a typical, hard-selling commercial." Weinstein, *The Forgotten Network*, 166.

[337] Lest the corporation become more intrusive, he limited Admiral's direct pitching to two segments – once before the beginning of his lecture and again immediately following its conclusion. This had the effect of giving him an uninterrupted twenty-plus minutes for his lecture, letting his viewers focus on the message at hand and likely also satisfying his own perfectionist trends for controlling his program. Weinstein, *The Forgotten Network*, 167.

[338] As host of *Life is Worth Living*, he was paid a salary by Admiral, the show's sponsor, of $10,000 per episode in 1952 and later $16,500 per episode in 1956 which he donated entirely to the SPOF. Noonan, *Missionary with a Mike*, 71.

Celebrity, Sanctity and Persona Negotiated

Like other celebrities, the celebrity preachers of the 1950s were not isolated in their formulation but were part of a wider discussion and negotiation of celebrity that defined the television personalities of the era. Though their programs were decidedly religious by nature – and largely came to air owing to the FCC's mandate as a public service announcement – the American public did not necessarily see men like Sheen and Peale as representing radically different enterprises than celebrities such as Berle or Sinatra, as both categories of entertainers essentially competed for *the same* audiences. The downward trajectory of Berle's program began in 1952, the same year that *Life is Worth Living* went on the air. This suggests that Sheen was able to draw audiences *away* from Berle.[339] Thus, the same people who might tune into the *Texaco Star Theatre* in search of a comedy routine might also tune into the DuMont Network for a light-hearted and often enlightening lecture from Bishop Sheen. From our current vantage point – one which can see the past seventy years of television history neatly mapped out – it might be tempting to look back and categorize both programs as discrete genres, one being a variety show comedy and the other being a public service lecture. However, to suggest that audiences at the time had the same level of awareness about genre and format as we do, is perhaps anachronistic. Television was a new medium at the time, not fully formed. Audiences then were likely less discerning about such differences, viewing the personality-centric programs as two sides of the same coin at the 8:00PM timeslot. In such a case, Sheen's star power and celebrity draw could be compared with not only to his fellow celebrity preachers but with wider configurations and expectations of American

[339] This act of divine thievery did not go unnoticed. Speaking to this phenomenon, an obituary in *The Tablet* commented on the competition between the two stars, with the author proudly observing that Sheen "attracted former devotees of the Milton Berle show." The choice of the word "devotee" here is of course interesting in that it points towards the ways in which fans can become fixated on television programs and the celebrities who host them – not unlike that of religious devotion. As such it also takes on the connotation of conversion, highlighting Sheen's prowess as an evangelist – a prowess which was able to attract the Jewish comedian Berle's viewership towards Sheen's own Catholic programming.

celebrity. As such, that Sheen's program – which was essentially a mandated public broadcast – not only survived but *thrived* is itself telling not only of the kind of programming Americans craved, but the kinds of celebrities they desired.

However, by virtue of being leading religious figures, people like Sheen and Peale were held to stricter standards than other celebrities of the era. While Sheen bore many similarities with his peers in religious programming – including those across denominational aisles – as a Catholic, he was nevertheless required to navigate and contend with additional facets of celebrity and *sanctity* that his Protestant counterparts did not. As a celebrated member of the Catholic clergy, Sheen was not simply a preacher but also a sanctified individual, a man who had taken the cloth along with its accompanying vows of celibacy. Since his death, Sheen has also been put forward as a candidate for sainthood, with his cause slowly progressing towards its ultimate goal. Thus, when examining Sheen's celebrity, it is not necessarily clear where – if at all – the dividing line between the celebration of celebrity ends and that of sanctity begins, posing a unique problem in understanding his fame.

What does it mean then when a sanctified person is also a celebrity? What happens when this person is self-aware of this dual positionality? How do they reconcile these two halves? Sheen's relationship with his celebrity, as previously discussed, is tenuous at best. While other celebrities of his time were focused on negotiating a form of celebrity that could put them on par with the "real" stars who hailed from Hollywood, Sheen faced a different set of negotiations and dilemmas related to his fame. This is perhaps why Sheen's approach to his own celebrity was highly ambiguous and largely standoffish. As discussed in Chapter 1, throughout his career and in his autobiography Sheen exerted an active effort to keep the topic of his celebrity at arm's length

whenever he was given the chance to discuss it,[340] often relying on his well-known tactic of self-deprecating humour to deflect any acknowledgement of his star power. In Chapter 1, I cited a quote from Sheen's autobiography where he cheekily remarked that three of his classmates had gone on to become famous personalities – and if the reader is feeling charitable, perhaps they will consider him the fourth.[341] During his appearance in *What's My Line*? he was asked whether he was "a familiar figure in public life." He replied "un peu, oui," (a little, yes) causing host John Daly to chime in with a correction "I would say our guest is well known." In the following question, he was asked whether he was well known in television. Sheen looked lost in thought a moment, before hunching his shoulders and responding "je ne sais pas" (I don't know) and again having Daly add "'yes,' for our guest." [342] Even as early as 1946 – several years prior to the inaugural run of *Life is Worth Living*, when he was still riding off the popularity of *The Catholic Hour* – Sheen reportedly told a reporter seeking to interview him that he was uninterested, as publicity was "as artificial as rouge on the cheek."[343]

Sheen's comment about fame being of little more value than "rouge on one's cheek" is perhaps ironic – as will be explained below – and doesn't really tell the full story of his relationship towards his own celebrity and persona. Sheen was known at times to have an obsessive tendency towards managing and perfecting his own image – especially as it appeared before the cameras. According to his one-time assistant and two-time biographer Daniel P. Noonan, Sheen was drawn to the camera from the first moment he walked on set, becoming immediately and intimately aware

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[340] As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, Sheen barely discussed his celebrity and the activities that made him famous, skimming over his tenure as the host for *The Catholic Hour* and for *Life Is Worth Living*. While there were strategic reasons for omitting these elements from his late life autobiography and focusing the reader's attention elsewhere, his similarly disparaging attitude towards celebrity can be traced much earlier in his career.

[341] *Treasure in Clay,* 12

[342] Speaking in what would be considered a foreign language to American audiences was a means of putting up a barrier between Sheen the celebrity and the viewing audience, his fans, and in doing so distancing himself from the very fame of his being proclaimed by the people around him.

[343] Reeves, *America's Bishop*, 370.

of the power the lens had for capturing his already well-honed persona as a powerful orator and preacher.[344] On set for *Life is Worth Living*, he was reported as being controlling and even domineering towards crew members, instructing camera operators how to position the shots to capture his best angles, and making heavy use of underlighting to give his face an air of added gravitas whenever he broke into the more serious elements of his monologues.[345] He never appeared before the cameras unless his head was immaculately coiffed, his cheeks and chin clean shaven, and his attire perfectly washed and ironed. His choice of wardrobe was equally telling: by choosing to dress up in the full ceremonial regalia of a bishop, Sheen signaled his authority while instilling a sense of presence and grandiosity before the cameras.

Actions such as this certainly spoke to his celebrity character and were by no means the only defining marks his fame had on his life. In *The Bishop Sheen Story*, James C. G. Conniff comments on the fact that the Bishop owned a "long black Cadillac" with a chauffeur, who not only ferried him to his engagements at the Adelphi Theatre for his weekly program, but also out to brunch with his film star friends – who included fellow Catholics and Hollywood starlets Loretta Young and Irene Dunne.[346] When he played his occasional round of golf, he would show up at the club "dressed for the sport like a men's fashion magazine ad model."[347] Sheen also owned a home in the Upper East Side made from white brick and limestone, and another in Washington with a stairwell modelled on one he'd seen in the Vatican and which had left an impression on him. Commenting on the stairwell at the Washington house, Conniff remarks that a "wired gold and aluminum ceiling fixture centered above it reflected in a circular mirror set in the basement floor.

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[344] Noonan, *The Passion of Fulton Sheen*, 54

[345] Noonan states that Sheen personally requested this sort of lighting so that his eyes "would look like dark, glowing coals." Noonan, *Missionary with a Mike*, 81. See also Reeves, *America's Bishop*, 217.

[346] Conniff, *The Bishop Shen Story*, 26. According to Reeves, Sheen eventually began to fear being seen in public with young actresses, after the husband of one saw the photos of them circulating in the press and accused him of having an affair with his wife. Reeves, *America's Bishop*, 137.

[347] Conniff, *Bishop Sheen Story*, 28

It gave the illusion that you were gazing down into fantastic depths at least two stories beneath the very foundations of the house."[348] However, lest the reader be taken away by the ostentatiousness of the buildings themselves, the author quickly highlighted how Sheen furnished his living spaces with "austere furniture... especially the bedroom."[349] The mention of the bedroom simultaneously draws attention to a very private (and potentially sexual) space while neutering it more appropriately for his person. Examples such as these highlight that Sheen was drawn towards the ostentatious, often manifesting itself through the material. While owning a stairwell that reminded him of a similar one in the Vatican could be made out to be a material reminder of a spiritual experience, such an artifact is hardly a pilgrim's memento or other keepsake. An imposing automobile, a home that instills awe in its visitors, and lunch companions that turn the heads and inflame the passions in bystanders are visibly powerful. They are symbols of privilege and influence in society – a passive means of signaling Sheen's celebrity to others in perhaps less than subtle ways – and likely contributed to the frequent accuations of pride levelled at him, as well as the concern his cause has taken to ensure that his more ordinary and "down to earth" aspects were emphasized.[350]

It is thus here where Sheen's success in cultivating a comfortable and entirely familiar 'everyman persona' faltered a little bit. Notably, the dressings he chose for his set, to make it appear like a rector or professors office, while useful for conveying authority, were not spaces with which the average American would have been familiar or perhaps even comfortable. Where television of the 1970s and onwards increasingly focused on family spaces, even having entre shows taking place predominantly in the living rooms of its characters, the 1950s still envisioned

[348] Conniff, *Bishop Sheen Story*, 28. One cannot help but notice the way his home is described here is very much the way his eyes often are.
[349] Conniff, *Bishop Sheen Story*, 28.
[350] For more on this, please refer to my discussions in Chapter Two.

a certain remoteness or idealization of its spaces.[351] Furthermore, Lynch remarks that while the content of Sheen's program was designed to be inclusive, inviting and form bonds of attachment with his audience, his choice of ceremonial clothing – rather than more comfortable, informal wear – had the effect of putting up certain barriers and creating detachment between himself and the viewer.[352] His choice of clothing also pointed towards his status as a veritable aristocrat within the American Church, causing one to wonder how his body can be understood – does it represent the fulfillment of the American dream, or does it represent its unattainability?[353] As much as he sought to become the familiar face and voice to millions of Americans, by mingling with his fellow celebrities, counting himself among them, meeting the opportunities they presented him, living in his palatial home, and even appearing behind the screens of the television rather than in person, Sheen was perhaps on some level maintaining the difference, distance and grandeur expected from a man of his stature within the Church. Though he sought to be ordinary, he was in reality living far from it.

Regardless, in calling attention to all these quirks of Sheen's celebrity, it is not my intention to debase the figure, nor to argue that he was hypocritical. Rather, I would like to highlight the complexity and ambiguity of a man balancing two halves of a life – one steeped in austerity, and the other in a world deeply embedded in conceptualizations of secular celebrity. It bears asking whether the two halves are in fact in opposition. As scholars Marguerite den Berg and Claartje L. ter Hoeven remind us in a recent article, where celebrity is concerned, faith and secularity should not be understood as two opposites separated by rigid boundaries; they often mix, overlap and

[351] Cantor, *Prime-Time Television*, 131.
[352] Lynch, *Selling Catholicism*, 139.
[353] Lynch, *Selling Catholicism*, 147.

blend in unexpected ways in the popular arena.[354] I suspect Sheen likely equated the two – that he saw no conflict between fame and sanctity, between *celebratio* and celebrity, perhaps even believing them to be intertwined. Sheen was in many ways a representative of the Church in America. Seeing him on screen was seeing the Church, in all its glory, personified and dignified, acted out on screens across the nation and there to console the hearts of Americans. By embodying the persona to the fullest of what his faith would allow, Sheen was perhaps also pushing the Church for all his celebrity could allow. All his grandiose gestures drew attention to himself and by extension to his Church, and because of that, he had to present himself as an impeccable representative of that institution.[355]

Conclusions

Cultural theorist Stuart Hall once remarked that "popular culture... is an arena that is profoundly mythic. It is a theatre of popular desires, a theatre of popular fantasies. It is where we discover and play with the identification of ourselves, where we are imagined."[356] Celebrity is a social construct – it acts as a guidepost for drawing attention to the traits of certain individuals held in regard by wider society. The traits and individuals that a given society finds themselves drawn towards are fluid and unfixed, constantly finding themselves in negotiation with their wider

[354] Marguerite den Berg and Claartje L. ter Hoeven, "Madonna as Symbol of Reflexive Modernisation," *Celebrity Studies* 4, no. 2 (2013): 150.
[355] Sheen himself appears to have equated, to a certain extent, the importance of said appearances, when he reportedly told fellow Catholic Loretta Young that "we dress for God, we are his representatives" – effectively equating one's moral duty with dress codes. His niece, Joan Sheen Cunningham, also once remarked that her uncle associated good looks with morality. Curiously, such comments seem to mirror certain Protestant social ethics and some elements early twentieth century "Muscular Christianity" movement, which equated the physical beauty of athletes with morality and godliness. That is not to say that Sheen was either directly or indirectly influenced by Muscular Christianity, but rather that there are interesting parallel between religious celebrity and religious bodybuilding concerning the emphasis on the body. For the remarks form Sheen's niece, see: Reeves, *America's Bishop*, 137; 272. For more on Muscular Christianity, see Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
[356] Stuart Hall, "What is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" *Social Justice* 20, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 1993): 113.

audiences and their expectations.[357] In this regard, television provided a new medium not only for entertainment purposes, but for conceptualizing new forms of celebrity.

In this chapter I have argued that Sheen's celebrity stardom signals the variety and ambiguity of the mid-twentieth century American celebrity. By signaling the fragmented conceptualization of celebrity, television ushered in modifications of the tropes and expectations once solidified and dominated by Hollywood. As Christine Becker remarks, "in the private spaces of American homes, early television progressively deconstructed the mythologies of stardom that the film industry had systematically cultivated for decades."[358] Television, with its focus on the authenticity and "real" personas of its stars, allowed the medium to propel figures like Sheen to the spotlight, figures whose presence could be read as a challenge to the prevailing norms of celebrity.[359] In this, I am not necessarily arguing that Sheen's show was itself responsible for changing norms and expectations of celebrity as some proponents have argued.[360] While Sheen was successful, he was hardly a prophet nor a herald of an innovative and new form of celebrity. He was, rather, the quintessential example of, not only the kind of celebrity Americans were searching for during that period, by also of the overlap of American celebrity, sanctity and visual culture that rose in prominence in the early 1950s.

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[357] Kimberly Bacheci, "Our Icons: Ourselves. Britney Spears, Justin Timberlake, Kevin Federline, and the Construction of Whiteness in a Post-Race America," *Celebrity Studies* 6, no. 2 (2015): 167.

[358] Becker, "Televising Film Stardom in the 1950s," 17.

[359] Of course, there are caveats to authenticity. In "Televising Film Stardom in the 1950s," Becker observes that "even television's claims to authenticity and the ordinary... could increasingly be recognized as constructed ideals" (11). Celebrity historian Will Scheibel has made a similar observation, remarking how the "authenticity" of the celebrity is every bit as constructed as their fame. See Scheibel, "Marilyn Monroe, 'Sex Symbol': Film Performance, Gender Politics and 1950s Hollywood Celebrity," *Celebrity Studies* 4, no. 1 (2013): 12. It would seem that the normalcy and familiarity conveyed by television stars, while perhaps closer to their "real" selves or rather their private selves than what was the case with Hollywood celebrities, was nevertheless itself a performance, and perhaps one that followed them off the screens into their own private lives.

[360] Massa, for one, argued that Sheen was in some part personally responsible for changing the norms and creating demand. See note 287.

Where Sheen stands out from his peers, however, is in his choice to be denominationally *visible*. While other celebrity preachers of the era, such as Peale, focused on tacit ecumenism and doctrinally watered-down positivity, Sheen's program was unapologetically Catholic in appearance if not doctrine. By dressing in his full ceremonial regalia (and not the more casual clothing one would assume he was likely to wear at home or in private company) Sheen was simultaneously subordinating himself to the cultural expectations placed upon a Catholic bishop, as well as slowly subverting such expectations of otherness.[361] By making himself a visibly (and undeniably) identifiable symbol of the Catholic faith, he was reminding his viewers of his status within the church, while also normalizing its presence and visibility. In the role of television host, and wearing the guise of the bishop, Sheen was demonstrating that the Catholic bishop was to an extent just another performance, just another television persona, just another fellow American. Speaking to this, Mark Massa argues that Sheen's popularity and career helped bridge American Catholicism's transition from cultural minority to part of the cultural mainstream.[362] Indeed, by relying on overtly Catholic symbols, and playing upon the familiarity engendered by the medium, Sheen's presence can be read as sign of the increasingly commonplace familiarity with Catholic symbols in American popular culture.

However, as will be discussed in the following chapter, the possibility that Catholics, being cultural minorities, predominantly inhabited spaces far from the mainstream is much more nuanced than some scholarship would have us believe. Indeed, where American visual media and culture was concerned, the process of "rehabilitating" Catholics into the American mainstream began

[361] While Sheen's choice to dress in full ceremonial regalia made him visually remarkable, he nevertheless chose to downplay the distinctiveness of Catholic doctrine in his messaging. One can certainly contrast these with his Protestant peers. Peale and Graham alike both dressed visually "normal" and familiar in two-piece flannel suits, and yet their respective messaging emphasized the distinctiveness of their teachings - with Peale on his pseudo-Prosperity Gospel and Graham with his revivalist crusades.
[362] Massa, *Catholics and American Culture*, 86.

much earlier than the television revolution of the 1950s. In the 1930s, Hollywood had much to do with making Catholic stories, culture and identities part of the mainstream American visual language and memory, notably by turning the most totemic emblem of Catholicism – their celibate priests – into leading figures with which Americans could identify.

Chapter 4 - From Suspicion to Stardom: Irish American Clerical Masculinity in American visual media from 1930s Hollywood to *Life is Worth Living*.

A Good Year to be Entertained

In 1954, *Life is Worth Living*, was in its third and final season on the ailing DuMont Network, effectively marking the peak of Sheen's nationwide visibility and popularity. However, parallel to his program, another American work of visual media replete with Catholic themes and characters began receiving widespread critical acclaim. Coming off the tail of his controversial appearance before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), director Elia Kazan released the film *On the Waterfront*, a tale of corruption, violence and one man's crisis of conscience while working as a longshoreman on New Jersey's docks.[363] Marlon Brando portrayed Irish-American protagonist Terry Malloy, a rough and tumble working-class American figure, able to exude – as film critic Allen Almachar remarked – "both a dangerous thug and a vulnerable man at the exact same time."[364] Though Brando's performance of a man struggling with his conscience and the demands of his blue-collar masculinity garners most of the film's laurels, Karl Malden's supporting role as Father Barry – a hard smoking, rough-talking and afraid-of-nothing Catholic priest – pointed to a new and markedly harder shift in the portrayal (and expectations) of Catholic priests.

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[363] As film critic Tim Brayton observes in a 2020 retrospective on the movie, the plot of *On the Waterfront* – with its emphasis on removing the stigma of testifying – in many ways mirrors the real-life decision of Kazan to testify against his peers at the HUAC. Tim Brayton, "On the Waterfront," *Alternate Ending*, May 24, 2020, https://www.alternateending.com/2020/05/on-the-waterfront-1954.html.

[364] Allen Almachar, "An Appreciation – On the Waterfront," *The Macguffin*, December 5, 2011, https://macguff.in/macguffin-spotlight/an-appreciation-on-the-waterfront/.

By the 1950s, Hollywood had no shortage of Irish American priests in its film catalogue. Popular films from the 30s and 40s helped build up a repertoire of expectations and visual imagery for on-screen depictions of priests. Rather than give in to the ripe atmosphere of suspicion that surrounded American Catholics at the time, these films depicted their protagonists as kindly, soft-spoken, safe (and celibate) figures, not unlike Sheen himself, who selflessly worked for the greater good of their communities – thus avoiding any nuance and ambiguity that might paint them in a negative light. While this type of characterization risked making Catholic priests appear effeminate to audiences, the movies in question tried to evade this reading by painting them as paternal figures who embodied a responsible and controlled masculinity and who were portrayed by highly charismatic leading men. The way priests of this earlier generation were portrayed was thus a far cry from Father Barry, who embodied a form of masculinity more typically found in the "hard-boiled" genre, where gangsters and detectives (often Irish Americans Catholics) glorified toughness and the reaffirmation of masculinity in a world of violence and competition.[365] The characterization of Father Barry suggests that, by the 1950s, the American audience's perception of priests had grown beyond these earlier archetypes, and that grittier, less "safe," and more nuanced characterizations were now possible.

Far from the gritty Father Barry, Sheen's Emmy Award-winning performance, as discussed in Chapter 3, made for decidedly safe, paternal, and family-friendly viewing.[366] While American audiences had – thanks to Hollywood – grown accustomed to seeing priests in either relaxed black

[365] The hard-boiled genre emerged in the post WWI-era of changing social and political realities, further framed against the background of the Great Depression. The individualist protagonists of these stories were invariably men who defined themselves and their masculinity through opposition and competition, often embracing both stoicism and toughness. See Jopi Nyman, *Men Alone Masculinity, Individualism, and Hard-Boiled Fiction* (Amsterdam: Brill, 1997), especially 41; 90.

[366] Sheen won his Emmy for Most Outstanding Personality in 1953 and was nominated for the award a second time in 1954 (losing it to Jack Webb for his portrayal of Sgt. Friday on *Dragnet*). Sheen would receive a third nod at the Emmy's in 1957 for Best Male Personality Continuing Performance, losing to Leonard Bernstein when he became director of the New York Philharmonic orchestra.

cassocks or black suits with clerical collars, Sheen performed each episode in the unambiguous garb of a Monsignor, wearing a bishop's cassock, a large pectoral cross, and an amaranth red sash with a matching cape and zucchetto.[367] In contrast to the more challenging figures Hollywood was portraying in the 1950s, Sheen's series and televised performances seemed to be a throwback – perhaps even an anachronism – that pointed to an earlier era of visual culture surrounding priests.

This chapter examines how Sheen's televised performances in the 1950s, rather than being read as a novel development in, or a logical extension to, the then-current visual repertoire of American priests, were indebted to an earlier tradition of Irish American priests in American visual media – namely, a tradition established by Hollywood in the 1930s and 1940s. I argue that Sheen was in many ways the inheritor of the archetype shaped by these earlier on-screen priests, that his own "brand" of embodied clerical masculinity reflected many of the same tropes, and, moreover, that he continued to embody these tropes even after they had long begun to fade in lieu of more challenging and ambiguous depictions that had by his era become the norm.[368] Sheen's self-fashioning lent itself well to the familiar, friendly medium of early television and the expectations of its audiences, whereas a priest like Barry, who embodied many of the harder stereotypes often ascribed to Irish-American masculinity, would not have fit.

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[367] Within the Catholic Church, Monsignor is an honorific title dispensed by the Pope to individuals who have rendered invaluable services to the Church. As a member of an inner church aristocracy, Monsignors were allowed to wear special dress and colours particular to their station. Sheen was made Monsignor in 1934 by Pope Pius XI while he was a professor at the CUA in Washington, coinciding with his being selected as the speaker for the institution's 150th anniversary.

[368] The changing depiction of priests in Hollywood can be witnessed in other films of the era. In Alfred Hitchcock's thriller *I Confess* (1953), Montgomery Clift plays Father Michael Logan, a World War II veteran who becomes a priest and finds himself embroiled in a murder mystery – with the climactic scene going so far as having the villain fire a pistol at him. Through the film, Logan embodies elements of hard masculinity while retaining his moral and spiritual edge. The pulpy *Edge of Doom* (1950) goes arguably further in its depiction of priests, having the disturbed Martin Lynn (played by Farley Granger) beat a priest to death with a crucifix after refusing to acknowledge the wrongs he had done to his father. The protagonist, Father Thomas Roth (played by Dana Andrews), then solves the mystery and confronts Lynn in the climactic scene, showing no fear and acting as his voice of conscience. Like *On the Waterfront*, both of these films employ priests as leading characters in hardboiled crime dramas, as opposed to the softer "feel good" movies of the 1930s and 40s.

Visual media, shaped in response to cultural expectations, moods and attitudes, is a product of its environment, and the earlier story of Hollywood's depiction of priests cannot be understood without also understanding the nation's temperament towards its Irish Catholics. I will begin this chapter by discussing certain tropes, perceptions and evolutions of Irish Catholics in America, along with the portrayals and embodiments of their masculinity. Following this, I will examine the disproportionately dominant role Hollywood has had on shaping the American public's perception of Irish American Catholic priests against racially and religiously charged nativist stereotypes. Hollywood introduced these figures into American popular culture, and also encouraged a very specific construction of priestly masculinity, one that was quintessentially soft and safe. Using Hollywood movies from the 1930s and 40s as my primary source material – specifically, *Going My Way*, *Angels with Dirty Faces*, and *Boys Town* – I will identify several major themes and archetypal traits of clerical masculinity that came to be codified in American visual media largely as a reaction against the nativist imagination. Using these examples, I will argue that Sheen's on-screen persona paralleled these earlier visual representations, eschewing the more challenging and "harder" models of priestly masculinity that were gaining popularity in Hollywood at the time. While Sheen's performance might have come across as anachronistic, it nevertheless resonated with audiences, and it is my contention that this has largely to do with the differing set of expectations audiences brought to the medium of television, as well as Sheen's particular skill at navigating these expectations and the constraints of the medium more broadly.

Irish Catholics, America and Hollywood

Irish Catholics in America

By the mid-twentieth century, Sheen and many of his contemporaries, such as fellow priest and CUA scholar John Tracy Ellis, were both unequivocal and nonchalant about the Americanness of the nation's Catholics of Irish descent. However, the integration and acceptance of Irish Catholics into the nation's membership was hardly a given in the generations that came before. While Irish Catholics have been on America's shores since the time of the Thirteen Colonies, their numbers increased exponentially following the Great Famine of 1845–1849, when nearly two million Irish men and women arrived as refugees, with another 650,000 arriving in the 1880s owing to increasing political violence and land wars back in Ireland.[369] The number of dioceses in the country at the beginning of the nineteenth century had quadrupled by the twentieth century, making the largely immigrant Catholic communities the single largest denomination by membership in the nation.[370] Their growing presence, however, did not signal a seamless amalgamation into the American pastiche – it was believed they were resistant to acculturation, and, as a result, did not achieve widespread cultural acceptance from America's Protestant majority. [371]

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[369] Ryan Dearinger, *The Filth of Progress: Immigrants, Americans, and the Building of Canals and Railroads in the West,* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 29. For a slightly different tally see O'Toole, *The Faithful*, 97-98. Dearinger emphasizes that this wave of immigration wasn't just caused famine and political unrest: the success of the generation who moved during the famine was also a motivating factor.

[370] In 1840 there were seventeen dioceses in the country, a number that would jump to sixty by 1880. While Catholics made up the largest denomination, they were still considerably outnumbered by Protestants as a whole. O'Toole, *The Faithful*, 101.

[371] Indeed, since before the War of Independence, Catholics in America were viewed with suspicion by their Protestant neighbours. While the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw legislation effectively banning their religious practice, the situation deteriorated further at the turn of the twentieth century, when militant nativist organizations – such as the Ku Klux Klan – gathered strength and numbers through anti-immigrant and notably anti-Catholic messaging. See Robert Emmett Curran, *Shaping American Catholicism: Maryland and New York, 1850-1915* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 3-7, and Maura Jane Farrelly, *Papist Patriots: The Making of an American Catholic Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 135. See also Kelly J. Baker, *Gospel*

Prejudice directed against Irish Catholics in America during this earlier era can be understood as an amalgamation of two historical currents. The first was a longstanding history of anti-Catholicism among English Protestants. As historian Kyle E. Haden puts it, "footed in the Reformation, anti-Catholicism bore fruit among the various Protestant settlers in colonial America and passed in the genetic structure of American national consciousness. Like a roller coaster, its manifestation in social and political behavior has risen and fallen over the course of U.S. history, but has never been eradicated."[372] The Catholic adherence to the foreign institution of the papacy was deemed at best to be medieval and backwards, and at worst evidence that Catholics held a tenuous dual allegiance to the Pope in Rome. [373] The second current was rooted in English colonialism – both of Ireland and of North America itself. Just as the Catholicism of the Irish was made into a trope to assert the power of English Protestantism, their expanding presence in America could also point to anxieties about the ruling class' inability to fully dominate and control their colonial subjects back in Europe.[374]

By the turn of the twentieth century nativist sentiments were in an upswing, and these sentiments painted Irish Catholics as a subversive "fifth column" incapable of becoming truly American – a portrayal that frequently made them targets of persecution. Certain liberal proponents of American democracy argued that the tenets of their young nation rested on non-

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According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant American, 1915-1930 (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2011).

[372] Kyle E. Haden, "Anti-Catholicism in U.S. History: A Proposal for a New Methodology," *American Catholic Studies* 124, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 27. See also Baker *Gospel According to the Klan*, 34-69.

[373] Haden writes that through much of American history, widespread social and political paranoia rooted itself in the belief that "foreign nations were […] sending subservices under the pretense of legitimate immigration." Haden, "Anti-Catholicism in U.S. History," 28.

[374] English colonization was cemented into the nation's foreign policy during the sixteenth century under the Tudor monarchy. Historian Nicholas P. Canny remarks that the English colonists were not only "hypercritical" of Catholicism on the island, but that Irish culture - and particularly Irish Catholic culture - was deemed to be so brutish that they were essentially infidel barbarians in need of utter civilizing and subjugation. Nicholas P. Canny, "The Ideology of English Colonization: From Ireland to America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (October 1973): 575-598.

dogmatic premises, and therefore Catholics, by their dogmatic nature, could never become true democrats and thus never become true Americans.[375] Catholics faced this type of perpetual questioning about whether they were *really* American until the midway mark of the twentieth century.

An added obstacle standing against possible acceptance of Irish Catholics was largely class-based. Of those who migrated to the United States, it is estimated that a mere 3% arrived with any professional or artisanal skills, making the vast majority of the arrivals unskilled labourers in desperate need of work.[376] As such, the majority of the newcomers settled in America's industrial centers – New York City, Chicago and Detroit – or in what remained of the old frontier, where manual labourers were in high demand for railroads and other infrastructure projects – work which did little to elevate them from their generally impoverished background as recently landed immigrants looking to settle in a foreign and often hostile culture.[377] Describing their work conditions, historian Ryan Dearinger states: "their days were spent draining land, grubbing, mucking, or digging ditches... [they] endured brutal working conditions, punishing state and company politics, and hostile community reactions."[378] As Irish studies scholar Christopher Dowd remarks, the Irish newcomers, many of whom did not speak English, appeared to outsiders as "poor, uneducated and insular. They did not seem compatible with American society."[379] Such

[375] John McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom* (New York: WW Norton, 2004), 176.
[376] See Dearinger, *The Filth of Progress*, 29.
[377] Patricia Kelleher, "Class and Irish Catholic Masculinity in Antebellum America: Young Men on the Make in Chicago," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 28, no.5 (Summer 2009): 7-42, 11-12.
[378] Irish Catholics were largely responsible for handling the toughest, most gruelling, and lowest-wage positions, positions that literally laid the foundations for America's future. While native born workers were increasingly becoming mythologized and romanticized as noble artisans, the contributions of the Irish were largely undervalued. Dearinger, *Filth of Progress*, 16-17.
[379] Christopher Dowd, *The Irish and the Origins of American Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 11.

ostracism coincided with a surge of self-awareness about their own ethnic difference, which, in turn only exacerbated the feeling of division between them and their American peers.[380]

Becoming recognized as American as opposed to simply "Irish in America" was thus a slow and unsteady process and not without its setbacks. While historians have noted a number of moments in 1920s and 30s where sentiments related to American Catholicism – and thus the Irish and other Catholic minority immigrants – seemed to mature and become more accepting, this reading seems to be one of retrospective optimism. The 1928 presidential campaign of Democratic candidate Al Smith, for example, seems to contradict such a view. Smith, a twice elected (and popular) governor of the state of New York (from 1919-20 and again from 1923-28), was in many ways the poster child for a rags-to-riches story showcasing the promise of the American dream. A second-generation American, Smith grew up in Manhattan's notoriously rough Lower East Side. Linked to Tammany Hall, the Irish American-run political machine that controlled most of New York's politics and the Democratic party in that state, he eventually became a political reformer who campaigned against Prohibition. Smith sought the Democratic nomination for the presidency first in 1924, and then successfully in 1928. Despite going forward as a popular candidate in the Northern states, his Irish Catholic identity ultimately worked against him.

By all measures Smith appeared largely detached from his faith in public life, and repeatedly denied that dogmatic matters could ever overrule the loyalty of Catholic Americans to

[380] Dearinger remarks that one major impediment to Irish Catholic acceptance, apart from their religion, was that "though visibly white in the social category of color, Irish immigrants were depicted as nonwhite in the nation's dominant racial system." It was only at the end of the nineteenth century – when African American freedmen migrated to the Northern industrial states en masse – that attitudes towards the Irish by their peers began to shift. In other words, as anxiety surrounding the blackness of freedmen heightened, the social currency attached to having any sort of European identity – even an Irish one – began to grow. See Dearinger, *Filth of Progress*, 76; Dowd, *The Irish*, 21. For more on the topic of the Irish, race and "whiteness," see Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (Hoboken, NJ: Routledge, 1995), and David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso Books, 1991).

their nation.[381] Yet, despite presenting himself as something of a liberal, urban gentleman, the image of the hard-drinking, hard-fighting Irishman was hard to fend off. Opponents saw Smith as having been cut from the same rough cloth as Irish labourers. [382] Opponents took issue with everything about Smith, from the people with whom he socialized (dock workers, Catholic priests) to the urban colloquialisms he deployed in his speech, to the cut of his suits, finding fault and proletariat sensibilities in all of them. It just went to show that even after putting on a suit and becoming governor of the nation's most populous state, the cigar smoking presidential candidate was, at the end of the day, unable to shake the pejorative stereotypes which branded every Catholic Irish American.

As this prominent example of anti-Catholic sentiment demonstrates, any historical analysis which supports the notion of there being radical change in America's attitude toward her Catholic minorities during this period seems misguided. Thus, rather than acting as a herald for equality and the positive acceptance of diversity, Smith's presidential campaign instead ended up giving new life to America's longstanding tendency towards "ethno-religious bigotry."[383] While nativist sentiments in late nineteenth and early twentieth century America were by no means homogenous, Catholics inspired sentiments of "fear and loathing" in the Protestant majority – a sentiment perhaps owing to their perceived racial proximity and similarity to the majority, along with the enduring prejudices inherited from Protestant Europe. [384] Smith's campaign thus became the

[381] After critic Charles Marshall published an open letter declaring that several of Pope Leo XIII's encyclicals made it clear that no Catholic could ever be fit to become President of the United States, Smith is popularly reported to have said "What the hell is an encyclical?" See Thomas J. Shelley, "What the Hell is an Encyclical?": Governor Alfred E. Smith, Charles C. Marshall, Esq., and Father Francis P. Duffy," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 15, no. 2 (Spring, 1997): 88. See also McGreevy, *Freedom*, 149.
[382] Christopher Shannon, *Bowery to Broadway: The Irish in Classic Hollywood Cinema* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2010), xxvi.
[383] Shannon, *Bowery to Broadway*, xii.
[384] Shannon, *Bowery to Broadway*, xxxi.

lynchpin for a revival in intolerance not seen in the states since the Know-Nothings of the 1850s.[385] While the backlash against Smith proved that America's Protestant majority was clearly not ready for the presence of prominent Irish American Catholics in politics (and least of all in Presidential races), the late '20s and '30s nevertheless marked a turning point of different kind and in a different arena. In the years following Smith's failed presidential bid, Irish American Catholics went on to achieve acceptance and even acclamation in the most privileged and rapidly dominant medium of entertainment culture: Hollywood.

From Suspicion to Stardom

While the Midwest of Sheen's upbringing and the urban metropolis where he forged his career were far removed from Southern California, it was there, during a generation prior, where the seeds that would move the nation towards Catholic acceptance – and by extension, his own success – were being sown.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Hollywood was little more than a small, unassuming municipality that straddled the edge of Los Angeles and the Santa Monica mountains. In 1910 the small city in the foothills voted to merge with their much larger neighbour, and just two years later some of the first motion picture companies settled around Los Angeles. Owing to its balmy weather and spacious potential for studio lots – as well as the distance it put between filmmakers and Thomas Edison's New Jersey based Motion Picture Patents Company, which had a penchant for

[385] The Know Nothings were members of a nativist political movement that existed for roughly twenty years in the mid-1800s. It was largely anti-Catholic, anti-Irish, and anti-immigration, finding its membership among those who traced or claimed descent from the earlier British colonists and settlers. They were propagators of the Fifth Column conspiracy that suggested all Roman Catholics, owing to their religious allegiance to Rome, were also politically aligned with the foreign power, rather than with America. McGreevy, *Freedom*, 148.

suing filmmakers – the area quickly became the center of America's fledgling movie industry.[386] By 1917, major motion pictures were being made, and the lead actors in these films – figures like Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks, and Mary Pickford – would quickly go on to become Hollywood's first stars. By the following decade – which saw the erection of the famous "Hollywood" sign on the hills – the suburb was producing several hundred feature films each year. While radio was still the dominant medium of entertainment in households and public spaces, movies were rapidly growing in popularity, and, as a result, Hollywood quickly became the dominant producer of not only films, but also American visual culture more generally.[387]

Despite coming from often disenfranchised socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, the 1930s produced no shortage of Irish American and Irish-born American actors landing leading roles in Hollywood pictures,[388] meaning that, in a peculiar twist of fate, Irish American Catholics were being widely disenfranchised in labour and politics at the exact same time they found themselves – and their stories – ascending in entertainment media. While some film representations of Irish issues and identities were played for little more than cheap laughs – as in

[386] Edison's use and control of patents was notorious, and "Hollywood was the ideal place to produce movies since filmmakers couldn't be sued there for infringing on motion picture patents." See: "Hollywood," *History.com*, August 21, 2018, https://www.history.com/topics/roaring-twenties/hollywood.

[387] It should be noted that certain scholars disagree with the idea that Hollywood was the predominant force in shaping American visual culture. Regarding the representation of masculinity in American visual culture specifically, John Beynon suggests that the influence of films must be placed alongside the influence of television, advertising and pop music. In other words, Beynon argues that the visual culture surrounding masculinity was constructed by this larger aggregate, and that film did not play a disproportionally larger role. See John Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture* (Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press, 2002), 63-65.

[388] To name a few: women such as Helen Kane, Helen Hayes and Maureen O'Sullivan gave highly acclaimed performances, while American-born Irish men such as James Cagney, Spencer Tracy and Pat O'Brien became prominent leading men in some of the highest grossing pictures of the early decades of American cinema.

in the infamous and widely boycotted 1927 film *The Callahans and the Murphys*[389] – others offered more positive and less prejudicial roles for Irish American actors to play.[390]

Contrary to expectation, American films with staunchly Irish stories helmed by Irish leads were hardly niche. Remarking on this, Gary D. Rhodes states "rather than being produced specifically for working-class Irish immigrants in urban areas like New York… it is clear that moving picture companies targeted Irish-themed films at the general American audience who attended screenings in small towns and big cities across the country."[391] So, not only were many popular movies of the era carried by Irish American actors, the stories themselves were fundamentally stories about the Irish in America – and, by extension, Catholics in America. These films did not shy away from depictions of Irish American hardships – their struggles and reconciliations with Catholic morality and their challenging interpersonal stories – and this exposed them in a way that became meaningful for wider American audiences. While the first Irish American celebrity actors of the 1930s and 40s indeed became celebrities through their portrayal of "Irish ethnic types,"[392] importantly, these portrayals did not characterize the Irish ethnicity as wholly other – rather, here, Irish Americans were portrayed as being both fully ethnic and fully American.[393] This more nuanced portrayal of Irish Americans – one that simultaneously reminded

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[389] The film was widely seen to have been catering to negative and stereotypical portrayals of the Irish as being overly rowdy and uncivilized. Irish magazines in America such as the *Gaelic American* received thousands of letters decrying the film. See Gary D. Rhodes, "Irish-American Film Audience, 1915-1930," *Post-Script,* 32, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 70-96.

[390] Commenting on the prominence of Irish actors in early Hollywood, film historian Kevin Brownlow remarks that even as far back as the silent picture era, the common Hollywood stereotype that the "Jews ran the business, [and] the Irish made the pictures" wasn't far from the reality. He also remarks that during the first few decades of the twentieth century, Irish prominence in American films was ironic given that Ireland had "no film industry" of its own to speak of. Kevin Brownlow, "When the Irish Ruled Hollywood," *Post-Script* 32, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 97.

[391] Rhodes, "Irish American Film Audience," 70.

[392] Dowd, *American Popular Culture*, 120.

[393] Shannon argues that the Irish American characters and actors who portrayed them called attention to both their differences and similarities, becoming both recognizably American and subtly other – with priests as the most visible and recognizable symbol of their difference and shared values. See Shannon, *Bowery to Broadway*, xxxiv; see also James T. Fisher, *On the Irish Waterfront: The Crusader, the Movie, and the Soul of the Port of New York* (Cornell University Press, 2009), ix.

viewers of their differences while at the same time closing the divide that separated them from the Anglo-Saxon, Protestant majority – reinforced the vision of America as a diverse, patchwork (or melting pot) of a nation. As a result, from the 1930s onwards, American movie goers became familiar with what would become quintessential Irish American figures, such as the hardboiled gangster with a kind heart underneath and – more significantly for our study – Catholic priests.

That priests – the most visible markers of Catholic otherness – would come to be major and often leading figures in early Hollywood productions of this era was by no means a certainty; and yet, it can hardly be considered a cultural fluke that slid under the radar of production studios. If a single figure can be said to have helped usher in not just the presence of priests in cinema but their casting by top actors in both leading and supporting roles, it would be Joseph Breen. Breen. Breen was the son of Irish immigrants raised in a devout Catholic household, and became a prominent journalist in the early 1930s before being before appointed by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) as the head of the newly created Production Code Administration (PCA).[394] While production studios had previously self-censored their work voluntarily, minimizing graphic violence and sexual content, the PCA made censorship requirements legally binding.[395] Breen, inspired by his staunch Catholic upbringing and enduring faith, approached his duties militantly.[396] Thus, as head of the censorship board, Breen acted as both the gatekeeper of Hollywood's content and the enforcer of its morality. For Breen, few

[394] See Thomas Doherty's, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema 1930-1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 9, and *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 11-14.

[395] The voluntary and un-enforceable nature of the pre-code era of Hollywood can be directly contrasted with the post-code era. Pre-code movies were largely informed by depression era consumer habits, in large part catering to the masses of unemployed men seeking entertainment. As such, they toyed with riskier depictions of sexual themes and notably women's bodies. While studios were generally unafraid of showing slightly more on screen than might otherwise be permissible in American society (such as a woman's exposed legs in stockings), advertisements such as posters or trailers emphasized or hinted at lewder themes than might have been present in the films. See Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood*, 1999.

[396] Fisher, *On the Irish Waterfront*, x.

characters held as much appeal – or significance as symbols of morality – as Catholic priests, and he ensured they would be portrayed as upright Americans in Hollywood's films. While priests thus could be (and were) routinely mocked in other areas of American culture, Breen ensured that their representation on screens across America would be consistently upstanding.

In his study on Irish Americans in classic Hollywood cinema, historian Christopher Shannon argues that the varied film representations of the Irish were meant to represent and encapsulate the diversity and difference of America's minority populations in a generally non-judgmental manner.[397] Of the films he discusses, three in particular stand out for our investigation and will figure into our discussion in the following pages: *Boys Town, Angels with Dirty Faces*, and *Going My Way*. Each one of these films is a prime example of the ways in which Irish American actors portrayed Irish American Catholic priests during this period – either in a leading role or as a major supporting actor. While each performance has its own nuances, three common elements stand out in particular: priests as characters with clear goals and relatable story arcs; priests as moral authorities and exemplars; and, perhaps most importantly, priests as familial figures with an overarching concern for the wellbeing of their communities. Taken together, these characteristics exemplify the positive portrayal of priests sought by Breen and others associated with the PCA, a portrayal which characterizes priests as "safe" figures who appear far removed from any of the negative stereotypes typically cast on them – and which in many ways mirror the later onscreen performance of Sheen himself.

[397] Shannon, *Bowery to Broadway*, xxxi.

Hollywood Archetypes

Safe Adults, Reckless Youths

The first of the three films I will discuss is *Boys Town*, which was released in 1938, just two months before *Angels with Dirty Faces* hit the theatres. In the film, Spencer Tracy portrays the real-life Father Edward J. Flannagan, who established the titular orphanage and associated organization in Douglas County, Nebraska in 1917. The movie opens with Flanagan hearing the final confession of a murderer on death row, who describes the troubles he had as a homeless youth and his inevitable spiral towards crime. Refusing to let other men follow the same path and believing – as he declares – that "there is no such thing as a bad boy," Flanagan makes it his life's goal to set up a sanctuary for delinquent young men.[398] Over the course of the film he encounters and overcomes a variety of opposition, from legal and jurisdictional matters to trouble among the young men he shelters at Boys Town. One in particular, Whitey Marsh – played by Mickey Rooney – idolizes his older brother Joe who is in prison awaiting trial for murder. After failing to be elected "mayor" of Boys Town by his peers, Whitey flees, intending to catch up with his brother who has recently escaped from prison. However, one of the other boys follows Whitey and is tragically killed after being abandoned by him. Still insistent on finding his brother, Whitey finally meets up with Joe during a robbery where he is accidentally wounded by a gunshot. Eventually, the delinquents give in, allowing Father Flannagan to come to their rescue while Joe and his criminal associates are captured. As a reward, Boys Town is flooded with donations and Flannagan begins planning an ambitious expansion for the sanctuary.

The image of the priest responsibly looking after delinquent youths and attempting to steer them away from a life of gangsterism is as important culturally as it is central to the film. The

[398] Michael Curtiz, dir. (1938: Warner Bros.).

eleventh-hour reversal at the beginning of the film – where the sinner on death row speaking to Flannagan sees the error of his ways and turns towards the Church – succinctly conveys the Catholic theory of redemption and salvation. Though, as the film demonstrates, Flanagan's interest in the salvific process is not only spiritual and moral, but also physical and communal. In other words, while Flanagan is indeed working to save the souls of the youths at the titular Boys Town, he is even more concerned with working to give them a better life in the here and now in America. As such, both the plot of *Boys Town* and the characterization of Flannagan specifically situate the priest a caretaker and surrogate father for young boys. As such, the characterization of Flanagan as a safe, paternal figure whom the boys can look up to inherently challenges the then pervasive suspicions cast on priests as agents of a foreign power or as possible corrupters of the youth.[399] By portraying Father Flanagan as a safe figure who desires to "save" the youth of the neighbourhood – not through proselytizing or doctrine, but rather through clothing, shelter and safety – the film maps Catholicism onto local and material concerns, grounding its supposedly superstitious and airy doctrines. Importantly, the movie reminds audiences that this was not some work of fiction: not only was Flannagan a real-life figure, but his Boys Town experiment also still existed, its mission intact and ongoing.

Fighting Stereotypes

Hollywood's depiction of Flannagan as an Irish American Catholic priest appeared in stark contrast with many of the stereotypes and representations of Irish Catholics in America at the time. Since the first waves of Irish immigration, Irish masculinity had inspired both fear and fascination in the American imagination. As discussed previously, the majority of the newcomers found

[399] See Haden, "Anti-Catholicism in U.S. History," 28.

themselves employed in industrial centers, performing hard labour in frequently unsafe conditions. Historically, the workplace acted not only as a space of male competition and rivalry for blue-collar workers and labourers, but also as a space of comradery and companionship that could extend beyond the working hours and into their shared spaces and activities.[400] Heavy drinking was common among blue collar workers and labourers, so much so that then-contemporary commentators saw boozing and brawling – two activities which seemed to occupy their work and leisure times – as "inherited traits" of the Irish in America, something "embedded" in Irish culture.[401] The stereotype of the drinking Irishman was, however unfortunate, not entirely mythical. As was the case with many labourers in America, the harshness of their working conditions often promoted – even necessitated – the consumption of alcohol on the job and after.[402] For many Irish left with no choice but to work in abhorrent conditions out of fear of remaining destitute, alcohol was valued as a "critical component of their transplanted culture and masculinity," becoming a crucial component of the construction of their masculinity and self-identification as "rough, daring and formidable" workingmen.[403]

Unsurprisingly, the preferred pastimes and hobbies of Irish Americans reflected their often hard, dangerous, and violent lives. Boxing became the favored (and uncouth) pastime of Irish Americans, as did other sports and forms of athleticism.[404] As a physical sport that relied on martial

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[400] E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformation in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 201. See also Matthew Pehl, "The Remaking of the Catholic Working Class: Detroit, 1919-1945," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 19, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 39.
[401] Dearinger, *Filth of Progress*, 75. See also Stephen Meyer, *Manhood On The Line: Working-Class Masculinities in the American Heartland* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 1-5; Shannon, *Bowery to Broadway* 29.
[402] Ryan Dearinger observes an irony in the stereotypes surrounding the apparent propensity to drink among the Irish, noting that many of the same people promoting these stereotypes were also involved in ensuring their working men never had want for alcohol. It wasn't uncommon for labourers to find part of their wages paid in rations of alcohol or even to have foremen supply their workers with a daily stipend of alcohol in order to both raise moral and push the men to work harder, and often more dangerously, than otherwise. See Dearinger, *Filth of Progress*, 66-74.
[403] Niko Besnier and Susan Brownell, "Sport, Modernity, and the Body," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41 (2012): 449. See also Dearinger, *Filth of Progress,* 77; Meyer, *Manhood on the line,* 199.
[404] Shannon, *Bowery to Broadway,* 24.

prowess, boxing matches were also tests and displays of manhood – here, Irish men could "affirm their masculinity," with boxers standing in metaphorically for the parishes or communities they represented, effectively putting the collective manhood of their supporters on the line.[405] Victories would be vicariously felt and enjoyed by their supporters while defeat brought with it a feeling of utter castration and impotence.[406] Sports and their associated activities allowed men to "escape from the domestic sphere and fraternize with other men, experiencing camaraderie and affirming their sense of male identity."[407] Bars – where watching sports and gambling often took place with plenty of alcohol – where quintessentially male spaces.[408] Owing to this, the Irish, as a people, were perceived to be more indulgent than others, "given to drink, sex, and generally revelry, which stood in stark contrast to stifling influences of Protestantism, lingering Puritan habits, and conservatives mores."[409] Such a rough and challenging masculinity was therefore framed as the embodiment of the existential threat to America's morality and moral sovereignty so feared by early nativists.[410]

However, the paradox of much of Irish masculinity in America at this time was that Irish masculinity was often times also fundamentally Catholic masculinity, effectively imbuing many

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[405] John Beynon echoes this sentiment, commenting on the sexual and racial nature of boxing as a pastime: victory emphasizes not just the physical superiority of the fighter, but also of the entire nation from which he sprang. Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture*, 46. See also Kelleher, "Young Men on the Make," 26; Dowd, *American Popular Culture*, 47.

[406] Besnier and Brownell have observed how particularly in migrant or transnational communities, local athletes become the embodiment of the pride of those same communities. Besnier and Brownell, "Sport," 453. Pierre Bourdieu has also referred to boxing as a bodily expression of the working class through sport. See P. Bourdieu, "How can one be a sports fan?" in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. S. During (London: Routledge, 1999), 427-40.

[407] Dowd, *American Popular Culture*, 46.

[408] Kelleher, "Men on the Make," 29. It is worth remarking, however, that Catholic men's identities and "spaces" are not necessarily as clear cut as Dowd and Kelleher seem to be suggesting. Religious studies scholar Alyssa Maldonado-Estrada's recent work *Lifeblood of the Parish* (New York: NYU Press, 2020), has helped showcase the complexity of Catholic male spaces owing to their devotional lives. She remarks that while often overlooked, churches and devotional communities are no less "male spaces" than stadiums or boxing rings, owing to the capacity for men to enact "manly" patterns of behaviour there, including lending their labour, artisanal skills, and so forth.

[409] Dowd, *American Popular Culture*, 17; Maldonado-Estrada, *Lifeblood*, 9-13.

[410] Kelleher, "Men on the Make," 23.

Irish men with a sort of ambiguity: they simultaneously embodied characteristics of rough, hardened and amoral labourers, as well as the more "feminine" qualities typically assigned to the religious. As Catholics, devotional life and religious culture inevitably seeped into their habits and informed their character, much of it carried over from their past in Ireland. As Irish-studies scholars Rebecca Anne Barr, Sean Brady, and Jane McGaughey remark in the introduction to their annotated volume *Ireland and Masculinities in History* (2019), Irish masculinities were religiously oriented and "inflected [with] social conservatism."[411] Discussing this ambiguity in his 2008 article "The Sword and the Prayerbook," Joseph Nugent notes how Irish clerics in the nineteenth century were often themselves the purveyors of this dual-natured masculinity. Initially, the Irish clergy emphasized a sort of heroic manliness that was rooted in martial prowess yet still connected to the spiritual. They emphasized that the ideal Irishman was like Christ both "in body and spirit," able to navigate both the secular and the sacred.[412] While models of tough, heroic and ultimately virtuous masculinity were initially emphasized through figures already present within the tradition – such as the world-travelling Ignatius Loyola and Francis Xavier, both of whom stood out as exemplars of manliness and transplanted identities – the ideals gradually shifted towards the ordinariness of priests as everyday people, as positive models for the community. [413] While Irish men may have reveled in and celebrated their working class credentials and its "harder" male activities and pastimes, they were nevertheless bound through their association to the Church.

This markedly religious aspect of Irish masculinity came to clash with hegemonic ideals of American masculinity that had largely relied on a separation of the public and the private – of

[411] Rebecca Anne Barr, Sean Brady and Jane McGaughey, "Ireland and Masculinities in History: An Introduction," in *Ireland and Masculinities in History*, ed. Rebecca Anne Barr, Sean Brady and Jane McGaughey (Cham, CH: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 4.
[412] Joseph Nugent, "The Sword and the Prayerbook: Ideals of Authentic Irish Manliness," *Victorian Studies* 50, no. 4 (Summer 2008): 597.
[413] Nugent, 'Sword and the Prayerbook," 592, 609.

home life and work life, of the secular and the religious – relegating duties such as child rearing solely to the domain of women and deeming its associated activities as "unmanly."[414] As John Beynon remarks, there was a clear dichotomy espoused around the ideal of manhood, in that

> being hard, physically powerful, and mentally strong, competitive, aggressive, dominant, rational, unemotional and objective are often advanced as typical indexical markers of the masculine. These traits, traditionally attributed to masculinity, present it as a superior state to femininity, whose attributes of softness, emotionality and nurturing are seen as wanting in comparison and, as a result, often employed in censure.[415]

It is in this aspect that Father Flanagan's real-life masculinity can be read being doubly important, for neither the real-life figure nor his onscreen depiction held to this dichotomy or shied away from elements marked as feminine. Instead, his religious calling and desire to act as a paternal figure to young men are presented as important, heroic and manly. Without a strong, caring and spiritual father figure – in this case, a celibate man – the young men in *Boys Town* would stumble into the more dangerous and destructive aspects of the harder masculinity which they idolized. While on the one hand, this characterization supported the age-old belief that young men require the active presence of masculine role models to support their proper development, the fear here is not that they would become too soft or feminine, but rather that they would fall into more untamed and unconscionable patterns of masculinity.

Catholic and American

A final aspect of Flanagan's characterization that I would like to emphasize – and which Shannon also notes in his own discussion of the film – is the choice to root his heroism and

[414] Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 5.
[415] Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture*, 56.

morality, not only in his Catholicism, but also in his Americanness: Flannagan was a role-model worthy protagonist because he was a great American; his vocation as a priest was merely incidental.[416] In other words, the way in which Flanagan is portrayed – as a morally upright protagonist looking after youth and opposing crime – is not inherently Catholic, and the traits he embodies could be those of any paternal moral exemplar. As such, according to Shannon, "the success of *Boys Town* marked a sea of change in American attitudes toward catholic priests... it was one thing to show a priest taming adult Irish gangsters in an urban ghetto; it was something entirely different to trust one with the children of America."[417] Narratives that showcased the concern of priests for their parishes and the youth of America directly countered stereotypical fears about the role of priests as indoctrinating foreign agents with malevolent agendas. Priests such as Father Flanagan were men you could trust around your children and were men who were concerned with securing a better future for America herself. Though he displayed heroic virtues in his service to others, he was neither a caricature nor depicted as being superhuman. Rather, his exploits were depicted as taking place in the realm of the ordinary, the normal, and in doing so the film helped underline the relative "ordinary" goodness in priests – a trait as well that viewers of *Life Is Worth Living* would later be hard pressed to deny Sheen.[418]

Soft Priest, Hard Gangster

Tracy's portrayal of Flanagan as the sympathetic and even heroic priest was well-received by the viewing public and film critics alike, earning Tracy the Academy Award itself for Best

[416] Shannon, *Bowery to Broadway*, 109.
[417] Shannon, *Bowery to Broadway*, 119.
[418] Nugent remarks that in the early twentieth century Irish Catholic priests ceased emphasizing the earlier superhuman and martial models of ideal masculinity, replacing them with an emphasis on the bodies of priests as ordinary people capable of ordinary acts of sanctity, effectively suggesting that the most positive role model for the young weren't figures from the distant past, but those in their immediate, everyday life. Nugent, "Sword and the Prayerbook," 609.

Actor at the eleventh Academy Awards in 1939. His portrayal would also help pave the way for a string of similarly well-received representations of priests in cinema. Following just two months after the successful release of *Boys Town,* the 1938 picture *Angels with Dirty Faces* reminded American audiences that priests could be benevolent, caring figures. Though not the leading man of the film (that spot would be taken by James Cagney), the character of Father Jerry Connelly (played by Pat O'Brien) stands as an example of the way early Hollywood filmmakers portrayed clerical figures as relatively safe and paternal figures who nevertheless understood the harder masculine attributes of living in rough neighbourhoods – and whose reformed character trajectory can, by extension, be read as mirroring the change in perceptions surrounding Irish American Catholics by wider audiences.

The film opens with a delinquent youth named Rocky Sullivan, (played by Frankie Burke during his adolescence and then James Cagney during adulthood) who gets sent to reformatory school (aka hard labour) after a failed trainyard robbery ends in his arrest. From there, a montage introduces us to a series of newspaper clippings and quick takes showcasing how Rocky spent the next fifteen or so years of his life in and out of the correctional system and taking part in an increasingly violent series of crimes. Upon returning to his old neighbourhood after taking a final "rap" on the advice of his lawyer and criminal associate Jim Frazier (played by Humphrey Bogart, no less), he encounters an old friend from his youth, Jerry Connolly. Jerry – a reluctant accomplice in the robbery at the start of the film – has now become a reformed parish Priest concerned with preventing the kids from becoming "hoodlums like me," as Rocky proposes.[419] Over the course of the film, Jerry attempts to help Rocky reform, but Rocky's old life and associates continue to pull him back towards crime. Rocky soon becomes a male role model to the unruly youths of the parish

[419] Michael Curtiz, dir., *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938: Warner Bros).

who come to admire his criminal ways and whom Jerry fears will follow him into a life of crime. At the end of the film, after killing two of his former criminal associates (including Frazier), Rocky takes Jerry hostage and is once again arrested by the police and sentenced to death. Jerry – who knows that how Rocky dies will affect whether the young men in the gang idolize or dismiss their mentor – pleads with Rocky to act like a coward on the way to the electric chair. Rocky initially refuses to let go of his pride, but eventually acts terrified in the moments before his execution, screaming for mercy. The young men later learn in the papers that Rocky apparently died a coward's death and lose respect for their one-time ideal – and by extension, with the masculinity he embodied – with the controlled, priestly masculinity of Father Jerry coming out as the victor and more desirable role model for the boys.

Angels with Dirty Faces did several remarkable things for the portrayal of Catholicism and priests in American visual culture. First, the movie mapped Catholicism to rough inner-city parishes, nestled among overcrowded and often gritty streets – a pairing which would continue to resonate, even with academics, to some extent into the twenty-first century. In numerous shots, the movie pans over the busy streets outside the parish showing viewers the relative grime, chaos and poverty of the community in which Jerry's church is situated. [420] The exterior shots situate the church within the immigrant community, a member of their toil and hardship on the still unfamiliar shores of America. As a pastoral worker, Jerry's main charges in the film happen to be the unruly young boys who make up his choir and who idolize Rocky, and Rocky himself, who embodies the violence and grit of the neighbourhood. Part of the Jerry's challenge appears to be in instilling order and domesticity in the neighbourhood, as the boys in the movie are initially shown to prefer

[420] As McGreevy notes, until the 1950s, Catholics primarily associated their sense of self with their parish neighbourhood, a situation made more pronounced by the catastrophic economic conditions of the 1920s that led many communities to turn inwards into ethnic enclaves and stasis. See John McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries*, especially chapter 4.

hanging out in an abandoned basement over going to the basketball games being organized by the parish. Second, like *Boys Town*, the movie positions the cleric ministering and watching over the boys as being manly and paternal. In this case, Jerry's athleticism is on display as he coaches them at basketball and other sports, suggesting that priests are not so far removed from more quintessentially male activities. Although the movie perhaps plays into the stereotype of Irish masculinity being both tough and working class, it also situates Catholicism on the bodies of men – and in particular, boys.

Much like *Boys Town*, *Angels with Dirty Faces* depicts various ideals and archetypes of masculinity in competition – in this case, between the tougher, "hard-boiled" masculinity that the boys idolize, and the safer, paternal masculinity of Father Jerry. Notably, this competition isn't a subplot but rather the primary focus of the film. In typical hardboiled fashion, Rocky "is a man of action who defines himself and his masculine identity in opposition to forms of non-masculinity;"[421] however, his eventual submission to Father Jerry's plea is not depicted as unmanly, but rather as heroic, suggesting that hard-boiled toughness is a sham, and that real toughness lies in sacrifice and submission. Much like in like *Boys Town*, then, it is the socially responsible and paternal masculinity embodied by the reformed Father Jerry that "wins" against the harder gangsterism embodied by Rocky and initially idolized by the youths. While the film suggests that there is a place for a reconfigured tough-guy Irish Catholic masculinity – Jerry himself used that life as a stepping-stone towards his fulfillment as a priest – ultimately it is Rocky's debasement and sacrifice at the end, which, though not seen as manly by the youths, nevertheless steers him more closely to the ideals espoused by Jerry's reformed masculinity. Such behaviour also reminds us of the duality or ambiguity of Irish masculinity, whereby the spiritual

[421] Jopi Nyman, *Men Alone Masculinity, Individualism, and Hard-Boiled Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), 90.

is always wrapped up in its configurations and performances, and ideal men are those who follow their moral compasses, whether priests or martyrs.[422]

Another interesting aspect of Irish and priestly masculinity in *Angels with Dirty Faces* is the general lack of female characters or feminine themes (something we also see in *Boys Town*). Despite the stereotypically gendered association between women and religion, the parish seems to be a rough and rowdy place, almost entirely populated by men and young boys. The one notable except is the character of Laury Marty (played by Ann Sheridan), a woman from the old neighbourhood who Rocky once picked on and who later rents him a room. While there are hints of a love story that develop between the two, her overall role in the film is minor and distant, and as a character she largely serves to echo Jerry's concern for Rocky's influence on the boys. As such, whether intentional or not, the movie situates Catholicism as being a *man's religion*, with the parish being the battlegrounds where conflicting themes of masculinity engage in competition. Here, then, Catholicism emerges as the space where tougher, urban masculinity is shaped and reformed towards more socially beneficial behaviour. In this regard, the movie perhaps unintentionally borrows and lionizes some elements of hardboiled masculinity, by pitting ideal masculinity in opposition to femininity – or in environments defined by its lack thereof.[423] As such, for a priest to be painted as caring and paternal, it did not open them to ridicule nor deny them space for their masculinity – which would parallel (and benefit) Sheen's later television performances.

[422] Shannon, *From Bowery to Broadway*, 19.
[423] Nyman, *Men Alone*, 41.

Irish in America vs Irish Americans

The third priest to be examined is Father "Chuck" O'Malley from 1944's *Going My Way*. Played by Bing Crosby – who won an Academy Award for the role – Father O'Malley stands out as a quintessential Hollywood priest: he combines the safe, paternal qualities of Father's Flanagan and Jerry with the charisma and charm typically expected of Hollywood's leading men. In the film, O'Malley is an outsider from Illinois who arrives in New York City to take charge of an ailing parish named St. Dominic's. The parish, we're told, "is in a bad way" owing to the current pastor, a man named Fitzgibbon, who is old and apparently unwilling or unable to turn things around.[424] Though the newcomer and the older priest initially clash in their pastoral styles, the two men eventually bond – over *Irish* whisky. With the help of O'Malley's talents as a songwriter and ability to orchestrate the boys of the parish into an effective choir, the priests are able to raise the necessary funding to save the parish from inevitable closure and decay. Though O'Malley is successful, the church is ultimately destroyed in a fire at the end of film. However, despite the tragedy and the failure to effectively "repair" the church, the lingering good of O'Malley's presence nevertheless had an immense impact on the lives of everyone associated with the parish. At the picture's end O'Malley disappears, much like the hero of an American Western – his job done, he allows the other characters to carry on with their now-repaired lives – which further roots him into the visual repertoire of heroic American images.

While certain plot elements of the film (such as the musical elements) might seem hokey by modern standards, the Best Picture-winning movie put both the Irish American experience and Catholicism front and center. The main plot of the film revolved around the administration and repair of a Catholic parish, and although only a minority of the film's audience would be able to

[424] Leo McCary, dir. *Going My Way* (1944: Paramount).

identify with this plot on a personal level, it was nevertheless translated in way that allowed the wider American audience to connect with the characters and their struggles as talented underdogs. Viewers could root for the priests in their underdog struggle to rescue their parish through their own ingenuity and talent. Of course, it did not hurt the film that the main character was played by Crosby, who was arguably the premier A-list celebrity of his era (and himself Irish American).

As a man of remarkable charm and personal magnetism, Crosby's personal charisma overlapped with that of the character he was embodying, allowing the character of O'Malley to transcend that of a motion picture priest and become conflated with the actor's own status as a heartthrob and celebrity. As such, the film is notable for the way Crosby portrayed the masculinity and even celebrity of priests. Where in contemporary popular culture priests are often depicted as grey-haired, elderly men out of touch with a changing world, such was not the case in the 1930s and 1940s. Crosby as O'Malley presents audiences with a good-looking, talented, and all-American man who effects changes in his environment through his own hard work and labour – the epitome of what American men could aspire to become – and who just so happened to be a priest. Such representations of priests were not altogether different than the representations being produced by Catholics themselves. Catholic publishers were keen on showing the younger generation that priests, while heroic, were not altogether different than they were.[425] They still enjoyed sports, male camaraderie and all the things young men should enjoy, except they happened to have found vocations within the church as opposed to outside. Catholic comic books and visual novels aimed at younger audiences also routinely depicted priests as being young, dark-haired and

[425] Catholic comics from the 1940s and 1950s frequently featured parish priests as protagonists or mentor figures in sometimes adventurous stories aimed at teenage readers. For a brief overview of Catholic Comic books, see Joel Fernandez, "A Brief History of Catholic Comic Books," *Damn Catholic*, October 21, 2019, https://damncatholic .com /2019/10/21/a-brief-history-of-catholic-comic-books/.

often handsome men who were physically fit and in the prime of their lives.[426] While this difference could be attributed to the changing demographics of the priesthood – the first half of the twentieth century saw far higher numbers of young recruits – it also acted as a reminder to audiences that priesthood was a viable, fulfilling profession, one in which a man, though celibate, was no less of a man.[427]

Interestingly, O'Malley is not depicted as being "soft" all the way through: he displays a strength of character that is unwilling to back down, and he is not afraid to hold his ground and lightly butt heads when it comes to it. At one point in the film, O'Malley accidentally breaks a window with a ball and apologizes to the man from inside for his mistake and tries to make amends. The man however repeatedly chastises him about the incident before boldly declaring that he doesn't understand or like priests because he doesn't believe in anything. He eventually, and reluctantly, throws the ball back to O'Malley who then jokes "You even throw like an atheist," drawing a contrast not between traditional masculinity and femininity, but between Catholic and atheistic masculinity, with Catholicism as the stronger, more manly of the two.[428] Thus, though he is a priest being derided by the man in the scene, O'Malley nevertheless comes across as being the humbler and more athletic of the two.

Going My Way also depicts masculinities in conflict, albeit in a more subtle manner than we saw in *Boys Town* or *Angels with Dirty Faces*. In the film, there is an open competition between clerical and non-clerical masculinities. O'Malley's restrained, productive and ultimately socially

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[426] Of the apparent danger of secular comics, Robert Orsi quotes Jesuit Scholar Robert Southard's remarks about comic book superheroes representing "a kind of duplicate of the Christian ideal [but] with pagan overtones." Robert A. Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 157. As discussed in Chapter 2, Sheen himself was also the subject of a children's colouring book that emphasized his connection to the land and his capacity for manual (and manly) labour.

[427] See note See Andrew Holt, "Between Warrior and Priest: The Creation of a New Masculine Identity during the Crusades," in *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jennifer D. Thibodeaux (London: Palgrave Macmillian, 2010), 185-203.

[428] Leo McCary, dir. *Going My Way* (1944: Paramount).

beneficial masculinity is contrasted with that of Tony Scaponi (played by Stanley Clements), the young leader of a gang of delinquents. Scaponi, an Italian American and fellow Catholic, is depicted as wayward and as embodying a competing ethnic model of masculine authority. O'Malley acts as the voice and embodiment of order, holding a particular disdain for rougher, uncouth patterns of masculinity. In one scene, a visiting friend, who is also a priest, offers to take O'Malley to play a couple of rounds of golf, to which he declares "a golf course is nothing but a poolroom moved outdoors" and filled with profanity.[429] It is through the force of his will that O'Malley steers the youth of the parish towards a model of socially acceptable masculine behaviour. Scaponi begins the movie as a model offering the opposite pull, towards a harder masculinity that proves itself through petty crimes and being a nuisance to authorities. In this sense, Scaponi's masculinity is decidedly working class and underdog, a model which Catholic Americans themselves were widely purported to follow. However, it is O'Malley who ultimately befriends Scaponi and reforms the younger man, reconfiguring the standards by which Scaponi rates himself as a man. By the end of the film, Scaponi becomes a choir leader, someone so transformed that he is no longer recognizable as the young man at the beginning of the movie.

Assigning wild, unruly and ultimately immature masculine qualities to a non-Irish immigrant character transfers these unpopular and demeaning elements of masculinity away from O'Malley – a priest who exhibits control and caring – and Irish Americans more generally. By portraying O'Malley as the embodiment of a calm, cool-headed, caring and ultimately noble man – someone the audience could identify and sympathize with – the film helps dispel and break the stereotypical representation of Irish Americans as rough working-class gangsters. Equally so, by associating a disdain for authority and a more lowly, earthy iteration of masculinity with Scaponi's

[429] Leo McCary, dir. *Going My Way* (1944: Paramount).

waywardness, the movie suggests that such masculine behaviour is somehow un-Catholic. The film therefore presents Irish Americans as model citizens seeking to reform society in a socially beneficial manner, while at the same time depicting the masculinity of the priest in an ideal manner, as one who restores and upholds order and its institutions without requiring violence or an ill temper to do so. Ultimately, O'Malley is revealed to embody a more powerful masculinity than Scaponi, thus informing the viewers that the calm, nurturing and ultimately celibate masculinity of the priest is greater than that of the brash, troublesome youth that Scaponi – and by extension, any ethnic stereotype – embodied in the film's opening.

While the representation of O'Malley certainly bears a number of similarities with that of Flanagan and Jerry, his characterization differs in the way the film emphasizes his *Americanness* over his Irish heritage. From their first scene together, O'Malley is meant to stand in contrast with Fitzgibbon, not only in their administration styles or age differences, but also in their identities. Fitzgibbon – as we learn from a scene where he expresses longing for his distant homeland – is an example of the Irish in America, whereas O'Malley is Irish American. As such, O'Malley is everything Fitzgibbon is not at the start of the film – youthful, courageous, innovative, and hopeful. One might argue that as Fitzgibbon acclimatizes himself to the new younger priest, he is simultaneously acclimatizing himself with the America O'Malley vicariously represents. However, as we shall see in the following section, representations of Irish American priests in the following decade took an altogether different turn in their characterization.

Manly, Spiritual and Nuanced

In the Hollywood movies of 1930s and 40s, the rash, abrasive, hard-hitting and hard-drinking masculinity typically imparted to the Irish was avoided, sublimated, or replaced with

more socially conscious patterns of masculinity, primarily embodied by the various priests discussed. These Irish American priests were decidedly safe and paternal figures who embodied the spirituality expected of their position while simultaneously coming across as distinctly American figures in the process. However, by the 1950s, Hollywood was transforming. Where the 1930s and 1940s had to show priests in a safe manner, by the 1950s it had become *safe* to show priests in more challenging performances and characterizations, ones that embodied more of the ambiguity of the Irish American Catholic experience and expectations. Notably, the hardboiled qualities of Irish gangsters – such as those embodied by James Cagney in *Angels with Dirty Faces* – could now equally be applied to onscreen clergy.

Karl Malden's performance as Father Barry in *On the Waterfront* – the movie discussed at the beginning of this chapter – was largely emblematic of this shift. Where Crosby could provide a certain celibate sex appeal to his character, Madden, though indeed possessing a charisma and magnetism of his own, did not embody the sort of visual charisma exuded by Crosby. While Crosby – a youthful, good-looking crooner – spent his time surrounded by children and women, Malden's priest embodied a hard, masculine character that working-class labourers could identify with, and which held a particular immediacy for Irish Americans. The movie revolves around a young man named Terry Malloy (played by Marlon Brando). Terry is a dock worker, and, like many of the men working in that part of the city, is inherently tied up with the mob. Though initially bound to a pact of silence that binds many of the men together (and lets the mob thrive), he eventually faces a crisis of conscious and a change of heart. At the urging of Father Barry, our combative reformer priest, Terry admits to his sweetheart Evie that he had an unwilling role to play in her brother's murder at the opening of the film, and later goes on to testify publicly against mobster / union boss Johnny Friendly. Terry's testimony causes a rift between him and the other

men, who effectively ostracize him for his commitment to the good of the community over the unspoken code of silence. In the end, Terry confronts Johnny Friendly and is badly beaten by his goons. However, rising up from his sacrificial state and marching to the dock to work wins him the respect of the men who shied away from him, and in turn he triumphs on the side of communal good over that of the mob.

On the Waterfront, then, unlike the other films referred to in this chapter, reshapes and inverts many of the previously established tropes associated with Hollywood priests.[430] While Father Barry is still a man looking out for the good of his community, instead of being portrayed as a safe figure surrounded by young boys in need of guidance, the wayward figures in his surroundings are Irish American men and the mob influencers who hold sway over them. Unlike Flanagan, O'Malley and Jerry, Barry's flock isn't composed of children, but working-class adults. As such, the masculinity displayed by Barry's character is stripped of any of the safer, gentler attributes associated with those men. His masculinity is undeniably hard-boiled, like that of Rocky in *Angels with Dirty Faces*. As a "manly" man thrust into the middle of unruly dock workers – lost men who might be the older versions of the wayward boys in other films – Barry fully inhabits the hardboiled world of violence, ambushes, competition and death.[431] Where the earlier priests were often treated with reference and deference, even in conflict, the dock workers freely heap insults on Father Barry and even consider having him murdered.

In terms of personality and physique, there is nothing "soft" about Father Barry. He smokes cigarettes and drinks beer. He walks into bars and dockyards without a moment's hesitation, and

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[430]In a remarkably self-aware moment about the historical legacy of Irish Americans in film and Catholic priests in particular, one theatrical trailer for *On the Waterfront* states that the film's "is as warm and moving as 'Going My Way' (but with brass knuckles)." The film thus feels indebted to the enduring legacy of these earlier films, despite having starkly different plans for the ways in which it will depict its characters. See Movieclips Classic Trailers, "On the Waterfront (1954) Trailer #1 | Movieclips Classic Trailers," YouTube video, 2:32, Feb 14, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOdYAXOfLMc&ab_channel=MovieclipsClassicTrailers.

[431] Nyman, *Men Alone*, 33.

he comes into every scene with a sort of fiery, righteously angry energy that threatens to erupt at any moment. When the men pelt him with fruit and beer bottles, he remains still and unflinching, keeping himself calm and controlled while they succumb to emotional outbursts and petty antics. Barry also explicitly proves his toughness and grit when he enters a bar and slugs Terry in the face. By entering a traditionally masculine space and exerting his authority through physical prowess, Barry demonstrates – not just to the men who work in the docks, but also to the viewer – that there was nothing to be questioned about this priest's hardened masculinity. Yet there is ambiguity here: though reflective of their present circumstances, Barry's masculinity, like that of the longshoremen, is rooted in the grittier demands of the past, oblivious to the gains made over the past generation in terms of perception, attitudes and acculturation.

Unlike the safe figure Father Flanagan – who Shannon read as American first and priest second – Barry is unapologetically Irish and Catholic, and perhaps only incidentally American. In one scene, Father Barry embraces his Irish roots by referring to himself sarcastically as "just a potato-eater." [432] In another scene, where he delivers a monologue to the men at the docks imploring them to turn away from the mob, he powerfully invokes Jesus. "[Christ] sees you selling your souls to the mob for a day's pay!"[433] he declares with righteous anger, adding that Jesus isn't back in the Church, but "kneeling right here beside you."[434] In doing so, Barry brings religion out of the church and into the docks, effectively bridging the barrier between the "feminine" space of the church and the harder, "masculine" space of the docks. In doing so, the story echoes the hardboiled trope of placing masculine and feminine spaces in contrast and opposition, two halves separated by a ranked dichotomy whereby manly spaces and the values believed to be inculcated

[432] See: Elia Kazan, dir., *On the Waterfront* (1954: Horizon Pictures).
[433] Kazan, dir., *On the Waterfront.*
[434] Kazan, dir., *On the Waterfront.*

there (courage and heroism) are at the top.[435] In this regard, Barry's Jesus is equally as tough and challenging as the Irish American dock workers. Hardly a sissy who died on a cross and never got his hands dirty, "Jesus stands alongside" the dock workers every morning as they line up for work, and is crucified anew whenever a good man is prevented from doing his duty or getting an honest day's pay from the mob.[436] A similar sentiment about the toughness of religious figures is echoed by Evie, Terry's love interest, when she asks, "Did you ever hear about a saint hiding in a church?"[437] In this, she suggests that true saints are the ones out there in the world, working where they're needed most, much like Barry is doing in the neighbourhood.

Ultimately, where the earlier movies depicted priests in ideal and almost neutered terms – presenting them as members of society that Americans need not fear – Father Barry spoke directly to the rougher side of the Irish American experience by embodying many of the hardboiled masculine characteristics more typically embodied by gangsters. In revisiting *Angels with Dirty Faces*, we can see that Father Barry channels much of the same energy and physicality of Rocky, and very little of the energy characterized by O'Malley and Flanagan in *Going My Way* and *Boys Town*. While it is possible that American viewers of the 1950s were simply growing more accustomed to increasingly challenging films and characters, Father Barry's turning away from earlier priestly archetypes speaks volumes about the changing perception of Catholicism in America.

As discussed earlier, the Catholic priests in the films of the '30s and '40s were framed in contrast to the still-simmering nativist backlash that erupted in the wake of Smith's presidential campaign. In this context, one can see that the impetus for creating safe, soft and reformed priestly

[435] Nyman, *Men Alone*, 35.
[436] Kazan, dir., *On the Waterfront.*
[437] Kazan, dir., *On the Waterfront.*

characters was to dispel anti-Catholic myths and stereotypes while conforming to the censorship requirements of the PCA. Father Barry appears to be a denial of these earlier tropes, tropes which gave priests little room to be anything other than shining examples of what Irish American Catholics could accomplish. Hollywood's move to explore more challenging characterizations of priests can thus be read as mirroring a change in the overall social climate: studios no longer had to defend the image of priests in the face of nativist prejudices and could instead depict them as complicated characters who borrowed from the personality traits of anti-heroes. In essence, priests had moved beyond their earlier and simpler characterizations as safe, soft, and reformed, and could now, by embracing their Irishness, embody a wider range of characters and experiences in the American canon of popular culture. Taken as a whole, this makes it strange that Sheen – perhaps the safest priest of all – would rise to television fame at precisely the same moment in time.

Comfortably Anachronistic

In 1954, Sheen was at the peak of his popularity. His program, *Life is Worth Living*, was in its third season and showed no sign of stopping.[438] The bishop had just won an Emmy award the year before, and now found himself nominated once again, an honour that highlighted how well-known and liked he was by American audiences. Like the other priests we have examined in this chapter, Sheen did little to hide his ethnic background or his visibility as a member of the cloth. He spoke with a lingering Irish brogue that defined his voice and gave him an accent that connected him with an older time and place. He was also visibly Catholic – as noted previously, he appeared in full clerical regalia and littered his set with Catholic imagery – an aesthetic choice which readily

[438] While this season would be Sheen's last on the DuMont Network – which had been in financial trouble for some years, owing in part to poor business decisions and bad luck – it would continue on for three more seasons after being picked up by ABC shortly following the dissolution of DuMont.

asserted his identity and difference to audiences. The former choice is particularly striking. Had Sheen been interested in defusing any lingering affiliation between Catholicism and suspicion, he could have chosen to perform in less ornamental garb, taking on the more comfortable black suit and upturned collar that marked virtually every priest in Hollywood movies and which he himself wore during his guest appearances at dinner and television specials.[439]

Despite wearing his Catholicism on his sleeve, Sheen's show was decidedly ecumenical, a choice that appealed to the shared ecclesiastical foundations of America's Hebraic-Christian identity – an identity which the nation frequently found strength in during troubling times. Unlike the later televangelists who would follow in his footsteps, Sheen "seldom quoted chapter and verse: he remolded the stories of the gospels to fit the times" and gave them a unique American spin.[440] Sheen's brand of television Catholicism was one which consistently overlapped with the symbols and motifs of wider America which had already been planted there by Hollywood a generation before he graduated to the medium. In this regard, it is important to remember that neither Sheen's performance nor the characterization of Father Barry in *On the Waterfront* can be read as having occurred in a vacuum. While both appeared on screen at the tail end of a long tradition of priests in Hollywood films, what is perhaps more relevant is that both of their onscreen debuts coincided with a particular moment in American history – that of the Cold War. Onscreen, Barry could be read as embodying a certain Cold War no-nonsense toughness, not unlike that of Joseph McCarthy. Sheen, on the other hand, was a comforting and safe persona that brought Americans back to simpler, stabler times. Ultimately, Sheen reminded audiences that to be American required a moral and religious underpinning of the self. Like the priests in the films discussed, Sheen's identity as

[439] Notably his appearance on *What's My Line?* as was discussed in Chapter 3.
[440] Thomas Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 158. It bears noting that Catholic priests and speakers of this era would seldom – if ever – quote chapters and verses from the Bible with the same emphasis as their Protestant counterparts, instead drawing their authority from tradition.

an American, as well as his emphasis on the Americanness of Hebraic-Christian values, was equally emphasized to his audience.

In this sense, the legacy of the earlier priests of Hollywood was well suited for the time, and offered a repertoire of visual tropes which Sheen, conscious or not, could harken towards. Like the characters of Fathers Flanagan, O'Malley and Jerry, Sheen also embraced the representation of priests as being caretakers for the youth, or at the very least, *safe* figures who were involved in the lives of children. While there is little evidence of Sheen having spent much time during his lengthy career in the company of children, he was nevertheless an avid teller of anecdotes, and frequently opened his episodes with stories involving children. In one episode, he talked about a little girl who was being taught catechisms by her mother and is quizzed about the difference between mortal and venial sins. The little girl said, "the mortal sin makes God angry, the venial sin makes Him nervous."[441] In another episode, he tells the audience about a girl studying at Rosemont College. She tells the sister running the class that "I just finished reading Bishop Sheen's work on *Three to Get Married*. God and I are willing, but we can't find the man."[442] He also told stories he was personally involved in. In one episode, Sheen informs the audience that he received a letter from a mother who watched his program. She wrote to tell him that Cathy, "our little 2-year-old adores watching you… you get many kisses" when it's time to say goodnight, and that she sits "in her rocker almost spellbound during your entire talk."[443] How he came into possession of these stories is unclear – perhaps they were among the mountains of mail he received, or perhaps they were mere inventions of his own imagination. Whatever their origin, it is telling that he shares them. Stories such as these – which detail a certain level of intimacy between Sheen and children

[441] *Life is Worth Living.* "Signs of our Times." DuMont Network, Written by Fulton Sheen, 1954.
[442] *Life is Worth Living*, "The Training of Children." ABC, Written by Fulton Sheen, 1956.
[443] *Life is Worth Living*, "Three Greatest Confessions in History" ABC, Written by Fulton Sheen, 1957.

– speaks volumes about his ability to convey himself to audiences as a safe, paternal and familial figure, not unlike a dear family friend or a relative.[444]

Out of all the priests discussed, Sheen perhaps shares the greatest number of similarities with the handsome and charismatic character of O'Malley. Despite being in his 50s when *Life is Worth Living* aired, his clean-shaven face, perfectly slicked-back hair, and generally meticulous grooming made him appear as a man far younger than his years. Indeed, his good looks hardly went unnoticed, by viewers and historians alike. Scholar Thomas Doherty comments on the "penetrating" quality of Sheen's eyes and his "silver fox hair," even going so far as to describe him as a "dashing Don Diego Zorro… a suave Count Dracula."[445] He further recounts television critic Marya Mannes as stating "the man has magic… he could probably qualify as a leading man at any studio" in Hollywood.[446] In effect, Sheen embodied a real life, living example of the kinds of priests Hollywood was so fond of portraying a generation previously. However, the similarities and overlap between both men goes deeper than surface level attributes. Both are relative outsiders who found fame and acclaim – each hailing from Illinois, no less – before eventually finding themselves assigned to revitalizing institutions in New York City. While O'Malley was sent to revitalize a sagging Parish, Sheen was sent to tend to the SPOF, and, as a result, the coffers of both eventually overflowed with donations. Both figures also communicated a strong personal magnetism, and the two of them could even bond over stories of broken windows.[447]

When comparing Sheen to the more hardened character of Father Barry – who embodied Hollywood's new model of priestly masculinity – it may seem remarkable that Sheen could be so

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[444] As referred to in the previous chapter, Sheen's "Uncle Fultie" nickname can be read as more than just a play on words with Milton Berle's similar "Uncle Miltie" nickname – it demonstrates the extent to which he was effective in endearing himself to audiences as a safe wholesome figure and family viewing choice.
[445] Doherty, *Cold War*, 153.
[446] Doherty, *Cold War*, 153-4.
[447] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay,* 16. As noted in Chapter 1, Sheen recounts a story of breaking a window in his family home as a child.

well-received. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, Sheen's success appears to be rooted in the differing expectations viewers had for the medium of television.[448] As a medium whose personas embraced friendly, familiar and even familial trappings, characters bearing strong similarities to the earlier priestly archetypes were well suited for the intimacy of the small screen and the content of its programming. Where a family might eagerly invite Sheen into their home through their television set, they would likely be much more reticent to invite in a figure like Father Barry. Sheen appeared as a close family friend or a relative might – without confrontation, controversy or challenge. As scholar Thomas Doherty remarked, Sheen was a "pure product of early television, a time when a singular face in close up on the small screen could still lull viewers in a trance of attention."[449]

In this regard, characters like Father Barry – who were then gracing Hollywood's screens and who would becoming increasingly frequent as the medium evolved – took more risks and moved away from the cozier content that was produced under the shadow of Breen and the PCA. Malden's performance as Father Barry (filmed in the same year that Breen retired, no less) was, in many ways, the opposite of what Sheen brought to viewers on weekly basis. Where Father Barry was loud and angry, Sheen was calm and soothing. Where Barry walked into violent spaces and was himself the subject of violence, Sheen was safe and reassuring. Ultimately, films like *On the Waterfront*, despite having trailers referencing earlier Catholic centric films like *Going My Way*, made for decidedly more challenging viewings than any of the earlier films discussed in this paper – with the possible exception to *Angels with Dirty Faces*, which also employed many of the tropes

[448] Television offers audiences a different viewing experience than cinemas. Situated in the living rooms of private homes, viewing events are experienced by the whole family and are defined by its comfort and simplicity. In effect, early television doesn't seek to challenge one's expectations but rather re-affirm the values with which the audience was already familiar. See also Tony Wilson, *Watching Television: Hermeneutics, Reception and Popular Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), especially 24-28, and Chapter 3 of the present work, esp. the heading "New and Familiar: Celebrity Reconfigured."
[449] Doherty, *Cold War*, 153.

and characterizations of hardboiled masculinity while simultaneously questioning their merits. In sum, viewers of Sheen's program did not tune in to be challenged, any more than audiences expected to be challenged by Berle's antics on the *Texaco Star Theatre*. Rather, they tuned in to listen to his lectures for the same reasons they read his and other post-War preachers' bestselling books – to find comfort and reassurance in an uncertain world around a shared ecclesiastical foundation which could give them stability.[450] Therefore, if Sheen was a living, breathing anachronism by the time his television program first came on the air, that was perhaps the point.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have examined the ways in which Irish Catholic masculinity has been constructed and perceived in American culture, along with the ways Irish Catholic priests have been portrayed in visual media. As Christopher Dowd observes, "the origins of American popular culture are rooted in immigrant life, cultural concerns about assimilation, and attempts to define common American experiences across class and social boundaries."[451] Accordingly, "popular culture provides a dynamic, discursive space in which communal identity constructions (including ethnic identity constructions) can take place. It allows for identities to be proposed, tested, rehearsed, revised and (sometimes) rejected."[452] In our case, the visual representations of Irish Catholic priests and their masculinity were shaped, molded and reconfigured through the visual media of popular culture, and, in turn, became an accepted part of American popular culture. From the 1930s onwards, priests were presented to the American viewing public, not as agents from an

[450] Scholar James M. Patterson used the term "ecclesiastical foundation" to point to the shared Judeo-Christian underpinnings of the American national identity, rooted in membership to a faith group or religious congregation. Patterson, "The Cross or the Double Cross: Roman Catholicism, Anti-Communist and the Political Theology of Venerable Fulton Sheen," *Perspectives on Political Science* 45, no. 1 (2016): 47-58.
[451] Dowd, *American Popular Culture*, 2.
[452] Dowd, *American Popular Culture*, 13.

insidious foreign power, but as socially-minded community organizers and educators of youth. They stood out as masculine role models, offering powerful alternatives to the rough, elemental forms of masculinity often stereotypically ascribed to Irish Catholics in America. In every film, the masculinity of priests was contrasted with those of unruly figures – be they wayward youths, gangsters, or union boss mobsters – over whom they ultimately prevailed and positioned themselves as models of masculinity worthy of emulation. And so, while Catholic masculinity on screen continued to be problematic – largely owing to gangster and mob masculinity being in large part holdovers from earlier anti-Catholic and classist attitudes – the bodies of priests became the canvasses where other Catholics could be painted differently.[453]

It was from this canon of popular culture that we can see and understand a little more about the figure of Sheen and what made his presentation to millions of viewers on a weekly basis so endearing. However, one irony of his performance is that, by the 1950s, Sheen – and the earlier priestly archetypes who came before him – seemed to embody a disposition that was much more recognizably "WASP-y" than what might have been traditionally associated with Irish Catholics. In other words, any association with the negative aspects stereotypically ascribed to the Irish – rough labour, unruliness, etc. – typically pointed towards a previous time, and a distant immigrant past, rather than the present. The characters of Fathers O'Malley, Flanagan, Jerry – and even Sheen himself – became more acceptable to mainstream Protestant viewers by embodying a familiar masculinity. This, in turn, had the effect of ironing out and homogenizing whatever differences their immigrant ancestors might have embraced, resulting only in vestigial differences, such as a lightly spoken brogue. In this sense, we can perhaps see a mirroring when we compare the

[453] It is perhaps worth noting that depictions of Irish working-class men as being subversive, violent and prone to joining gangs continues to be prevalent in contemporary film and other media. Martin Scorsese's mob films such as *Goodfellas* (1990) and *The Departed* (2006) as well as *Gangs of New York* (2002) also associate Irish American masculinity with mob violence and present the male Irish body in an unresolved state of moral conflict.

character of Father Barry to Sheen. Where Barry reminds viewers of the rough edges of the American dream – experienced daily by successive generations of the Irish Catholic diaspora – Sheen stands in as the opposite, promoting the message that these immigrants and their descendants could not only rise above their humble origins, their blue-collar toil and daily hardships, but also at become fully and convincingly American – even in spite of their lingering differences with the Anglo-Saxon majority.[454]

Shannon suggests that the rising prominence and visibility of Catholic priests in early to mid-twentieth century American popular culture can be read as the "test case" for America's emerging conception of itself, not as a nation built around a single ethnic group as was frequently the case in Europe in the preceding century, but as an evolving pluralistic democracy.[455] Where the late 1920s saw revivals of anti-Catholic sentiments resulting from the ill-fated presidential campaign of Al Smith, from the 1930s onward Hollywood played a pivotal role in rehabilitating and demystifying the image of Catholic Americans and priests as their most visible symbols. Even then, Catholicism was still very much an underdog religion in the American landscape, with its adherents predominantly still living in parish neighbourhoods of a single ethnicity up until the end of the Second World War.[456] This only began to shift in the 1940s and early 1950s, when Catholics were presented with new horizons and the means of leaving behind their close-knit parish communities that had bound them together for so long. It was thus there, in the newly built suburbs, that Irish American Catholics more fully reached the end of a long trajectory that took them and

[454] Irish American masculinity was by no means static or singular. Figures such as Sheen and Barry, when taken side by side, demonstrate the possibilities and potential evolution of ethnicity and masculinity. See Kelleher, "Men on the Make," 32.
[455] Shannon, *Bowery to Broadway*, 120.
[456] Some scholars also point to the widespread Irish American participation in the military forces in WWII as a final "test" of their American-ness. A similar thing occurred for post-Famine immigrants who were swiftly encouraged to join the Union Army during the Civil War. See George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1996.

their stories from despised, dangerous outsiders, into ideal examples of Americans. As such, the conception of priests in American popular culture foreshadowed the gentrification process that Irish American Catholics themselves underwent from the era of nativism to the post-war suburbs.

Sheen's television show can thus be read as having occurred at the apex of this trajectory, at the confluence of time when America was beginning to come to terms with its diversity and accept its identity as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society. Sheen was not one to hide away in a church, and, as a preacher, he could at once cling to and shed the rigidity of his Catholic identity and speak to the whole of America, even as a minority. His appearance is also noteworthy for having occurred on screen before the arrival of Protestant televangelists such as Billy Graham, marking perhaps a rare moment when an inherently denominational spokesperson could appear and to audiences speak more broadly. Sheen, as heir to a lengthy tradition of depicting priests in morally upright and positive roles, encapsulated the possibility of the societally benevolent religious minority who stood out as a quintessentially American figure. In this sense, his 1950s television show stands out as the proof of America's receptivity to Catholicism and the minority communities which constituted that faith. In the same way Hollywood presented Irish Catholics as part of America's broader urban village, Sheen's television show did the same for institutional Catholicism, taking the tradition and its doctrines out of its austere and ornate churches and cathedrals, and presenting them to Americans in a way that was broadly appealing, recognizable and familiar. In case there were any lingering doubts about the character and allegiance of Irish Catholics in the early 1950s, Sheen was living, breathing, performing proof that Irish Catholics had become part of the larger patchwork of what an American man could be. Nevertheless, despite his contrast with the hardboiled masculinity of Father Barry, Sheen, as we shall see in the following chapter, was not without a certain hardness of his own.

Chapter 5 – Hard Bodies, Hard Nation: Fulton Sheen, Joseph McCarthy and Anxieties About 1950s American Masculinity

In 1959, New York's *Herald Tribune* ran an extensive and largely flattering ten-part biography of Fulton Sheen entitled "The Bishop Sheen Story." [457] Written by journalist Francis Sugrue, the series was intended to build excitement around Sheen's sophomoric (and short-lived) return to television after the cancellation of *Life is Worth Living*. Ostensibly seeking to provide a behind the scenes glance at the man whose face was by then well-known across America, the reader was served carefully selected tidbits from Sheen's personal life. In part five of the series, the article opened with a section discussing Sheen's daily habits and hobbies. Giving a nod to his workaholic tendencies, it mentioned that Sheen – rather heroically – refused to "bow" to a 40-hour work week and spent the vast majority of his time undertaking work for the SPOF, writing books and articles, preparing speeches, instructing converts, or on any other number of his prolific endeavours. While the article was keen to display Sheen's formidable output where publishing and other duties were concerned, Sugrue conceded that the aging Sheen did take some off time, enjoying a number of markedly gendered pastimes. The bishop, like his fellow Americans, was known to take the "occasional television glance at a baseball or football game," though he much preferred participating in similar activities himself. At 58, Sheen was presented a man of "ruddy good health, enhanced by tours on many a Washington golf course."[458] Sugrue also notes that Sheen was no slouch on the tennis court, a statement he supports with an apparently candid quote from a certain

[457] Not to be confused with "The Bishop Sheen Story" by C.G. Conniff (1953), which was published by Fawcett as a standalone magazine at the height of his popularity. Francis Sugrue, "The Bishop Sheen Story: Part Five" *New York Herald Tribune*, 1959, News Clippings 1950-1959, Catholic University of American Archives, Washington, D.C., USA.

[458] Though based in New York City at the time of the article, Sheen had previously resided in Washington, D.C., where he taught at the CUA from 1927-1950.

Freddy Botur, the local "tennis pro at the River Club on the Upper East Side" which Sheen frequented. In Botur's professional opinion, Sheen was an "excellent player" – especially for a man of his age.[459] While the privileged status signaled by tennis and golf as sports hobbies – not to mention the status signaled by playing tennis with pros at a private club in New York's Upper East Side – might have been simply matter of fact in Sugrue's biographical work, the subtle nod given to an aging bishop and prominent anticommunist's apparent late-life athleticism, vitality, and hardened work ethic was anything but happenstance.

It is widely reported that, in the 1950s, America experienced a moment of acute anxiety surrounding men's bodies – and, in particular, white, English-speaking men's bodies – often referred to as a "crisis of masculinity."[460] While America's men had spent the better part of the previous decade proving themselves on battlefields across Europe and the Pacific, the postwar years saw their society undergo a rapid and often bewildering transformation. The GI Bill and other economic measures enabled thousands of returning servicemen to earn college degrees, secure white-collar jobs, and settle into the expanding suburbs outside of America's growing cities. The decade also witnessed an unprecedented expansion of single-family households and the height of the "Baby Boom," which saw a skyrocketing birth rate rapidly turning a whole generation of men into fathers.[461] All this prosperity, however, led to a widespread belief that men were becoming alienated from the harder, more primeval elements of their manhood. Accordingly, advertisements frequently emphasized "male" activities such as backyard BBQs, camping, hunting, and fishing.[462] At the same time, a slew of then-contemporary literary works – such as

[459] Sugrue, "Bishop Sheen Story."
[460] The concept of "crisis" will be discussed further at a later point in this chapter.
[461] Jan Van Bavel and David S. Reher, "The Baby Boom and Its Causes: What We Know and What We Need to Know," *Population and Development Review* 39, no.2 (2013): 264–265.
[462] Advertising in the 1950s frequently emphasized the outdoors as man's domain, while also refiguring certain household tasks – i.e., those that involved tools and hard work – as being suitably manly responsibilities around the home front. Mark Moss, *The Media and Models of Masculinity* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 30.

Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.'s *The Vital Center* (1949), David Reisman's *Lonely Crowd* (1950), Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955), and William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956) – asserted that these transformations were inherently detrimental for America's men, leading to feelings of isolation and detachment from traditional masculine values.[463] Scholars such as K. A. Cuordileone (2000), Andrea Friedman (2003), Franklin Rausch (2015), and Tanfer Emin Tunc (2018) have equally observed how American men were widely perceived to be falling away from "hardness" and sliding towards "softness" – a state of physical, mental and even moral weakness.

From the 1950s onwards, both popular culture and government policy connected men's bodies with the nation's domestic and international struggle against Communism, vicariously linking the vitality of men's bodies with the health of the nation, its institutions and its ideologies. As Susan Jeffords argues in her 1994 monograph *Hard Bodies*, the Cold War helped construct and establish an embodied dualism whereby "bodies were deployed in two fundamental categories: the errant body containing sexually transmitted disease, immorality, illegal chemicals, 'laziness,' and endangered fetuses, which we can call the 'soft body'; and the normative body that enveloped strength, labour, determination, loyalty, and courage – the 'hard body.'"[464] It bears noting that in hierarchical systems of social organization marked by race and gender, soft bodies inevitably belonged to women, people of colour, foreigners, and men of non-normative sexuality, while the

[463] For a scholarly discussion of Reisman and Wilson's work, see James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); for Schlesinger and Whyte's work, see K. A. Cuordileone, "'Politics in an Age of Anxiety': Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960," *The Journal of American History* 87, no. 2 (Sept. 2000): 515-545. It is perhaps ironic that while men in the 1950s and 60s saw the immediate postwar decade as one of decay and estrangement from masculinity, Robert Bly of the later mythopoetic men's movement saw it in quite the opposite vein, writing "the Fifties male had a clear vision of what a man was... each liked football, [was] aggressive, [could] stick up for the United States, never [cried]." This perhaps goes to show the cyclical and often contradictory nature of men's anxieties. Robert Bly, *Iron John*: *A Book About Men* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesely, 1990), 1-2.

[464] Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*, 25.

hard body was inherently male, white and heterosexual.[465] Nevertheless, standing for good health, physical strength, virility and loyalty, hard bodies were presented as the ideal both for the nation and the men embodying its values, whereas in contrast, soft bodies were everything that hard bodies were not – sites of weakness, illness, deviance and treachery. In the political arena of the Cold War, the repercussions of the bodily dichotomy could be mapped to the then-current geopolitical positioning of the nation in a clearly defined manner: men with hard bodies could stand up to the cultural, political and military challenge posed by the Soviet Union, while men with soft bodies were at danger of being losing the battle and going over to the side other.[466]

This chapter seeks to expand upon the existing literature examining men's bodies, anxiety and the need for hardness, particularly focusing on Catholic anticommunism as a gendered and bodily response to both the Cold War and a decade of bodily unease. Paying close attention to the symmetrical and symbiotic relationship between bodies and nation, I demonstrate how leading Catholic anticommunist figureheads – specifically Sheen and Senator Joseph McCarthy – who, despite their formidable differences, embraced and figured into narratives of hardness that emphasized bodily and moral integrity as key indicators of physical and spiritual superiority against Communists and other subversives. Ultimately, though Catholics such as McCarthy and Sheen deployed and had their bodies imagined according to this rather untenable hard/soft dualism, the Catholic nature of their identities readily lent itself to a refigured embodiment of hardness rife with contradictions that would seem to undermine the very concepts they exemplified.

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[465] See Connell, *Masculinities*.

[466] Jeffords argues that in this binary system, soft men were understood to lack the gall needed to make the right and often difficult decisions for the good of the nation while hard men were able to stand up to and withstand such adversity. See Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*, 38-52. Tunc also comments on how the popular and political culture of the 1950s linked hardness with patriotism and the strength of national institutions. Tunc, "The 'Mad Men' of Nutrition," 190-192.

Theoretical considerations

Hardness and Hegemonic Masculinity

While the definition of "hard masculinity" I will be employing is largely in accordance with Jefford's, it is worth stating that the imperative of hardness has been variously theorized and understood by both scholars and the public. Rooted in the physiological ideals of the male body, hardness has often been overtly conceptualized by the muscular and the erectile.[467] However, as social scientist Robert Brannon comments, hard masculinity also encompasses a concern for a hardness of character. While Brannon analyzes hardness of character in terms of the idea that men need to have tightly controlled emotions,[468] American handbooks for young men from the postwar era associate hardness of character with the ability to strictly adhere to moral codes. Take, for example, Catholic ex-marine John Cross's *Let's Take the Hard Road*, which portrays the ideal man, not only as one who strives for hardness of body, but who also has discipline over his emotions, desires, and any temptations that may arise – such having sexual relations outside of wedlock or even smoking cigarettes.[469] In effect, the hard male is one who is simultaneously hard of body and mind, stoic yet virile, disciplined yet utterly detached from their emotions.

In trying to understand the operative patterns of hard masculinity and the anxieties surrounding male bodies which fail to conform to those standards, R.W. Connell's theory of "hegemonic masculinity" (1987; 1995; 2005) is helpful. Noting the hierarchical organization of masculinities and femininities at the societal level, she argues that hegemonic masculinity is driven

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[467] Marc Lafrance, "Building A Body, Building A Life: Men, Masculinity and The Birth of Bodybuilding Magazines in Montreal," in *Canadian Men and masculinities: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. C.J. Greig and W.J, Martino (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., 2012) 345-60, see especially 348.
[468] R. Brannon, "The Male Sex Role: Our Culture's Blueprint of Manhood and What It's Done for Us Lately," in *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority: The Male Sex Role* (Reading: Addington-Wesley, 1977), 1-45, especially 12.
[469] See John Cross, *Let's Take the Hard Road: A Book on Strength for Young Men* (Kenosha: The Cross Company, 1946), especially 57-84; 117-138; 147-159.

by the need to dominate and the fear of being dominated by others, a drive which pools social power in the hands of 'hard' men at the expense of women and subordinated masculinities. Accordingly, hegemonic masculinity is not a "fixed character type… but a pervasive force."[470] Such a system thus reinforces and is reinforced by a perceived gender dichotomy: 'real' men are rational, stoic, tough, and independent, while women – and subaltern men – are emotional, superstitious, weak, and dependent. Scholars such as Rotundo (1993) and Meyer (2016) have commented on the contradictions inherent in setting such impossible standards for men to live by – while hegemonic ideals propose the means of asserting oneself and overcoming anxiety, they are at the same time the causes for those very same anxieties.[471]

Throughout the twentieth century, the integration of hard masculinity with religious bodies has largely occurred under the hegemony of white, heteronormative – and in particular – Protestant Christianity. While the roots of this trend can be traced to the "Muscular Christianity" movement that emerged out of late nineteenth and early twentieth century England before being exported to other Anglo regions,[472] America has experienced its own home-grown iterations of muscular devotional culture. Historian Kristin Kobes Du Mez outlines how during the 1940s-1950s a revitalized evangelical identity spearheaded by figures such as Billy Graham lent itself to an overlapping focus on militarism, traditional gender roles, and white patriarchal authority that

[470] Connell, *Masculinities*, 75.

[471] As scholar Hoon Choi remarks, hegemonic sentiments have a tendency to grow during times of perceived national turmoil and when there is a strong impression that a nation and its ideologies are under attack. Though Choi's research deals with hegemonic and military masculinity in 1950s South Korea, his observation that citizens seek a stronger nation through stronger bodies would appear to ring true in the American context as well. Hoon Choi "Brothers in Arms and Brothers in Christ? The Military and the Catholic Church as Sources for Modern Korean Masculinity" *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 32, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2012): 75-92.

[472] Besnier and Brownell have remarked how sports in the Western World have been linked to masculinity, religion nationalism since the late nineteenth century. Muscular Christianity in the British Empire, for one, can be understood as having emerged in reaction to the increasing visibility of the "other" bodies of their colonial subjects. In this sense, the muscular superiority of white athletes over non-white ones equally demonstrated the spiritual superiority of Protestant Christianity over other religions. Besnier and Brownell, "Sport," 446-447.

permeated religious and popular culture.[473] For many evangelicals, figures who embodied virtuous American masculinity – John Wayne, for example – "would come to define not only Christian manhood but Christianity itself," regardless of their actual religious affiliations.[474] In effect, white, Protestant Americans founds means of using biblical frameworks (notable those espousing male "headship") to reinforce a broader cultural trends towards masculine hardness.

The "Crisis" of Masculinity

Scholars addressing the theme of masculinity in the 1950s – when Sheen was most prolific and visible – have widely reported that this era experienced a so-called "crisis" of masculinity. Commenting on this, James Gilbert (2005) argues that the literature surrounding this crisis is "so pervasive and convincing" that historians may be inclined to take the term at face value, a move which risks allowing the narrative of crisis to obscure the fact that men during this period had a diversity of lived experiences.[475] Highlighting this diversity, Gilbert argues that the lived experiences of males during this period were not monolithic.[476] While some men may well have felt their masculinity to be in crisis, an equal number carried on without experiencing anxiety at all. Historian Marko Dumančić (2017) also comments on this diversity, noting how crisis literature inevitably focuses on the experiences of white, Anglo-Saxon and heterosexual men while overshadowing and silencing men of colour, gay men, and others who fall outside of the normative assumptions about race and sexuality.[477]

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[473] Du Mez *Jesus and John Wayne*, 10.
[474] Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 11. In a curious twist on the Protestant adoration of the figure, John Wayne converted to Catholicism shortly before his death.
[475] See Gilbert, *Men in the Middle*, 11.
[476] Gilbert, *Men in the Middle*, 1.
[477] See Marko Dumančić, "Hidden in Plain Sight: The Histories of Gender and Sexuality during the Cold War," in *Sexuality, Gender, and the Cold War: A Global Perspective*, ed. Philip E. Muehlenbeck (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2017), 1-11.

A further complication regarding this so-called crisis, as articulated by Franklin Rausch, is that "the United States has witnessed multiple waves of anxiety about masculinity throughout its history."[478] Michael S. Kimmel (1987) first articulated the possibility that the perceived despair around men's bodies in the 1950s was hardly unique by showcasing how two disparate historical contexts (late seventeenth-century England and late nineteenth-century America) both experienced apparent moments of male crisis coinciding with times of social change and women's upwards social mobility. [479] In light of this cyclical pattern of repetition, cultural studies scholars Kathleen Starck and Russel Luyt (2018) have also questioned the usefulness of the term "crisis" in scholarly works.[480] Effectively, male-specific anxieties appear to be deeply rooted in the male experience of their own bodies, gender and sexuality in contrast to femininity and otherness in a given historical context.

Catholic Masculinity

As American masculinity has largely been theorized in relation to the bodies and actions of Protestant men, ideals of Catholic masculinity need to be considered separately. While not completely detached from the larger currents and patterns noted in such theories, Catholic masculinities – largely owing to their historical associations with immigrants and working-class men – have nevertheless been positioned as subaltern in relation to the dominant (i.e., Protestant) modes and aesthetics of manhood.[481] This positioning can be unpacked via an investigation into

[478] Rausch, "All Man, All Priest," 63.
[479] See Michael S. Kimmel "The Contemporary 'Crisis' of Masculinity in Historical Perspective," in *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies*, ed. Harry Brody (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), 121-154.
[480] See Kathleen Starck and Russell Luyt, "Political Masculinities, Crisis Tendencies, and Social Transition: Toward an Understanding of Change," *Men and Masculinities* 22, no. 13 (June 2018): 431-443.
[481] See Kelleher, "Men on the Make," and Dearinger, *The Filth of Progress*.

how Catholic masculinities – due to their adherence to a ritualistic devotional culture – are intrinsically inflected with a religious angle that differs sharply from their Protestant peers.[482] Maldonado-Estrada, for instance, has demonstrated the ways in which Catholic men associate activities performed for their parish (such as physical labour and craftsmanship) as being simultaneously manly and religious, while Fisher has commented on the ways in which Catholic men's lives often intertwine the mundane with the sacred.[483]

Catholic priests, in particular, embody a pattern of masculinity that is markedly different from the norms of hegemonic expectations. By virtue of their celibacy and positionality as religious leaders, they seem to shirk the traditional signifiers of masculinity – biological fatherhood, sexual conquest, etc.[484] Yet, priests have been contending with these issues since the Middle Ages, and have rebutted this framing through a refiguration of hegemonic ideals whereby the spiritual and the moral authority of their position is positioned hierarchically above the muscular, the erectile, and any other components of masculinity which could be deemed as hard or hegemonic.[485] This is not to say that Catholics, as a whole, have shied away from other markers of hard masculinity (such as aggression, willingness to fight, emotional stoicism, etc.) – scholars such as Rausch[486] and Seitz[487] have effectively demonstrated ways in which twentieth century priests have appropriated military fatigues, ammunition and other elements of war to reinforce

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[482] See Nugent, "The Sword and the Prayer Book."
[483] See Maldonado-Estrada, *Life Blood of the Parish*, and Fisher, *On the Irish Waterfront*.
[484] Scholar Ulrike Stasser remarks that "biological reproduction and fatherhood [have] long been mainstays for men in the secular world... Catholics asserted the superiority of chastity to marriage by insisting on the sexual purity of priests... this uncompromising emphasis on purity, more than ever cast Catholic clerics as unlike other men." Strasser, *German Jesuits*, 57.
[485] See Andrew Holt, "Between Warrior and Priest: The Creation of a New Masculine Identity during the Crusades," in *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jennifer D. Thibodeaux (London: Palgrave Macmillian, 2010), 185-203. See also Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).
[486] See Rausch, "All Man, All Priest."
[487] See John C. Seitz's, "The Mass-Clock and the Spy: The Catholicization of World War II," *Church History* 83, no. 4 (December 2014): 924-956, and "Altars of Ammo: Catholic Materiality and Visual Culture of World War II," *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief* 15, no. 4 (2019): 401-432.

their masculine credentials. However, Catholic masculinities do complicate traditional hegemonic ideals and narratives of masculinity through their reframing of ideals.

Setting

A Shifting World Order and Geopolitical Angst

Men's bodies exist and are understood differently according to their historical and cultural contexts. In the case of midcentury America – when Sheen was most prolific and his biographers were highlighting his physical vitality – the looming threat of the Soviet Union cast an ever-present specter over men's bodies that could not be ignored. While formerly allies, the cracks in the Soviet-American WWII alliance began to show in the span of a few short years following the conclusion of the war, and the two superpowers quickly found themselves in a state of mutual fear and mistrust. In 1947, America made anticommunism – once a fringe political position – mainstream foreign policy by adopting the Truman Doctrine, a geopolitical and economic precursor to NATO which sought to curb, combat and ultimately contain, not only Soviet expansion, but the spread of Communism globally, effectively setting the tenor for American global relations moving forward.[488] The following year, the Marshall Plan was approved as a comprehensive and American-led plan for the economic recovery of war-torn Europe, with the provision that a modernized, revitalized Western Europe could stand on its own two feet against Soviet expansion.[489] However, despite these measures, by 1950 the Soviets had developed their own

[488] The longer lasting and more military focused successor to the Truman Doctrine, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) would be signed into existence in 1949 by America along with thirty other nations. See Dennis Merrill, "The Truman Doctrine: Containing Communism and Modernity," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1, (2006): 27-37; Patrick J. McNamara "McCarthy and McCarthyism" *American Catholic Studies* 116, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 85-88.

[489] Though principally economic in its clauses, the Marshall Plan was also ideologically driven, as American financial backing encultured closer ties with the regimes of Western Europe while limiting potential Soviet influence. See

atomic bomb, Communists under Mao had finalized their seizure of mainland China, and the Communist Northern half of Korea was now threatening the South. As Communism spread rapidly across the globe, taking seed in countries from Southeast Asia to South America, Democracy appeared to be losing, not only its previous geopolitical footing, but also the vigor and vitality it needed to endure.

Although the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis – perhaps the height of tension between these two superpowers – was still some years away, the 1950s were nevertheless a time of uncertainty and escalation in America's geopolitical relationships as well as with the bodies within its own borders. In December of 1953, anxieties connecting men's bodies with anxieties about the nation came into full effect when the *Journal of the American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation* published a rather unsettling article entitled "Muscular Fitness and Health," which painted a dire portrait of the health and fitness of the average American. The article's study revolved around a systematic examination of the fitness levels of American boys between the ages of 6 and 16. Comparing their criteria with European youths in the same age bracket, the study suggested that the average levels of physical fitness among Americans paled in comparison to their transatlantic counterparts.[490] Shortly after the publication of this article a disturbing trend was noted in army recruitment offices: a drastic upsurge of young men were failing to meet the basic physical fitness requirements of America's armed forces.[491] America's men, it would seem, were in danger of becoming "sissies."[492]

Michael J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain, and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1952* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Alan S. Milward, *The Reconstruction of Western Europe 1945-1951* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

[490] See, President's Council on Sports, Fitness & Nutrition, "Our History," *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)*, accessed October 18, 2020, https://www.hhs.gov/fitness/about-pcsfn/our-history/index.html.

[491] Thomas M. Hunt, "American Sport Policy and the Cultural Cold War: The Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Years," *Journal of Sport History* 33, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 274; K. A. Cuordileone, "Politics in an Age of Anxiety," 527-528.

[492] Rausch, "All Man, All Priest," 63.

Hard Bodies, Hard Nation

In response to this apparent laxity in America's physical capabilities, President Eisenhower launched the President's Council on Youth and Fitness, a nation-wide program for raising awareness about the health and fitness of America's young men, and by 1957 the council began implementing a nationwide program focused on setting targets and standards for schools to implement.[493] Although the Council's initial focus was on America's youth, the program's benefits were expected to continue with the participants into adulthood, resulting in a new – and harder – generation of American men.[494] Dr. Shane MacCarthy, the executive director appointed to head the Council, was unequivocable in communicating this goal of internal transformation – as he explicitly remarked just prior to the 1956 Olympic games in Italy, "perhaps as we consider the next Olympics, the theme should be not so much 'Win in Rome' as 'Win at home.'"[495] As this remark suggests, it was McCarthy's hope that, by demonstrating their vigor on the international stage, these athletes would inspire a larger reinvigoration of the nation. In other words, it was important for America's Olympic athletes to be successful, young, and powerful, not only to win metals, but also to act as representatives of the dominant ideology their nation espoused and hoped to inculcate into its populace.

The Olympics were, in fact, a major driver behind America's desire to demonstrate the vigor of its men, as – in a geopolitical context of Communist expansion – the visibility of Soviet bodies made possible by the recently revived Olympics represented a source of anxiety. Though

[493] The program would eventually coalesce into the Presidential Youth Testing Program. See, President's Council on Sports, Fitness & Nutrition, "Our History."
[494] Anxieties surrounding the bodies of boys and the young men who would one day grow into the nation's able-bodied men can be found in literature immediately following the conclusion of WWII. One notable book lamenting the loss of vigor in the nation and connecting physical and moral patriotism was Catholic ex-marine John Cross' *Let's Take the Hard Road*.
[495] Hunt, "American Sport Policy," 274.

the first post-war games were held in 1948 in London, the 1952 Games in Helsinki would be the first time Americans and Soviets squared off against one another in competition.[496] Just as the Soviets were mistrustful of America's growing world influence and ideological hegemony, they had similar worries about the potential danger of American bodies and their domination in international sports.[497] Sports scholar Ekaterina Emiliantseva argues that, for Soviets, "results oriented competition was [seen] as a way to expand the realm of ideological agitation abroad and strengthen legitimacy at home" – put differently, sporting competitions came to be understood as ideologically potent "Cold War weapon[s]."[498] That the 1952 games would be a highly televised event was hardly overlooked by the Soviet leaders. Television would become the ideal means to increase the visibility of hard Soviet bodies while exposing the potential softness of America's own. As Jeffords remarks, "a nation exists… as something to be seen," and there was no better way of being seen than through athletic competition.[499]

Similar fears and anxieties surrounding men's bodies would later be echoed by President-elect John F. Kennedy, who penned an article for *Sports Illustrated* magazine in December of 1960, shortly after winning that year's presidential election. Entitled "The Soft American," Kennedy used the editorial to lament what he saw as the ongoing loss of American vitality and

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[496] The Soviets were invited to attend the 1948 Olympics, despite some protest from the USA. Nevertheless, they declined to send any athletes, opting instead to send observers and prepare for the coming games in Helsinki. Even then, the chair of the Soviet Sports Committee, Nikolai Romanov, was initially hesitant about sending athletes to the event as he equated sporting competitions with "bourgeois" excess and dangerous capitalist influences. Stalin, however, pushed his minister, all but accusing him of "cowardice" and unmanly behaviour. Stalin saw the Games as an opportunity to showcase the vigor of Soviet athletes, and, by extension, the vitality of their nation. The Soviets therefore approached each successive Olympics – along with any other international athletic competition – with the sole intention of winning as many events as possible. This marked a notable shift in Soviet ideology concerning sports, as, in the early post-revolution years, what was emphasized was *fitzkultura* – athleticism framed as a benign and non-competitive way to benefit the health of its citizens internally. See Dennis C. Coates, "Weaponization of Sports: The Battle for World Influence through Sporting Success," *The Independent Review* 22, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 215-221; Ekaterina Emiliantseva, "Russian Sport and the Challenges of Its Recent Historiography," *Journal of Sport History* 38, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 361-372.
[497] Coates, "Weaponization of Sports," 219.
[498] Emiliantseva, "Russian Sport," 363-364.
[499] Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*, 6.

manhood since the closure of the Second World War. In voicing his apprehension over this increasing frailty, Kennedy drew a direct contrast between American weakness and Soviet vitality:

> We face in the Soviet Union, a powerful and implacable adversary determined to show the world that only the Communist system possesses the vigor and determination necessary to satisfy awakening aspirations for progress and the elimination of poverty and want. To meet the challenge of this enemy will require determination and will and effort on the part of all Americans. Only if our citizens are physically fit will they be fully capable of such an effort.[500]

Here, Kennedy effectively draws a connection between the vigor of a nation's people and the vitality of its ideology and global ambitions, by pointing out the apparent dangers of a physically unfit or "soft" civic body in the face of an implacable ideological foe. His statement suggests that the hardness of Soviet bodies represented a challenge, not only to the physical fitness of America's own men, but also to the vitality of its institutions. American weakness was thus not only a threat to its efforts overseas – it also had the potential to jeopardize the freedoms and aspirations of its citizens within its own borders. As such, Kennedy's article and the Eisenhower administration's edicts can be read as part of a wider trend in America that "connected male physical fitness… to patriotism."[501] In other words, by embracing and embodying the harder attributes and expectations of masculinity, men could also embrace and embody a firmer definition of American patriotism.

[500] John F. Kennedy, "The Soft American," *Sports Illustrated*, December 26, 1960; Council on Youth Fitness: "The Soft American," John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston, Massachusetts, USA.
[501] Tunc, "The 'Mad Men' of Nutrition," 190.

Senator McCarthy

Embracing Bodily Hardness

As discourse surrounding this hard/soft binary unfolded in American politics and also in its wider popular culture, American Catholic figureheads and contemporaries of Sheen were dispensing their own discourses on hardness and softness. Before retiring from public life in the early 1950s, Jesuit Edmund A. Walsh – an ardent anticommunist – framed the Catholic response to Communism as hinging upon hardness of body and character. Walsh had been an ardent anticommunist since the 1920s where he was tasked with directing relief work for the National Catholic Welfare Council in the then famine-stricken Soviet Union. Having witnessed atrocities against local clergy, along with the shuttering of the Catholic presence in Russia and show trials condemning priests, he very much seems to have emerged a changed man with a singular mission to combat the existential and cosmological threat he saw in Communism. According to Walsh, the reason Communism threatened the United States and was growing worldwide was owing to the fact the Soviets perceived Americans and Democracy to have "gone soft." However, all was not lost, as even though America's men might have lost some of their earlier hardness, the nation had "not lost its soul." As such, the remedy for America's lack of physical hardness was to embrace its inner moral hardness. What this meant in practical terms was that, by the 1940s, he was all but advocating for a pre-emptive atomic strike against the Soviet Union. Arguing the moral legitimacy of atomic war, he believed that only by utterly annihilating their atheistic opponent could they ensure the preservation not only of democracy but of their Judeo-Christian values. For Walsh, only hardness could resist the Communists, as softness and "the belief that you can win over a

totalitarian government with sweetness and light is a delusion that time is gradually uprooting."[502] While Walsh was influential, a stroke caused him to rapidly fade from public view at precisely the same moment when Wisconsin Junior Senator Joseph McCarthy began to rise.[503]

After delivering a surprisingly fiery speech in 1950 at the Republican Women's Club of Wheeling, West Virginia – during which he held up a list identifying some 200 or so Communist party members operating within America's government – the Junior Senator rapidly shot to national prominence due to his outspoken and ardent anticommunism.[504] In 1952 he was re-elected with ease and was made the chairman of the Senate Committee on Government Operations, which put the vaguely-defined Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations under the purview of his office.[505] Under his control, the two committees provided him with the ability to pursue his agenda of rooting out suspected subversives within America's institutions. With the counsel of lawyers Roy Cohn and Gerald Schine, McCarthy was given a free hand in investigating the US State Department for apparent subversives, resulting in the highly televised trials, dismissals and smearing of thousands of government employees.[506] Though his time in the spotlight was relatively

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[502] See Patrick J. McNamara's, "Russia, Rome, and Recognition," 71-88, and "'The Argument of Strength," especially 71-72.

[503] According to a largely anecdotal story from journalist Drew Pearson, Walsh apparently met McCarthy at a dinner in the early 1950s and pushed him to make anticommunism the mainstay of his political career. Though Walsh challenged Pearson to prove his story, he steadfastly refused to ever address any questions concerning his relationship and influence with McCarthy, leading McNamara to remark that his silence on the topic led many to believe it to be true. McNamara "McCarthy and McCarthyism," 85-88.

[504] McCarthy was one of several guests invited to speak at the dinner, and of those was likely the least well-known at the time. As few papers expected anything memorable to come from the event, there was but a single reporter from the Associated Press in attendance. See Adam J. Berinsky and Gabriel S. Lenz, "Red Scare? Revisiting McCarthy's Influence on 1950s Elections," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 369-391.

[505] McCarthy's fiery persona had already been well-established by Republican party insiders due to his previous stint as a judge of the Wisconsin tenth circuit. It has been suggested that in their haste to mollify him and keep him out of the limelight, his party had sought to put him in charge of an unassuming committee, and that initially the Senate Committee on Government Operations seemed the most likely to do so. See Allen J. Matusow, *Joseph R. McCarthy*, (Inglewood: Prentice-Hall, inc., 1970).

[506] Adam J. Berinsky and Gabriel S. Lenz, "Red Scare?," 370; see also Ellen Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 1998).

short-lived – his rapid downfall quickly followed his decision to investigate the American Army – for a time he was America's most visible and feared anticommunist.[507]

Like Sheen, McCarthy was an Irish American Catholic hailing from the Midwest – which at first glance would appear to be all that the men shared. Nevertheless, that McCarthy was able to accomplish what he did without arousing fear and suspicion due to his cultural and religious identity owed a great deal to the brash and quintessentially "hard" persona he cultivated and embodied.[508] To onlookers, the senator did whatever he could to portray himself as a "self-made man of the people" which was very much in line with the American Dream.[509] He painted himself as a Washington outsider, a man without baggage or ulterior motives who the average American could trust to tell the truth and look out for their interests unlike the stuffy old men who had long been running the nation and who, by letting their guard down against Communism, had enabled it to bloom.[510] Though McCarthy, a law school graduate, was hardly the humble figure he portrayed, he leveraged the immigrant background of his parents, carrying his "hard scrabbled Irish Catholic roots as a point of pride," effectively embracing a modern day image of "the fighting Irish."[511] Unlike the men who ran Washington, he was young and tough, a real blue-collar hero. Like a true adherent of *The Drinking Man's Diet,* he did nothing to hide the fact that he was a prolific drinker

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[507] Scholar Anthony Lewis remarked that McCarthy's political power and influence was so great that Eisenhower was held virtually captive by his posturing and, despite the president's dislike for the senator, was unable to intervene so long as his position was secure. Nathan Glazer, Anthony Lewis and Sam Tanenhaus, "'Have You No Sense of Decency?' McCarthyism 50 Years Later," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 57, no. 3 (Spring, 2004): 25.

[508] Though the stature of Catholics and the Irish in America had much improved since the 1920s and Al Smith's disastrous run for President, some prejudices and suspicious around Catholics persisted to some extent in the 1950s. Facing a fresh wave of anti-Catholic propaganda during his presidential bid, John F. Kennedy famously declared "I am not the Catholic candidate for president. I am the Democratic Party's candidate for president, who happens to be a Catholic." For a more detailed discussion of his run and the implications of his Catholicism, see Shaun A. Casey, *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960* (Oxford University Press, 2009), and Lucy S. Dawidowicz, "Religion in the 1960 Presidential Campaign," *The American Jewish Year Book* 63 (1961): 111-128.

[509] Donald F. Crosby, "The Catholic Bishops and Senator Joseph McCarthy," *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 86, no. 1/4 (March – Dec., 1975): 138

[510] See also Matusow, *McCarthy*, 107.

[511] Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium*, 13.

– whiskey was his beverage at choice – and was rarely seen eating anything but steak and other large cuts of meat.[512] McCarthy further embraced the persona of the Cold Warrior, claiming (quite falsely) to have flown dozens of dangerous volunteer combat missions during the Second World War where he acquired for himself the nickname "Tail Gunner Joe."[513]

Where figures like Sheen, and even Walsh to some extent, were aristocrats of the Church and spoke with a certain eloquence and authority, McCarthy was in many ways the opposite. In distancing him from the "soft" politicians of Washington, he was unabashedly crass in his speech and largely shied away from personal grooming. Not wanting to arouse any suspicions that he was a dandy, he often donned a rumpled suit and day-long five o'clock shadow even during his televised hearings. His close associate Roy Cohn remarked with some praise that the senator, though busy at work in Washington, was essentially "rough-hewn… never managing to throw off his country-boy origins" and emphasized his athleticism by remarking that McCarthy "liked to swim and water-ski and would occasionally play golf."[514] Speaking to his persona, Scholar Andrea Friedman remarks that "he cultivated a reputation as a fighter, a gambler, and a womanizer. McCarthy made much of his college career as a boxer, glorying in his depiction as a "slugger" rather than a man of skill."[515] McCarthy rooted much of his hardness in his own physicality, demonstrating that he was a man of action, unwilling to be slowed down by decorum or by taking the time to gather evidence to support his accusations.

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[512] Andrea Friedman, "The Smearing of Joe McCarthy: The Lavender Scare, Gossip, and Cold War Politics," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (Dec., 2005): 1109. It has been suggested that McCarthy's drinking and eating habits greatly contributed to his early death in 1957 at the age of 48.

[513] McCarthy's claims to have been a combat veteran would eventually be revealed as utter fabrication. In reality, he worked behind a desk during the war and the only times he found himself in the air was during training runs in friendly airspace. James T. Keane and Jim McDermott, "Cold Warrior: America's battle against Joe McCarthy," *America: The Jesuit Review*, February 9, 2009, https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2009/02/09/cold-warrior-americas-battle-against-joe-mccarthy.

[514] Matusow, *McCarthy*, 111; 113.

[515] Friedman, "Smearing of Joe McCarthy," 1108.

In his quest to root out so-called subversives, McCarthy frequently called attention to the body by making use of sexual innuendo and language linking heteronormativity with hardness and dissent with softness and deviancy. At one point, McCarthy was asked to compare his list of subversives from the Tydings Committee with the State Department's own loyalty files and dossiers. Finding little in there to support his own claims, McCarthy declared publicly that then President Truman had the dossier "raped" in order to cover any data that might have exposed potential subversives. He also once accused his critics and anyone siding with those he persecuted as being "perverted."[516] He referred to opposing politicians as being part of "the lace handkerchief crowd," not so subtly implying that their lack of support for his tactics demonstrated a lack of masculinity but also that it brought their sexuality into question. [517] In rooting hardness with the normative male body and softness with the deviant body, McCarthy effectively also rooted *moral* normativity with hardness.

It is in this regard that McCarthy's hardness wasn't solely focused on physicality and empty posturing – it was in fact deeply rooted in his Catholic faith. According to biographer David Oshinsky, McCarthy was a devout Catholic who "went regularly to confessions, observed meatless Fridays, gave generously to Catholic Charities, and rarely missed Sunday Mass.[518] In a 1952 issue of *Catholic World*, a woman who claimed to know some of the senator's friends assured the magazine that he was "a deeply religious man... Joe always takes time out to pray, even in the heat of a tight political campaign.[519] McCarthy himself even spoke openly about his faith to a certain

[516] Matusow, *McCarthy*, 37; 45;48.
[517] Friedman remarks that parallel to the Red Scare was also the often overlooked "Lavender Scare" which saw the vilification of men who had sex with men, and anyone suspected of non-normative sexuality. Friedman, "Smearing of Joe McCarthy," 1109.
[518] David Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy so Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 11.
[519] Helen Williams, "Never Sound Retreat!" *Catholic World*, November 1952, 88-89, quoted and abridged in Glen Genzel, "Pride, Wrath, Glee, and Fear: Emotional Responses to Senator Joseph McCarthy in the Catholic Press, 1950-1954," *American Catholic Studies* 120, no. 2 (2009): 38.

extent. He told *TIME* magazine that he was a "good Catholic," but – lest someone think his faith made him soft or subservient, a person of questionable loyalties as many Catholics had historically been stereotyped – he reminded them that he was not a "kiss-the-book, light-the-candle" kind of Catholic.[520] Still, the senator did little to hide his affiliation with the minority church, and since the beginnings of his career, frequently turned to his Catholic piety as a source of inspiration in his developing rhetoric and positionality against Communism.[521]

For much of the American public at the time, questions as to whether McCarthy was the real deal, or living an opportunistic myth were of little interest.[522] What mattered was that he *appeared* to be all the things he claimed. By embracing hardness and rooting it within his own body and highly vitriolic televised performances, McCarthy demonstrated the superiority of hardness over the softness of his opponents, both within and without the nation. In doing so McCarthy also inadvertently drew attention to the contradictions inherent in his position as the embodiment of hard masculinity. For instance, however improbable it may seem, for a time McCarthy was considered to be one of Washington's most eligible bachelors, described as being "handsome in a dark, square-jawed way… a wolf."[523] Curiously, despite his hard manliness and even the hard manner in which his attractiveness was described, McCarthy apparently had little interest in enacting his own supposedly heteronormative sexuality. The senator never fathered children and only married at age 45 – four years before his death – during which time his wife and

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[520] *TIME,* October 22, 1951, 22, quoted and abridged in Genzel, "Emotional Responses to Senator Joseph," 37.
[521] The official stance on Communism within the Catholic church was hardly nuanced. Papal encyclicals dating back to 1848 declared communism to be atheistic, materialistic, and evil, and American Catholics had enthusiastically embraced Anti-Communism since the 1930s as a way to point their loyalty to the larger institutions of the church. Notably, Pius XI strongly warned against Communism in *Quadrageimo anno* in 1931 and later denounced it outright in *Divini Redemptoris* in 1937.
[522] That his charges were likely trumped up mattered little as "many prominent politicians at the time knew McCarthy had fabricated his explosive allegations, they feared him and failed to stand up to him... many cowed in silence." However, in 1952, aging Democratic senator Herbert Lehman of New York demanded to see the evidence for McCarthy's claims of widespread communist infiltration, only to have McCarthy loudly retort "go back to your seat old man." Berinsky and Lenz, "Red Scare?," 372; 388.
[523] Friedman, "The Smearing of Joe McCarthy," 1105.

he adopted a child rather than give birth. This flaw in his character would seem to be at complete odds with the hardness he embraced and the accusations he levelled at his opponents – who would eventually themselves take notice of it. Journalists Edward R. Murrow and Drew Pearson, to name but two, were able to highlight cracks in McCarthy's life and entourage which he was unable to defend.[524] By raising suspicions about his bachelorhood and the seemingly homoerotic relationship between his associates Roy Cohn and Gerard Schine, they suggested that McCarthy was perhaps not quite as hard as he seemed, and, and more importantly, that if he wasn't, then perhaps he was a man with something to hide – and secrecy, as McCarthy had made very clear, required suspicion. Having created an aura of distrust and fear around all potential difference of perceived softness, McCarthy effectively sowed the seeds for his own downfall.[525]

Nevertheless, to McCarthy, like many Catholics including Sheen, the fundamental difference between America and the Soviet Union wasn't so much the difference between two competing political and economic systems, but between good and evil, between moral hardness and immoral softness embodied by each nation respectively. "The greatest difference between our western Christian world and the *atheistic* Communist world is not political," he declared, "ladies and gentlemen, it is *moral*."[526] He added, in a snippet of speech that reads like it could have been spoken by Sheen himself, that the "real, basic difference" between the two nations "lies in the religion of *immoralism* invented by Marx, preached feverishly by Lenin, and carried to unimaginable extremes by Stalin."[527] Such proclamations were not simply about him standing up

[524] Pearson published a string of articles not only denouncing McCarthy's tactics but alleging that the Senator was a fraud who cheated on his taxes, held anti-Semitic views, and had staffers arrested for homosexual indiscretions. Friedman, "Smearing of Joe McCarthy," 1110.
[525] See Friedman, "The Smearing of Joe McCarthy," 1112-1125. A deeper investigation into McCarthy's potential or perceived celibacy among Catholic audiences may be warranted in a future study.
[526] Italics mine. U.S. Congress, Senate, Congressional Record, 81st Cong., 2d sess., 1950, 96, referenced in Matusow, *McCarthy*, 20.
[527] Matusow, *McCarthy*, 20.

to Communism and deriding it, but were deeply rooted in his faith, the underpinnings of which necessitated a hardness of body, character and spirit.[528] As we shall soon see, even though McCarthy presented himself as a crude – hardboiled, even – Irish American working man's politician and crusader, his response to the Cold War and the anxieties over men's bodies can be understood using the same points of reference and refigurations of body and morality that the more eloquent Sheen would deploy. [529]

Bishop Sheen

Hard Body, Harder Spirit

By the mid-1950s, Sheen's opposition to the Soviet Union was longstanding and well-recognized. Daniel P. Noonan – who, as noted previously, was his former secretary and two-time biographer – paints Sheen as something of a prophetic figure who foresaw the eventual cooling of the relations between the United States and the USSR long before it happened.[530] Scholar and Sheen biographer Kathleen Riley also positions Sheen as something of a forerunner, suggesting he was something of a "vanguard" in America. She writes: "By crusading for social justice and against the threat of communism, Sheen was among those socially conscious priests who helped move the Catholic Church out of the confines of the ghetto mentality and into its rightful place in

[528] McCarthy' spiritual hardness wasn't lost on his Catholic supporters. Despite his crude tactics, he was widely seen among Catholic conservatives as a "defender of the faith." Gendzel, "Emotional Responses to Senator Joseph," 28.
[529] I should note that this is not to suggest that Sheen and McCarthy ever colluded, or, for that matter, even saw eye to eye. It was once erroneously believed that Bishop Sheen had approved and sided with McCarthy's public discourse, however the historical record reveals a substantial divide between the two men. While Sheen was notoriously tight-lipped about the senator, he was once quoted as having dismissed McCarthy's campaigns owing to the fact that McCarthy was "not an authority on communism in any case." See Crosby, "The Catholic Bishops and Senator Joseph McCarthy," 132; see also Patterson, "The Cross or the Double-Cross."
[530] A similar sentiment would be echoed by Donald F. Crosby, who referred to Sheen as the nation's foremost "prophet and philosopher" where anticommunism was concerned. See Noonan, *Missionary with a Mike,* 15-17; Donald F. Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1978), 1.

the mainstream of American life and thought."[531] Though claims to Sheen having been a lone voice against Communism during the 1930s and 1940s are fanciful at best, he was certainly one of the most prolific figures in American popular culture.[532]

On his *Catholic Hour* radio show, communism was a frequent topic of his discussions and Sheen argued that the Church alone had consistently stood strong against the threat of the modern errors of Nazism, Fascism and Communism. Equating each of these with being fundamentally anti-American, Communism was the most dangerous as it survived the war under the guise of friendship. As the Church had seen it for what it was all along, "the only solution to the threat of communism" was through the Christian principles best espoused by the Catholic Church.[533] Sheen would also claim to have been personally urged on by then Pope Pius XI to speak out against Communism even while America was in the process of cementing their wartime alliance with the Soviet Union, effectively bestowing him with a divine mandate to combat the opposing ideology.[534] From there, Sheen devoted considerable time and energy to combatting the ideology, consistently "[pouring] forth a gushing stream of books, articles, pamphlets, sermons and speeches detailing theory and dynamics of Communism."[535]

Though both Sheen and McCarthy hailed from the rural Midwest, the bishop embraced little of the earthy populism that defined the senator's hardness. While Sheen did selectively emphasize his rural upbringing in his autobiography, as discussed in Chapter 1, and was re-

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[531] Kathleen Riley Fields, "Anti-Communism and Social Justice: The Double-Edged Sword of Fulton Sheen," *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 96, no. 1/4 (March – December 1985): 84.
[532] Noonan tends to aggrandize Sheen (for better or worse) while ignoring the larger context. Anticommunism was hardly novel in Catholicism, as the Church itself had already taken a stance against Communism, such as with Pius XI's encyclicals. In America, the popular and prolific radio-priest Father Coughlin stands out as being the most vocal Catholic anticommunist of his era until being censured in 1942. Though Noonan does concede that Father Coughlin was a prominent figure, he suggests (largely without evidence) that his influence paled in comparison to Sheen, and that much of his fiery vitriol was meant to be taken "tongue-in-cheek." See Noonan, *Missionary with a Mike*, 24-25.
[533] Fields, "Anti-Communism and Social Justice," 85-86.
[534] Noonan, *The Passion of Fulton Sheen*, 51.
[535] Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 15.

envisioned as a country boy by his later devotees, as discussed in Chapter 2, Sheen opted instead to take a more spiritual and learned – though no less impassioned – stance against Communism that might seem at odds with hard masculinity. In 1948, Sheen released *Communism and the Conscience of the West*, a book that expanded many of his *Catholic Hour* discussions about Communism. He argued that America and other Western nations rested their success, freedoms, and national character on the strength of their moral foundations – foundations which were predominately shaped by Christianity. As long as people upheld those values, a nation could fend off ideological threats. Similar to how Kennedy and others equated a loss of physical vigor with susceptibility to foreign invasion, Sheen argued that when a nation loses its moral tenor, it becomes susceptible to rot which in turn creates a space where other ideas – such as Communism – can enter and fill the void.[536] Where much of the nation in the 1950s would connect bodily hardness with ideological strength, Sheen was advocating for a sort of spiritual, moral and intellectual hardness that prefigured all other discussions of the body. In elevating spiritual hardness, Sheen was perhaps able to circumnavigate some of the expectations of bodily hardness that McCarthy and others so readily emphasized.

As American popular culture and politicians were readily channeling the dichotomy of hard and soft to link men's bodies with national vitality, Sheen used similar language to shift the dialogue towards the more pressing softening taking place within America – a softening of spirituality, morality, and intellect. In 1947, a quote of his found its way into the pages of *The Observer* (an edition of *Our Sunday Visitor*), where Sheen opined on America's spiritual laxity, stating that "Communists have zeal and no truth, we Americans have truth but no zeal."[537] In the

[536] See Fulton J. Sheen, *Communism and the Conscience of the West* (Pekin, Indiana: Refugee of Sinners Publishing, Inc. 1948).
[537] *The Observer*, June 1, 1947. Uncategorized Box, *Fulton Sheen Museum Archives*, Peoria, Illinois, USA.

same article, while discussing an apparent post-war lack of ingenuity and intellect of America compared to its earlier achievements, Sheen would comment on bodily hardness albeit not as one might expect: "there has been a softening of our brains. We [now] appeal for a *hardening* of brains."[538] Sheen's interest in the male body was specifically rooted in the brain, where man is responsible for his spiritual and intellectual reasoning. He further developed this interest in an episode of *Life is Worth Living* where he declared that "the fatigue which concerns us presently is not physical fatigue, but rather mental fatigue. Why is there so much apathy and dullness and indifference in the world, and such a want of fire and enthusiasm…. the chief cause of fatigue is not exhaustion, but stagnation."[539] Unlike the examples discussed in the previous sections, which primarily rooted softness in the base physicality and athleticism of men, to Sheen, the fatigue and weakness afflicting Americans was only rooted in the physical insofar as it could be connected to morality and intellect. In effect, the weakness affecting America's men was a pressing concern, not due to their diminishing build or musculature, but because a stagnation of morals and intellect at the personal and national level together threatened the nation's global standing and ideologies. Thus, where Kennedy and others would equate physical fitness with patriotism, Sheen went further, equating patriotism with spirituality and an explicitly Christian morality. In other words, physical and mental fitness were important primarily because they gave rise to a strong spiritual and moral character.[540]

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[538] *The Observer*, June 1, 1947.

[539] *Life is Worth Living,* "Comparison of the Soviet and American Constitution," Written by Fulton J. Sheen, DuMont Network, 1953.

[540] Patterson argues that, in Sheen's worldview, all Americans had the choice of either bowing to the flag of their beloved nation based on Christian principles, or of bowing to totalitarian regimes. Commitment to one meant restoring the world, while the other meant corrupting it. Patterson, "The Cross or the Double-Cross", 47. Similar fears about the potential moral decay of the nation and its vulnerabilities were held by American Catholics during WWII; as Seitz remarks, "the enemy was not Germany or Japan, not Nazism or totalitarianism, nor even the lurking menace of communism. The enemy was a [spiritually] wayward America." Seitz, "The Mass-Clock," 928.

Like McCarthy, who tied moral and bodily softness with vulnerability and potential sites of supervision, Sheen too saw a nation's spiritual and moral softness as being a potential entry point for communist incursions. In one episode of *Life is Worth Living*, he made an explicit connection between Communism's rise and a nation's weakened moral fiber. In comparing the nation to a body, he stated that "whenever a civilization begins to die morally or spiritually, there begin to appear vultures. That is the mission of Communism in the world. Communism is the scavenger of a decaying civilization."[541] Just as bodies open themselves up to incursion when experiencing moral weakness, when a national body loses its sense of morality and strays from its Christian foundations, it too opens itself up to the danger of weakness. For Sheen, spiritual and moral weakness were thus more pressing concerns than mere physical weakness in warding off Communism. He elaborated on this in another episode, by stating "we need the kind of revolution in the United States... that pours out of a man's heart pride, and covetousness, and lust, and anger, and envy, and gluttony, and sloth. In other words, then, the battle against communism begins with the hearts of every single American."[542] Here, like McCarthy, he explicitly situates the cosmological underpinnings of the battle of democracy versus capitalism in the body, linking the decline of Christian morality and bodily integrity to a potential communist incursion.[543] Sheen would continue to emphasize this link when he declared that "Communism is strong only when it borrows some of the moral indignation that has been inherited from the Hebraic-Christian traditions; Communism is weak when it departs from that tradition."[544]

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[541] *Life is Worth Living*, "The Role of Communism and the Role of America," Written by Fulton J. Sheen, DuMont Network, 1953.
[542] *Life is Worth Living,* "The Philosophy of Communism," Written by Fulton J. Sheen, DuMont Network, 1953.
[543] A similar mentality was gradually espoused by Catholic leaders during the second World War, where they "framed the problem of [the conflict] not as a matter of geo-politics or justice, but as a challenge to the moral and spiritual authority of the church" all the while "[cherishing] the idea that their tradition offered the country its best hope against a perilous future." Seitz, "The Mass-Clock," 929; 938.
[544] *Life is Worth Living,* "The Philosophy of Communism," Written by Fulton J. Sheen, DuMont Network, 1953.

Though Sheen seldom referred to men's bodies in as explicit a manner as McCarthy, he does expressly connect the American nation and its ideologies with the body of Christ. When speaking of Christ's sacrifice on the cross in an episode of *Life is Worth Living* entitled "Pain and Suffering," Sheen states that "his blood was his royal purple. It was the foundation of democracy, the worth of a single soul."[545] Here, Sheen is effectively suggesting that, as Christ's bodily sacrifice was the bedrock upon which American democracy rested, the battle for its future continued inside the hearts and souls of its present-day inhabitants. However, what is perhaps more remarkable is that the hardness Sheen advocates is explicitly rooted in Christ's suffering and ravaged body, making this a stringently Catholic reading of Christ's body and its connection to America's ideologies. Unlike American Protestant depictions and conceptualizations of Christ's hardness – see, for example, Warner Sallman's immensely popular painting *Head of Christ*, which emphasizes a glowing, virile and 'manly' Christ – Sheen's Catholicism inverts these more traditional depictions by asserting that true physical hardness has ties to suffering, and that Christ's noble sacrifice was the wellspring not just the nation's religious foundations, but of democracy, the most cherished of America' ideologies.[546]

It was this very spiritual hardness that Sheen so effectively embodied when positioning himself against the hardest embodiment of Communism – Stalin himself. Where Truman once referred to Stalin in hardened terms as the "world's bully," Sheen casually remarked in a *Time* magazine piece from 1954 that "he prays every morning for Joseph Stalin" the same he would for

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[545] *Life is Worth Living,* "Pain and Suffering," Written by Fulton J. Sheen, DuMont Network, 1954.

[546] David Morgan devotes an entire monograph to reading the works of Warner Sallman, focusing on Sallman's hale and hearty depictions of Christ. Scholars Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey also notably discuss how Protestant figurations of Christ similarly emphasized images of a healthy and stoic Christ that can be contrasted with Catholic images of presence brought into the nation by the Irish in the nineteenth century. See David Morgan, *Icons of American Protestantism: The Art of Warner Sallman* (New Haven: Yale University Press. 1996); Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

any wayward soul – effectively debasing the Soviet leader to the status of a common sinner, of a man experiencing moral softening.[547] However, his most poignant rebuke of the Soviet leader occurred in an episode titled "On the Death of Stalin." Using clever play on words, frequent allusions and his own creativity, he delivered an episode-length monologue heavily indebted to Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar.* Envisioning a fictitious scenario in which the Soviet leadership was forced to react to and contend with the sudden death of supreme leader Joseph Stalin, Sheen interspersed scenes from the tragedy with his own biting criticism of Communist principles and leaders by name. In one scene, Sheen played with the famous speech given by Marc Antony to the Roman people after the death of Caesar, replacing him with the Soviet leader Malenkov giving a similar speech to Soviet leaders. "Friends, Soviets, countrymen," he began, "lend me your ears; I come to bury Stalin, not to praise him."[548] Where Marc Antony's speech became a clever double entendre that turned the people against the conspirators, Sheen's Malenkov was not intend to offer praise to the recently departed leader – as he states in his final, dramatic pronouncement of the episode: "Stalin must one day meet his judgment!"[549] At the time of its original telecast, the episode was very much a work of fiction. Stalin, the Soviet leader, was very much alive and there were no plans pertaining to the succession of his leadership. However, nine days later, Stalin suffered a sudden cerebral hemorrhage. After three days unconscious in a coma, he was pronounced dead.

Stalin's death further cemented Sheen as one of the nation's foremost anticommunist crusaders, as well as many declaring him as being something of a prophet against Communism. More importantly, by condemning Stalin's soft moral integrity, only to have him die a few days

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[547] *Time*, April 14, 1953, Uncategorized Box, *Fulton Sheen Museum Archives*, Peoria, Illinois, USA; See also McNamara, "The Argument of Strength," 67.
[548] *Life is Worth Living*, "On the Death of Stalin," Written by Fulton J. Sheen, DuMont Network, 1953.
[549] *Life is Worth Living*, "On the Death of Stalin."

later, Sheen showcased the link between spiritual hardness and bodily integrity. [550] In other words, because Stalin's outward hardness lacked the internal hardness afforded by a strong Hebraic-Christian moral foundation, he ultimately lacked the bodily integrity to persevere. And so, if the vitality of male bodies was understood to stand in for the vitality of the nations and its ideologies, Stalin's death demonstrated an inherent weakness in both the Soviet nation and its ideologies, suggesting that they were not as secure – or hard – as may have been previously thought. That such a proclamation should have come from an Irish American Catholic priest is itself interesting, as men like him would still be under some level of suspicion in wider America – though hardly at the levels which they were during the interwar period.

A Most Healthy Body

Despite Sheen's own personal focus on the importance of philosophical, moral and intellectual hardness in the cosmic war with Communism, many of Sheen's supporters were nevertheless fixated with the physical elements of the hard/soft and how they related to his own body, and he did little to detract them from this. Though clearly aging, Sheen's body and bodily habits became points of fascination, intimately linked with the vitality of the national ideologies and its efforts to combat Communism. For instance, during the 1950s, Sheen's eating habits had a habit of making their way into newspaper exposes of his life, interviews, and other biographical instances. In a 1952 article entitled "The Seven Deadly Sins of Our Time," which included an interview with Sheen, the author remarks that when Sheen "adjourns for dinner" it occupies no

[550] Numerous Catholic commentators (and more recently, bloggers) have framed Sheen's pronouncement as "prophetic" and taken this as further proof of his saintly character. See, for example, Charles F. Harvey, "The Virtually Venerable Fulton J Sheen," *Ignatius Press,* accessed Dec 24, 2019, http://www.ignatiusinsight.com/features2006/fultonsheen_bio_nov06.asp, and Michael Cunningham "Living the Worthy Life – The Devil in the Details," *Catholic365.com*, accessed Dec 24, 2019, http://www.catholic365.com/article/10646/living-the-worthy-life-the-devil-is-in-the-details.html.

more than "one half hour" taking place like clockwork from six to six thirty.[551] It goes on to state that "he contents himself only with a few vegetables, a glass of milk or black coffee, a tiny unseasoned salad, or a lamb chop no bigger than a delivery stamp... he contents himself to eat frugally." Not only does Sheen eat little, with no garnish, but he takes little pleasure in eating – seeing it more as a daily chore than anything else. In another article introducing Sheen to his parish shortly after his installation at Rochester, one journalist remarked that Sheen's "breakfast is frugal – orange juice, hot water and toast."[552] In case readers didn't happen to associate Sheen's healthy yet skimpy breakfast with the traditional Catholic virtue of asceticism, Atwell makes the reference explicit, by stating that Sheen's morning meals are "a combination of mortification and practical necessity... he's suffered from ulcers but they don't bother him much now." Remarkably, the article suggests that Sheen's austere diet combined with his personal asceticism improved his health – making his meals both healthy and holy. Sheen's eating habits were thus a source of much fascination and were frequently linked with the discourse surrounding physical fitness being espoused nationally. In other words, Sheen's aging body was represented as a site of both physical and moral strength in the face of America's perceived growing luxury, decadence and laxness.

Interest in Sheen's physicality extended far beyond his food preferences. In *The Bishop Sheen Story,* Sugrue casually refers to Sheen as the "ex-farm boy from Peoria."[553] Much like how the current Diocese of Peoria has been seeking to refigure Sheen as a rural Catholic, Sugrue declared that though Sheen resides in bustling New York City, he "can't get enough of fresh air."[554] As remarked in Chapter 2, at his museum in Peoria, in the small children's corner behind the main

[551] *News Weekly*, October 20, 1952, Uncategorized Box, Fulton Sheen Museum Archives, Peoria, Illinois, USA.
[552] "The New Bishop of Rochester" by Father Henry Atwell, Uncategorized Box, Fulton Sheen Museum Archives, Peoria, Illinois, USA.
[553] Sugrue, "Bishop Sheen Story."
[554] Sugrue, "Bishop Sheen Story." For more on the rural/urban divide and narratives emphasizing Sheen as a "farm boy," see Chapter 2.

display housing some of his vestments sits a stack of colouring books. The first quarter of the book depicts idyllic and imagined images of Sheen's past, as a young man growing up on the farm. We see him riding a horse and smiling. In another image, he uses his muscular arms to work the dirt in the field with a shovel. By all accounts, the Sheen depicted in these images for children to view and colour is a strapping young man in the prime of his life, more of an athlete than a bookworm – far flung from the perfumed man who was immaculately coiffed in well pressed suits or full clerical garb.[555] Ironically, these accounts contrast very much with scenes from his autobiography and even his own aversion to manual labour and farm work.[556] Similar to McCarthy, Sheen's rural origins – no matter how far removed he might have become in becoming a veritable New York dandy – became a point of fascination, an earthy marker of his identity that grounded him among average Americans rather than singled him out as a member of the nation's intellectual – and often perceived to be effeminate – elite. [557]

The extent to which Sheen's supporters lionized his aging body reached almost comical proportions. A year before his death, Sheen endured serious heart trouble that required prolonged hospital stays and repeated surgery. Shortly after leaving the hospital, he was apparently back to his old self, giving speeches and presentations and refusing to rest. A story in *The Twin Circle* at the time by Angela Canade and Paul Fisher remarked that "at 83 years of age, Archbishop Sheen

[555] There is something to be said about a hardened anticommunist appearing each night on television wearing, for all intents and purposes, a dress made for men. As Seitz remarks, clerical vestments have the capacity to bring a touch of delicacy to cold or rough environments - but not necessarily in a detrimentally "soft" manner for Catholics. In one of his studies on WWII military chaplains, he observes how Catholic clerical garbs can signal moral hardness through the "imprint of austerity, solemnity, and historical depth" these vestments carry. I would also add that seeing Sheen in full clerical garb had the capacity to reinforce an aesthetic association between the visual culture of American Catholicism and America's Cold war ideologies. Seitz, "Altars of Ammo," especially 413-416.

[556] See Chapter 1.

[557] Sheen played golf and tennis in Manhattan's Upper East Side. He also drove an imposing black Cadillac and lived in a gaudy home that was then valued at half a million dollars. He enjoyed what would have might otherwise been a normal existence for a wealthy, young NYC playboy, except for the fact he was a celibate bishop. He was also a scholar and an academic, two things which were far flung from typical conceptions of hard bodily masculinity, but which nevertheless suited his approach emphasizing spiritual and intellectual hardness.

has bounced back with vigor... his voice booms."[558] They also commented on his appearance twice in the article, observing that "the famous silver hair is carefully parted above a baby-smooth skin that glows with a healthy blush" and "there is a glowing quality about his eyes... you bask in their warmth." It would seem that even on the cusp of death, Sheen's body was not only glowing but had somehow gotten younger, almost childlike in terms of vitality. In a later obituary after his passing, the same newspaper remarked that even into his 80s, Sheen "spoke with the same vigor that characterized his earlier TV shows" some twenty-five years prior.[559] Similar stories would also run at various stages of his later life, notably during his troubled tenure in Rochester and his retirement shortly thereafter. In the *New York Times*, Paul Hoffman wrote a not-so subtle piece entitled "Bishop Sheen's Vitality Startles and Delights Rochester." The author would declare that Sheen had "the agility of a man much younger than his 72 years." Two years later, in the *Democrat and Courier*, George Murphy remarked that even in the "Autumn" of Sheen's life, he "remains young in spirit" after serving as a priest for 50 years.[560]

What we can see through these various sources is that, though advanced in years and well past his past his prime even by the mid-1950s, Sheen was refigured and re-imagined as embodying a hard masculinity. While his body never achieved the same, almost fetishistic, heights to which McCarthy's and later Reagan's body would, Sheen's body, like his anticommunism and devotion to America's institutions, was nevertheless rendered hale and hearty through symbiosis, able to stand up to the ideological and geopolitical threat created by the nation's soviet rivals. For as long as the aging bishop, a stalwart and outspoken defender of the nation's ideologies, was firm in his

[558] Angela Canade and Paul Fisher, "Archbishop Fulton J, Sheen: A Life Crowned by Love," *Twin Circle*, Sunday June 4, 1978, Uncategorized Box, Fulton Sheen Museum Archives, Peoria, Illinois, USA.
[559] *Twin Circle*, December 23, 1979, Uncategorized Box, Fulton Sheen Museum Archives, Peoria, Illinois, USA.
[560] George Murphy, *Democrat and Chronicle*, Rochester, December 1, 1966, Uncategorized Box, Fulton Sheen Museum Archives, Peoria, Illinois, USA.

resolve against Communism, so too would his body be the mirror reflecting these values. As such, even the potentially more problematic elements of his hard masculinity – such as his taste for luxury and, notably, his celibacy – could be variously overlooked or reconfigured towards his spiritual hardness.

Conclusions

The Cold War was not only a conflict of political ideologies, but also a conflict over the interpretations of men's bodies. As Dumančić has observed, "anxieties about mental and physical toughness consumed not only the leadership of Cold War governments; those in charge of cultural production also found themselves fixated on (re)presenting appropriate versions of masculinity."[561] Masculinity – or rather, the idealized perception of certain hypermasculine traits – became a stabilizing agent in American society, with white, heteronormative men's bodies acting as the main vessels through which the nation could shape its hard character, avoid suspicions of softness, and render the identity of the nation more secure. What this investigation and that of similarly themed literature reveals is that bodies and ideologies overlap, become entangled and otherwise are used to read one another. In this era, men's bodies were imagined as mythical spaces where the conflicts of the competing ideologies of Democracy and Communism were played out. There was a rhetorical and imagined correlation between hardness and softness envisioned variously as good health and athletic fitness, but also in terms of morality and mental faculties. Sheen warned not of Soviet military aggression, but rather that the greatest threat was the corruption of the mind and soul – and, as he demonstrated in the case with Stalin, a weakened moral faculty inevitably led to a weakened bodily state. Fortunately, though America was suffering

[561] Dumančić, "Hidden in Plain Sight," 5.

from a moral softening, every American had the possibility within them of standing up against the Soviets, of hardening themselves, and it all "came down to the Cross."[562] In particular, Christ's bodily sacrifice played a significant if not pivotal role in the potential for hardening America's men.

Despite a pronounced emphasis on spiritual hardness, understandings of Catholic bodies and Catholic understandings of the body are not wholly detached from wider discourses and perceptions in America but are brought into negotiation with ongoing currents of hardness in society. In this case, Sheen's celibate, clerical, and ascetic body came into dialogue with the contradictory and unstable elements of hard masculinity intermixed with religious expressions in a novel manner. While his position as a celibate cleric, teacher, and intellectual dandy who paid close attention to his grooming may well have contributed to an image of effeminacy or sexual suspicion, the hardness of his spiritually ideological stance against Communism rendered him into a figurehead for America's own ideologies, and, as such, necessitated that he be perceived to embody hardness in all of its elements however improbable it may have been. In other words, while Sheen spoke of a hardness of spirit and mind, wider society's understanding of the binary necessitated he also have a hard body. Perhaps in Sheen we can see the possibility that men of this era – and indeed, of any era – have the potential to demonstrate courage, bravery, and hardness in the face of opposition without having to shy away from the intellectual, moral and spiritual elements of their own existence. Sheen's Catholicism facilitated envisioning masculinity in this manner, and the same would be true for other anticommunist priests and Church leaders of the period. As scholar Franklin Rausch argues in his study of Father Emil Kapaun – a Catholic priest who was captured and "martyred" during the Korean war – priests with hard bodies revealed that

[562] Patterson, "The Cross or the Double-Cross," 52.

"religion did not make men, but instead gave them strength."[563] Catholicism could then argue that of all the forms of hardness, moral and spiritual hardness reigned superior, and Sheen was the ideal embodiment of these characteristics.

Nevertheless, as a final note of caution, Jeffords remarks that hard bodies ultimately make for "dangerous role models" owing to the militarism and nationalism embedded within, but also because they hint at desperation, a last ditch for a nation to cling to what may be a dying, conservative framework whose influence has long been unable to keep up with cyclical and changing social conditions.[564] Societal change, therefore, is a major precursor for male anxiety and the apparent need for hard, seemingly stable role models.[565] Yet, as noted in my introductory remarks, the conditions that led to anxieties around men's bodies in the 1950s were hardly unique, as they are equally present in the 1800s and at the turn of the century.[566] This suggests that anxiety and the drive to hardness are inherent and pervasive in hegemonic masculinity, and that men in any era of change and uncertainty will almost certainly experience a contradictory pull whereby bodies can ease sentiments of anxiety while themselves being the sources of said anxiety.

As a final note, similar investigations of bodily hardness / spiritual hardness of Catholic Cold War figures would certainly be warranted in future studies. Prominent 1960s anticommunist figures such as Tom Dooley, who practiced personal austerities, and President John F. Kennedy,

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[563] Father Emil Kapaun was captured after refusing to retreat, choosing instead to remain with the wounded. His spiritual and bodily hardness led him to become a role model and father figure to his men until he died in a POW camp in 1951 before the war's end. Rausch, "All Man, All Priest," 88-89. See also Seitz's "The Mass-Clock," and "Altars of Ammo," for similar observations about WWII military chaplains.

[564] Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*, 193.

[565] Rausch observes that while anticommunism enabled a space for men to harden themselves against soft enemies, it was not the sole factor leading to this need for hardness. The rising status of women, African Americans, changes in the workplace and the corporatization of American life were equally guilty of apparently sapping men's vitality. Rausch, "All Man, All Priest," 63.

[566] See Kimmel, "Crisis."

whose ravaged body was broken and effectively martyred, spring to mind as viable candidates of similar studies.

Conclusion: The End and the Beginning

December 2nd, 2020, holds the dubious distinction of being the one-year anniversary of the latest delay in Sheen's Beatification ceremony. In a markedly frustrated editorial composed for *Our Sunday Visitor*, Michael R. Heinlein – a frequent contributor and editor of *The Catholic Answer* magazine – railed against the ongoing delays. As might be expected, he decried the surprising and vague nature of Rochester's request to halt the proceedings. However, more surprisingly, he extended some of the blame to Vatican officials themselves, calling attention to what he saw as an "all-too-familiar lack of clarity" in the canonization process on the part of the Holy See. Such disruptions and their lack of transparency should be a cause of concern not just for Sheen's devotees, he argued, but for the "whole Church."[567] In other words, until Church leadership is able to offer more clarity, laypeople everywhere will be forced to continue toiling, not just for the cause of their celebrated patrons, but also in the difficult task of finding answers that should otherwise have been given.

On February 4th, 2021, after several more months of no progress, the street outside of St. Mary's Cathedral in downtown Peoria was given the honorary designation of "Bishop Fulton Sheen Avenue." Msrgr. Stanley Deptula, the executive director of the Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen Foundation, commented on the location, noting how Sheen's family had moved from their farm to a home not far from the Cathedral, apparently so that Sheen and his brothers could be close to the building along with the parochial school at the nearby Spalding Institute. As he states: "it is from these very streets that Fulton Sheen went on to change the world, not just the Catholic world, but

[567] Michael R. Heinlein, "A Year Later, Still No Answers on the Delay of Fulton Sheen's Beatification," *Our Sunday Visitor* December 2, 2020, https://www.osvnews.com/2020/12/02/a-year-later-still-no-answers-on-the-delay-of-fulton-sheens-beatification/.

the world, with a message that life is worth living."[568] While certainly hyperbolic, the Monsignor's words, similar to Mr. Heinlein's, indicate the extent to which Sheen continues to be viewed as something more than just the sum of his parts, and that his influence and significance extend far beyond his community. The honorary renaming of the street alongside the Cathedral is of course symbolic of Sheen's spiritual connections to the Church, an institution to which he dedicated his life. However, given that New York is still actively contesting Sheen's cause, the move to continue tangibly mapping Sheen to Peoria's geography may also be read as part of the larger struggle for rural Catholic visibility.

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Over the course of this work, I have sought to highlight, not only the enduring importance of Sheen within the history and ongoing reality of American Catholicism, but also the ways in which celebrity and masculinity studies offer important theoretical supplements to the study of mid-twentieth century American Catholicism. In the first chapter, I demonstrated how Sheen's celebrity and sanctity both complemented and challenged one another. The Church has never looked upon celebrity favourably, always seeming to fear its potential to grow beyond its boundaries and spill out of their control. Sheen, in the composition of his autobiography, demonstrated that he was in no way unaware of this tension, and sought to sublimate the elements of his life that led him to become a figure whose celebrity extended beyond the confines of the Church. In doing so, he borrowed from the trappings and tropes of classical hagiography, and, in many ways, re-imagined what it means to be an American celebrity – and, by extension, a sanctified figure. Ultimately, Sheen's desire for control over his narrative body led to the creation of a rather novel document that is neither fully biography nor hagiography, but an unstable mixture

[568] Tom Dermody, "Naming Street Near Cathedral for Archbishop Sheen Called 'Wonderful Tribute,'" *The Boston Pilot* February 10, 2021, https://www.thebostonpilot.com/article.asp?ID=189365.

of the two – much like his own personhood and body. This document highlights the possibility of undertaking similar readings of other biographical material produced by figures who straddled the twined poles of American celebrity and Catholic sanctity.

In the second chapter, I highlighted how Sheen's afterlife and body – that is, his material remains as they become holy relics – have exposed rifts and power imbalances in the wider American Church. Since the late nineteenth century, rural Catholics have struggled for visibility and recognition amid the larger narratives of American Catholicism – narratives which have tended to be shaped, claimed and otherwise dominated by the nation's urban metropolises, notably New York. Although the transfer of Sheen's remains to Peoria – the diocese responsible for his canonization proceedings – should have been simple, it became a veritable, and highly public, tug of war between New York and Peoria, between center and the periphery, between the powerful and the underdog. This particular struggle, however, revealed itself to be not just a battle over Sheen's final resting place, but also over his identity. Was Sheen a country boy at heart who never forgot his upbringing, or was he a member of the New York elite? Similarly, questions of Sheen's identity are also questions about situating American sanctity within one's body. Is sanctity derived by whatever kernels of one's upbringing that remain deep within one's core, or is it demonstrated more so by the choices one made later in their life? In this case, we can see how the sanctity of the figures we adore is very much shaped by our own positionality. That Sheen could be both – country boy, rural Catholic and city dwelling, elite – was perhaps never properly asked, but only tacitly admitted by Peoria as they commemorate him and keep his life on display at the Archbishop Fulton Sheen Museum. Nevertheless, one walks away from this ongoing ordeal asking to what extent his celebrity has also acted as a complicating factor in New York's decision to hold up his proceedings,

and to what extent celebrity may also complicate the afterlives of fellow modern saints in the making.

In Chapter 3, I contextualized Sheen's sacred celebrity alongside certain socio-religious trends that facilitated his rise along with his fellow celebrity preachers. While postwar America appears to have been in the process of experiencing a new religious revival, with Americans craving meaning and simple explanations to help them situate themselves in the aftermath of war, Sheen's rise (like that of Vincent Norman Peale) was made largely possible by new technologies of access. In ancient times, sacred figures were made known through local communities of adherents, through shared religious orders, or institutional promotion. By the 1950s, radio, paperback publishing and television effectively transformed the ways in which average people were able to connect with the figures they celebrate. Television, in particular, allowed for these connections to become more personal and familial, owing to the viewing experience itself and the types of content that Sheen and others in those pioneering years produced. Celebrity (as well as sanctity) became more accessible and approachable, something a person could invite into their living room, rather than experience at an absolute distance. Yet, even then, these friendly familiar personas embodied by Sheen and others still bore the marks of being manufactured and catered, with Sheen still putting himself and his body at distance through his choice of wearing his full ceremonial regalia during each program. In effect, Sheen's program embodied certain contradictions of accessibility and distance between his body and that of the viewer, which further emphasized his celebrity / sanctity difference.

In the fourth chapter, I positioned Sheen as the heir to a sizable repertoire of visual tropes and conventions established by Hollywood's depiction of priests in the previous generation. In contrast to the often-derogatory stereotypes of Irish in America (and in particular, their

masculinity), priests – as the most visible symbol of Catholic difference – were played by Charismatic leading men and demonstrated socially favorable traits with which Americans could identify. Sheen's later television presence is very much indebted to these earlier Hollywood iterations, even as Hollywood had by that time moved beyond these earlier archetypes and was depicting priests in more challenging manners. As I argued, the medium of television, with its emphasis on familiarity, allowed his then-anachronistic (albeit charismatic) character to thrive with his family-friendly content and affirming discourses. From these we may gather that American visual media – from cinema to television – not only has a hand in negotiating American religion to the masses, but also in shaping and sculpting it in a way that resonates more closely with its audiences and their expectations.

Lastly, in my fifth chapter, I demonstrated how the early postwar era, like much of the Cold War, was an era of anxieties where men's bodies were concerned. As the nation's men were perceived to be sliding towards dangerous softness, it necessitated the space for firm voices to vicariously embody and demonstrate that much needed hardness. While McCarthy was the gruff opposite of Sheen where presentations are concerned, the two men nevertheless held a shared understanding of the geopolitical struggle of Democracy versus Communism and its implications for the perceived place, role and survival of American religion. While McCarthy dealt with bodily anxieties in a typically hard male fashion, Sheen refigured hardness by tying it intricately to the spirit and one's moral compass. Firmness of character, morality and mind – characteristics that Americans had within their reach owing to their shared Hebraic-Christian heritage – could allow the nation to overcome the threat posed by the Soviet Union and their bodies. In effect, Sheen's Catholic response to the geopolitical conflict signaled the ways in which body and religion can symbiotically inform one another during moments of increased national tension, crisis and anxiety.

Ultimately, through these various discussions, I have demonstrated how Sheen' body and body of work represent an important site of intersection between the institution of the American Catholic Church, the various identifications of its members, its understanding of sanctity, and its engagement with wider secular themes in American culture – my focus, of course, being on constructions of masculinity and celebrity. With respect to the former, I have demonstrated how Sheen's particular performance of masculinity represents a fascinating mediation of the concerns and expectations of both secular and Catholic expressions of masculinity; with the latter, I've sought to specifically call attention to how Sheen, as a sanctified celebrity, provides a powerful example of how the contemporary American context complicates traditional models of sanctity, forcing us to reconsider what types of secular attachments represent real or perceived impediments to the claim of sanctity. Through an exploration of his television fame – amplified by his careers as a bestselling author and radio personality – Sheen managed to tap into a particular moment of American history, reading the needs and expectations of his audiences to create a persona and performance that effectively blurred the lines of separation between religious and popular culture.

Sheen's blurring of such lines is not wholly unique: many mid-twentieth century American Catholic figures have held secular attachments that might be read as complicating or being at odds with their claims to sanctity. Take, for example, Father Emil Kapaun, the U.S. Army chaplain who died as a prisoner of war during the Korean War. While not necessarily a celebrity of the stature of Sheen, Kapaun embodied a sort of military heroism, making his body an excellent site to interrogate the ways in which Catholic and military identifications intersect.[569] Like Sheen, his physical remains have also posed problems for his cause, which up until recently had not been

[569] See Rausch, "'All Man, All Priest."

recovered nor identified. [570] With the "discovery" of his remains, the Diocese of Wichita, where his cause is based, is eagerly looking forward to continuing the process. It will be intriguing to witness whether his life among America's servicemen, while certainly one of the more hallowed of American callings, may disrupt or complicate understandings of his martyrdom and sanctity – and, if so, whether it will also need to be defused or refigured accordingly.

Equally intriguing investigations could be undertaken on Dorothy Day or Thomas Merton.[571] Despite Day's accomplishments, her early life – which flirted with communism and anarchism and saw her enjoy a "bohemian lifestyle" which led to an unwanted pregnancy and abortion – could prove to represent a complicating factor in her cause.[572] Though Merton (like Sheen), likely has fewer skeletons in his closet, during the peak of his celebrity, he nevertheless engaged in dialogue with other traditions and embraced a certain level of ecumenicism and anti-war activism that might not have been expected for a typically reclusive Trappist monk.[573] Like Sheen, both Day and Merton wrote auto-biographies that can be read as auto-hagiographical, in that each arguably sought to use these works to attenuate aspects of their character which might read as being at odds with their Catholic identity. In effect, the lives of all three (Sheen, Merton, and Day), were heavily intertwined with the workings of the modern secular world and its culture,

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[570] Kevin J. Jones, "Medal of Honor Chaplain Fr. Emil Kapaun's Body Identified as Sainthood Inquiry Continues," *Catholic News Agency*, March 5, 2021, https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/medal-of-honor-chaplain-fr-emil-kapauns-body-identified-as-sainthood-inquiry-continues-46493.

[571] Both Day and Merton have open canonization causes. In 2012, Day was elevated to Servant of God, while Merton's cause has yet to make any significant inroads. For Pope Francis' remarks, see Dan Zak, Abby Ohlheiser and Sarah Pulliam Bailey, "Pope Francis Praised Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton. Here's Who They Were," *Washington Post*, September 24, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/09/24/pope-francis-praised-dorothy-day-and-thomas-merton-heres-who-they-were/.

[572] See Michelle Boorstein, "Dorothy Day Was A Radical. Now Many People Want the Vatican to Make Her A Saint," *Washington Post*, January 28, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2020/01/28/being-communist-socialist-anarchist-sympathizer-once-made-dorothy-day-radical-now-many-want-vatican-make-her-saint/. See also Anne Klejment, "Dorothy Day and César Chávez: American Catholic Lives in Nonviolence," *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 29, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 67-90.

[573] See Clooney, "Thomas Merton's Deep Chrisian Learning," and Denis Gleeson, "'Meditation With Fireflies': An Introduction to Thomas Merton," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 102, no. 405 (Spring 2013): 43-52.

making one wonder to what extent a potential modern American saint could exist without doing so. As such, the auto-hagiographical genre represents a fascinating window into the secular-sanctified tension inherent in these figures, demonstrating that they were, on some level, aware of this tension and anxious about attenuating it.[574] While the lives of all sanctified figures intersect with the secular to some extent, modern figures who find themselves celebrated beyond Catholic devotional circles inherently accumulate more secular attachments and significance than past figures – which, in addition to potentially complicating their claims to sanctity and the drive for their canonization, also drives home the necessity of studying these figures through an interdisciplinary rather than purely Catholic Studies lens.

As a final concluding remark, I would like to momentarily turn our attention back to the theme of "ordinariness," and how both Sheen and his devotees attempts to frame his life in "normal" and "ordinary" terms speaks to a larger tension in the post-Vatican II canonization process. In Sheen's autobiography, the concern for ordinariness reads almost strangely: on the one hand he uses the tropes of hagiography to signal his own sanctity, while on the other he emphasizes his "ordinariness" in his efforts to downplay his celebrity and frame his accomplishments modestly. His devotees have acted similarly, positioning him as a salt of the earth Peorian rather than the New York aristocrat he read as during his life. In each case, we find ourselves continually being steered away from his career in New York City and the very aspects of his life that make him as recognizable as both a celebrity and sanctified figure. By moving to highlight such elements of Catholic ordinariness in his life, narrative and image, Sheen begins to appear, both remarkable and unremarkable when viewed from different angles – something which seems to undermine the

[574] As discussed in Chapter 1, my use of the term "auto-hagiography" differs from its classical usages. Please see Chapter 1 for the full discussion.

heroic nature and special character that would normally isolate a saint. Interestingly, this ambiguous framing speaks to a wider trend in modern saint-making post-Vatican II.

Since the late 1970s, papal figures, such as John Paul II and his successor Benedict XVI, have often stressed the apparent "ordinariness" of figures on the road towards canonization, suggesting that the heroic virtues practiced by these figures could be attainable for the average Catholic in search of a figure to emulate.[575] Coupled hand-in-hand with the reduction of the miraculous requirements for canonization, first by allowing for the founding of a religious order to replace one of the two required miracles, and then adapting the once mandatory requirement for the second,[576] we can see a top down push towards emphasizing ordinariness in the lives of saints and those who would be counted among them. Such a push is, of course, paradoxical. If all saints are simply normal people who embodied a slightly heightened sense of virtue, then what point is there to singling out the saints? It's a question that the post-Vatican II Church has perhaps been unable or unwilling to answer.

Nevertheless, Sheen and his many intersections act as a reminder that our fields of study are seldom demarcated, that bodies move through many worlds, and that stories seldom play out the way they are written. In effect, given the prominence of similar celebrated Catholic figures whose secular attachments can be read at odds with their sanctity, interdisciplinary readings that move beyond the confines of religious studies are crucial and dare I say essential. Celebrity studies

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[575] Vatican II and the period since have seen an increased interest towards "normal" saints by the popes canonizing them. The cause for John Neumann, a Redemptorist priest and bishop of Philadelphia, had stalled somewhat prior to the council owing to the difficulties in showing that he had lived a life of "heroic" rather than ordinary virtues. However, with the changes in the air, what had once been a liability soon became a quality and he was canonized in 1977. Cummings, *Saint of Our Own*, 173-175. A similar mood can perhaps be read in Sheen's autobiography, with his emphasis on his own ordinariness, as discussed in Chapter 1.

[576] Typically, and historically, to be canonized as a saint, the candidate is required to have performed at least two miracles demonstrated to have been such by the cause and investigators at the Congregation. However, candidates who have become beatified may only require a single miracle, depending on the reasons for which they were beatified. This could include the founding of a religious order or other acts deemed to have been greatly meritorious by either the Sacred College of Cardinals or the Congregation.

can help us contextualize figures whose mass appeal extends beyond the domain of religious devotion and whose lives and careers touched those inhabiting non-denominational spaces. Under examination we can understand how secular tools of access and modes of being might inform the identities of these figures and their potentially contradictory embodiments of sanctity. Equally so, masculinity studies (or gender studies more broadly) for their part can help us navigate the often ambivalent and contradictory demands and expectations of both religious masculinities as well as secular ones. Figures such as Sheen effectively demonstrate the difficulty of being "read" according to a single rubric and the necessity for being viewed under a variety of lenses. Ultimately, the complexities I've outlined in the cause of Sheen and the causes of similar figures, along with their engagement outside of purely religious milieus and many intersections with wider culture, are what makes them such engaging figures of study and which draws devotees to their cause.

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