



Angelic teachings...

Rarely do sequels live up to the expectations established by their predecessor. But in the case of **The Bells of St. Mary's** (1945), a follow up to the Oscar-winning **Going My Way**, the story proved not only more enduring and timeless but more popular with audiences. Crosby reprises his role as Father O'Malley, a benevolent priest whose new assignment as head of a parish school brings him into immediate conflict with Sister Mary Benedict (Ingrid Bergman). From the onset the two cannot agree on anything.

After a fist fight develops between two boys, O'Malley declares one 'the winner': "I like a fella' who can take care of himself" he tells Sister Benedict, "After all, on the outside it's a man's world, you know." "How are they doing, Father?" she glibly replies. Director Leo McCarey's direction allows the maudlin elements of the plot their full scope of sugary sweetness. But it's the tender sparing between Crosby and Bergman that one tends to recollect fondly in second thoughts.



During production, the Catholic League of Decency sent a representative to ensure that the due austerity of religion was preserved. Although McCarey assured a sterling adherence to those guidelines, Crosby and Bergman decided to have some fun with the representative. During the final moment in the film, in which Sister Benedict forgives Father O'Malley, Crosby and Bergman suddenly embraced in an unscripted passionate kiss, sending the representative into a momentary tizzy.

Crosby, who had previously won the Best Actor Oscar playing O'Malley in the aforementioned **Going My Way** was nominated again in this film – the first time any actor received two nominations for playing the same role.

PLOT: Father Chuck O'Malley (Crosby) is assigned to oversee a parochial school run under the firm by gentle hand of Sister Mary Benedict (Bergman). Used to having their own way, the nuns are at first a little put off by O'Malley's laconic way. After an impromptu declaration of a holiday some of the school children get into trouble with neighboring property owner, Horace P.



Bogardus' ambition is to drive St. Marys into extinction and buy up the land for a parking structure adjacent his new office building. Sister Benedict has other ideas. She and the nuns have been praying that Bogardus will wake up one day, realize the error of his ways and donate the building to the church for their new school.

Two criteria appear to be working in their favor; first – that Bogardus' health is ailing, hence the old curmudgeon's concerns gradually shift toward achieving immortality through kind deeds, and second, that O'Malley is infinitely devious in his charming of the industrialist out of his most prized possession. But the story takes an unexpected



melodramatic turn with two tear-jerking moments; the first involving a reclusive student, Patsy (Joan Carroll) who is reunited with her biological father; the second, when Father O'Malley discovers that Sister Benedict is dying of tuberculosis. Through a misunderstanding, Sister Benedict thinks that Father O'Malley is conspiring to have her removed from St. Marys because she is withholding Patsy's graduation certificate due to poor grades. Resilient in her own standards, Sister Benedict's resolve is decimated when she learns that the Arch Diocese is sending her away without any explanation or just cause. Having earlier concurred with Dr.

McKay (Rhys Williams), that to tell Sister Benedict of her condition would destroy her positive attitude, in the final reel Father O'Malley has a change of heart. He confides in Sister Benedict the truth, a revelation that restores her faith, not only in O'Malley's sincerity, but in mankind as well.

Republic Home Video has released **The Bells of St. Marys** on DVD in a rather lack luster transfer that is, to put it mildly, disappointing. Though the image can at times appear to be quite clean and sharp, nothing can excuse the excessive shimmering of fine details that plague the DVD transfer throughout. At times these anomalies are quite distracting. The image also appears to wobble slightly during several sequences. The final curiosity on this transfer is the masking of a credit immediately below the title that is supposed to read "*Miss Bergman appears courtesy of an exclusive agreement with David O. Selznick.*" Apparently, after the demise of Selznick International some well-intentioned editor sought to obliterate all external references to the producer. The gray block that appears on screen after one has already had the opportunity to view the credit, neither covers up the credit entirely, nor does it disappear for several brief seconds after the credit itself has dissolved to reveal a list of cast members – odd and distracting to say the least. There are no extras.

