

My Name is Earl & God  
Sean Caldwell  
August 17th 2021

The television series *My Name Is Earl* revolves around the character Earl Hickey and his experiences understanding the Buddhist concept of Karma.<sup>1</sup> In this essay we will be looking into how the life-long Catholic writer of the show Greg Garcia tries to show that Karma may be a method in which the living God works in this world.<sup>2</sup> Greg Garcia was born shortly after the most impactful ecumenical council of the Catholic Church's history. Within this council the writing *Nostra Aetate* recognizes other faiths as a method to help men understand God. This is to recognize that other religions contain guidance to bring you closer to God before knowing Him. "Buddhism, in its various forms, realizes the radical insufficiency of this changeable world; it teaches a way by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, may be able either to acquire the state of perfect liberation, or attain, by their own efforts or through higher help, supreme illumination."<sup>3</sup>

The story of our protagonist Earl Hickey starts as a story of redemption. Earl is a wicked man that has continually gone down the wrong paths in life due to pure ignorance. Earl is first brought to the idea of Karma after he had been punished for his misdeeds. Although what he was ultimately given was an orientation that took him from his ways. To be scared of what will come from his sins and act in accordance with the law, through the fear of God.<sup>4</sup> It is from here that the story becomes how Earl interacts with Karma as a method of understanding the supernatural world around him. The story now is a basis for his conversion into the Spirit as to keep his eternal life.

The interactions within the show and the Spirit really become an explanation for how God is always wanting to interact with you. What is happening with Earl is being determined by the actions he takes with his life. This is fitting the Buddhist idea that Karma is the justice of the universe. After Earl had been struck by a car and introduced to the idea of karma he experienced a moment of eureka regarding his life. That the crash he just experienced, along the rest of his miserable life, was just punishment for his actions. Craving a better life he found the best thing he could do to improve it

---

<sup>1</sup> Sayadaw, Mahasi. "Basic Buddhism: The Theory of Karma."

<sup>2</sup> Spiegelman, Ian. "Greg Garcia Responds to Baldwin:

<sup>3</sup> *Nostra Aetate*

<sup>4</sup> Saunders, Rev. William P. "What Is the Fear of the Lord?"

directly was to make up for his past deeds; and that's how his infamous *list* was birthed. We can find the explanation of said *list* in which the show revolves around from Ezekiel 33:14-15, "And if I say to a wicked person, 'you will surely die', but they turn away from their sin and do what is just and right... return what they have stolen, follow the decrees that give life, and do no evil- that person will surely live; they will not die."

From the beginning of the series we have the writer trying to convince us that God is directly ordaining Earl's life based on his actions. In the first episode after Earl decides to make his list of wrongs in order to correct them for good Karma he is rewarded with the return of his winning lottery ticket. Our writer also consistently reminds us of the direct connection with the Creator and Karma even though it's not directly referenced by the characters. In episode 14 '*Monkeys in Space*' Earl's brother is looking for his purpose in life. Searching deeply because Earl had found his, redeeming himself. While Randy was with Earl committing most of the sins with his brother. The show has him attempt numerous jobs but closes with his purpose being to help Earl with the *list*, and the clouds part and cast light upon Randy. This refers to earlier in the episode where he is asking for guidance for his life. Essentially his only form of prayer, asking if he will receive a 'Jesus Light'. Randy says that the clouds moved just for him. Which they may have, for God is pleased when the wicked turn from their ways and live (Ezekiel 18:23).

Through interpreting the show as someone without a relationship with God you can come to an understanding of how a relationship with Him may work. Many Catholic teachers have said to me that prayers are often answered indirectly and I can't help but see that this was an attempt to help teach the people this principle. Catholic literature in the modern era often acknowledges the broken world in which we live in. The Vatican 2 council which was mentioned before actually in part was taken place to be an *Aggiornamento* which simply would mean bringing the Church up to date with modern times. The ending of the show *My Name is Earl* was an attempted idea of how people can force change in the modern times. Although it never happened the story was to come full circle, where Earl would be incapable of righting a wrong on his list. However the story would end with Earl finding another person who is completing their own list in which he himself is on.<sup>5</sup> The story ends here. "Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit... For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone... Repent and live!" (Ezekiel 18:31-32).

---

<sup>5</sup> Spencer, Anthony. "The Amazing Ending of 'My Name Is Earl' That Fans Never Get to See."

## Sources

“NOSTRA AETATE.” Nostra aetate. Accessed December 7, 2021.

[https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html).

Saunders, Rev. William P. “What Is the Fear of the Lord?” Catholic Straight Answers, February 26, 2015. <https://catholicstraightanswers.com/fear-lord/>.

Sayadaw, Mahasi. “Basic Buddhism: The Theory of Karma.” buddhist studies. Accessed December 7, 2021. <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/karma.htm>.

Spencer, Anthony. “The Amazing Ending of 'My Name Is Earl' That Fans Never Get to See.” TheThings, January 12, 2021. <https://www.thethings.com/the-amazing-ending-of-my-name-is-earl-that-fans-never-get-to-see/>.

Spiegelman, Ian. “Greg Garcia Responds to Baldwin: 'I'm Not a Scientologist.'” Gawker. Accessed December 7, 2021. <https://www.gawker.com/5046326/greg-garcia-responds-to-baldwin-im-not-a-scientologist>.