

MARY AS MEDIA ICON:
THE MADONNA IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN CATHOLIC DEVOTIONAL
CULTURES

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ABSTRACT

MARYELLEN DAVIS: Mary as Media Icon: The Madonna in Twentieth-Century American Catholic Devotional Cultures
(Under the direction of Thomas A. Tweed)

“Mary as Media Icon: The Madonna in Twentieth-Century American Catholic Devotional Cultures” investigates the proliferation of Marian representations within the media of two U.S. Catholic devotional organizations, the Militia Immaculata, U.S.A., and the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal, at specific cultural and historical moments, specifically from 1917 to 1970. Both groups used media, particularly their magazines, *Immaculata* and *The Miraculous Medal*, to communicate their devotional messages and to represent the Virgin Mary in ways that expressed their distinctive views. While exploring this media, I found that twentieth-century Marian devotional organizations in the United States, such as the Militia Immaculata and the Association of the Miraculous Medal, adapted images of the Madonna to their religious, political, and historical subcultures through acts of creative representation intended to transform beliefs into actions. These representations became media icons—images that both signify and participate in the religious worldviews of Marian devotees. This dissertation employs the scholarly perspectives of Catholic Studies, American Religious History, Media Studies, and Critical Theory to interrogate the role of the Madonna in twentieth-century American Catholic devotional cultures.

To Keith

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ABBREVIATIONS

MI	Militia Immaculata
CAMM	Central Association of the Miraculous Medal

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: TOWARD A THEORY OF MARIAN IMAGES AND CATHOLIC REPRESENTATION

It took me a while to figure out what I was doing by studying the Virgin Mary in American Catholic history, and traditional Catholic devotional groups like the Militia of the Immaculata and the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal that became the focus of this dissertation. A series of experiences showed me the strong reactions people have to Mary. Once, at a job interview, a member of the hiring committee asked, “Isn’t that just ‘Mary-worship’? Why would you study that?” In a course I taught, the American Catholic Experience, I showed images from 1950s Catholic magazines to the class, depicting the Madonna as a warrior against Communism. One student remarked, “That’s just dumb!” Another asked, “Did people really believe that?” On another day, a Catholic friend asked about my research in passing. She did not hesitate to offer her own opinion: “Mary is for superstitious people who want something to believe in.”

I realized that images of the Madonna stir up powerful emotions, not only among Marian devotees, but also in everyday encounters with people outside that tradition. Much of the negative response is fueled by a broader attitude toward Catholicism in America going back to the Colonial Era—a way of thinking that identifies Mary as a feared symbol of Catholic difference. Many American Catholics, however, also react negatively to what they view as an over-emphasis on Mary in their religion’s past. Marian devotion, once a badge of Catholic (and ethnic) identity, became a possible source of shame in the face of assimilation

into mainstream American society. Religious identity, especially in a culture as diverse as the United States, involves a complex dance of negotiation. Since the U.S. context offers freedom of religion, distinguishing one's place both within and without a tradition is important. A landscape of choice is a landscape of judgment: this is "not-my-Catholicism" or "not-my-Christianity" or "not-my-religion."

As a scholar and a Catholic, certain aspects of my research *did* make me uncomfortable. I was deeply attracted to strands of Catholic thought that in many aspects were "not-my-Catholicism"—not in the way the Spanish Inquisition is "not-my-Catholicism"—but disturbing enough to make me squirm in my chair when an interviewer, or student, or friend pressed the issue. In academic circles I opened myself up to the common (if simplistic) accusation: to study something is, at some level, to endorse it. I asked myself, "Is a subject that inspires such mixed feelings worthy of study?" Precisely *because* it inspires such affect, I concluded, the topic seems valuable.

I realized that what I was offering was not an apologetic for particular forms of Marian devotion, but an expression of a principle that, for me, forms the heart of religious studies as a discipline: to dismiss someone's religious practice as "dumb" is to refuse to understand it. For me, this is one of the most dangerous forms of ignorance in today's world. I've spent a great deal of effort trying to educate my students about the complexity of religious beliefs and practices. To get them, for example, to at least engage the teachings of Islam, before they equate it with terrorism. To parse out the agonizing choices of Christian Scientist parents who refuse to treat their sick child as an observance of God's law. To comprehend the religious motivations of groups who segregate themselves from society, like the Amish or Hasidic Jews.

What became clear to me was that my attraction to Marian devotion stemmed primarily from an interest in symbols and their startling power. I began the task of situating Marian symbols within the Catholic theology of sacramentality. During my research on Marian representations within U.S. Catholic devotional organizations, three themes emerged: *creativity*, *adaptability*, and *transformation*. My research led to an investigation of two American Catholic Marian devotional groups that had not yet been the subjects of in-depth scholarly study: the Militia Immaculata, U.S.A., and the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal. Both groups used media, particularly magazines, to communicate their devotional messages and to represent the Virgin Mary in ways that expressed their distinctive views. While exploring this media, I found that twentieth-century Marian devotional organizations in the United States, such as the Militia Immaculata and the Association of the Miraculous Medal, *adapted* images of the Madonna to their religious, political, and historical subcultures through acts of *creative* representation intended to *transform* beliefs into actions. These representations became *media icons*—images that both signify and participate in the religious worldviews of Marian devotees.

Creativity and Adaptability

Ultimately, the play of symbolic representations of Mary among devotees demonstrates a deep sense of creativity and flexibility. For me, creativity is at the heart of a definition of religion. Devotees became the bricoleurs, who pieced together meaning not only along the smooth lines of stated doctrines, but also out of the fragments of faith, imagination, and

desire.¹ Such creativity is not passive, but involves actions and practices. Robert A. Orsi notes:

Religious creativity is not intransitive. It is an action on the world, made necessary and possible by particular circumstances in the world. “Religion” is not *in* or *of* the world, nor simply *against* but *through* the world...People appropriate religious idioms as they need them, in response to particular circumstances. All religious ideas and impulses are of the moment, invented, taken, borrowed, and improvised at the intersections of life.²

Religion documents the myriad ways human beings have creatively constructed meaning.

What is most fascinating to me is that the constructions of Mary within the Catholic tradition are not perceived as false because they are constructed. Rather, it is the Catholic theological emphasis on *sacramentality* that produces meaning, even with an apparently over-constructed and re-constructed symbol such as Mary.

In Marian representations, I even dared to see a response to some of the assumptions of some postmodern theories, which suggested that to reveal the seams in the garment of faith, or the contours shaping a symbol in frequent use, was to learn the truth of unhinged signifiers. In this rubric, Marian images might signify nothing but the folly of human construction. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, postmodern theorist Jean Baudrillard reflects on the status of religious signs:

All Western faith and good faith became engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could be exchanged for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange—God of course. But what if God himself can be simulated, that is to say can be reduced to the signs that

¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 16-33. Lévi-Strauss notes in this translation, “the ‘bricoleur’ has no equivalent in English. He is a man who undertakes odd jobs and is a Jack of all trades or a kind of professional do-it-yourself man...” (17) The bricoleur “makes do” with “whatever is at hand.” (17) For the purposes of this project, I use the terms *bricoleur* and *bricolage* to describe Marian devotees and their acts of representation, whose playfulness with the religious symbols at hand involves a type of symbolic craftsmanship.

² Robert A. Orsi, “Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion,” in *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, ed. David D. Hall (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 8.

constitute faith? Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer itself anything but a gigantic simulacrum—not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference.³

Baudrillard disputes the premises of belief that devotees use to affirm the referential nature of religious images. He describes the first stage of understanding images as “reflection[s] of a profound reality,” as part of a “sacramental order.”⁴ He continues, however, to suggest that images ultimately become disconnected from this order and become “pure simulacrum” in a postmodern economy.⁵

By contrast, Catholic sacramental thought retains belief in a non-simulated divine that stands behind the world of representations. From a Catholic theological perspective, Richard P. McBrien argues, “sacraments both signify and cause grace.”⁶ In this sacramental vision, Mary becomes not just a symbol, but also an *icon*—a window opening to the divine presence. The commonality between the disaffected postmodernist and the Catholic devotee is that both believe that signifiers instigate major ripples in the web of human meaning. The difference is that the postmodernist sees that cycle of cause and effect as somewhat arbitrary, without grounding in phenomenological experience. The Catholic devotee (or theologian)—or at least one who embraces sacramentalism—interprets the symbol of Mary through the cycle of grace. In Catholic tradition, Mary is a conduit of grace, both literally and metaphorically. But metaphor here does not signal it is not real (as defined by the Catholic devotee), since metaphor serves as a primary means of accessing spiritual realities. Religious

³ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 5-6.

⁴ Baudrillard, 6.

⁵ Baudrillard, 6.

⁶ Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism: New Edition* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 12.

metaphors, like poetic ones, in the Catholic worldview, give life to the ideas they represent. This is not the dualistic analogy of the Platonic forms, but rather a fleshy sacramentalism.

The Marian imagery used by Catholic devotional groups like the Militia of the Immaculata and the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal occupies a metaphorical realm that David Tracy described as the “analogical imagination” and Andrew Greeley identifies more broadly as the “Catholic imagination.”⁷ Greeley’s attempt to elucidate a particularly Catholic way of seeing the world is bound up with theological concepts that echo McBrien’s definition of “sacramentality.” Greeley argues:

The Catholic imagination in all its many manifestations (Tracy calls it “analogical”) tends to emphasize the metaphorical nature of creation. The objects, events, and persons of ordinary existence hint at the nature of God and indeed make God in some fashion present to us. God is sufficiently like creation that creation not only tells us something about God but, by doing so, also makes God present among us.⁸

Greeley suggests that Catholic signs participate in what they represent, as manifestations of divine presence, and reminds readers that, “A metaphor is a two-way street.”⁹ Marian devotees construct such reciprocal metaphors of give-and-take as an act of religious creativity. Although Greeley might be criticized for attempting to describe Catholic imagination in the singular, rather than the plural, he is careful to note that the common themes he focuses on find diverse expressions. He draws from common terms, symbols, and aesthetics, an imaginative lexicon that births an “enchanted” Catholic world.¹⁰

⁷ David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981). Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

⁸ Greeley, 6.

⁹ Greeley, 9.

¹⁰ Greeley, 183.

Greeley dwells particularly on the significance of Mary in the Catholic imagination in his chapter titled, “The Mother Love of God.”¹¹ He discusses the “Mary metaphor in the Catholic imagination: she represents the Mother Love of God, the generous and loving, life-giving power of God, the tenderness of God, the fertility of God, the nurturing of God.”¹² In the representational dynamics of Mary within Catholic devotionism, I also discovered an intense yearning for the missing mother. For many Catholics (as some Catholic feminist theologians have argued), the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit leaves out an elemental principle of the feminine maternal. Devotees laud Mary as an ideal mediator with the Holy Trinity, and particularly with her son, Jesus.

Greeley focuses on the content of Marian imagery and the important feminine niche Mary occupies in the Catholic imagination. This niche is certainly very important to understanding the visual practices of the devotional groups addressed in my study, but I’d like to push the imaginative significance of Marian representations even further. I am concerned with the religious practices of representation, in which devotees create images of Mary that change, but still *mean*. Orsi observes, “Religious idioms make desire and imagination possible at the same time as they constrict and discipline desire and imagination; creating and disciplining are simultaneous processes...”¹³ Within a certain set of Catholic idioms and sensibilities, these devotees expressed the idea of sacramentality in both the content of their Marian representations (Mary as Missionary Mediatrix, Gendered Exemplar, or Anti-Communist Warrior) and the form of these representations (Mary as Media Icon). Such representations served, as Orsi suggests, both creative and disciplinary functions.

¹¹ Greeley, 89-108.

¹² Greeley, 90.

¹³ Orsi, “Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion,” 16.

Devotional idioms are articulated in the “vernacular.” Folklorist Leonard Norman Primiano’s concept of “vernacular religion” draws attention to multiple expressions of religious creativity:

Individuals feel their personal belief system as believers to be “official,” and they also at the same time feel the belief systems disseminated by the agencies of institutional hierarchy to be “official religion.”...the concept of vernacular religion can highlight the creative interpretations present in even the most ardent, devout, and accepting religious life, while also being sensitive to the context of power which makes the validity of “official” religion so convincing...vernacular religion can develop to contest unequal power relations, to affirm the existence of inequality in the struggle of life, or simply to confirm the social status quo.¹⁴

Acts of religious creativity may be regulatory and/or transformative, blurring the lines between “official” and institutional understandings of faith, and the personalized *bricolage* of devotees.

Mary and Postmodernism

In *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy*, Edith Wyschogrod makes intriguing connections among postmodern themes, the lives of the saints, and the practice of hagiography, as she searches for a new approach to ethics. In Wyschogrod’s work I recognized my own desire and discomfort over postmodern theory’s implications for both religion and ethics. She suggests that the lived experience of morality and ethics seems to resist the fetters of theory, even though the canons of philosophy (including postmodern philosophy) have sought to describe and contain these urges. She asserts that her “investigation will work itself free of theory” by critiquing it.¹⁵ The religious impulses of

¹⁴ Leonard Norman Primiano, “Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife,” *Western Folklore* 54, no. 1 (January 1995): 47.

¹⁵ Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), xxv.

Catholic theology and popular devotion resist theory in a similar way, challenging postmodern assumptions even as they seem to embody them. And yet postmodern theory and Catholic thought share a central longing for the *Real*.¹⁶ The theorist's delight is in the recognition that this desire can never be fulfilled in the present—the Real has “always already” passed this way, leaving only “traces” of its construction. Rapture ensues in the theoretical poetry that describes only the absence or lack of the Real in a fractured, postmodern world. Where postmodern theory emphasizes absence, Catholic theology seeks presence. The Catholic principle of sacramentality affirms that the Real, in the form of divine grace, is omnipresent in the world, and that a significant part of the Catholic spiritual condition is an awakening to the immanence of grace. I began to see an odd kinship in the representational practices of postmodern philosophy and Catholic faith: both imagined ecstasy as both standing outside and standing in; both sought pleasure in maintaining the discrepancies between part and whole. While postmodernism embraced nothingness or the everythingness that becomes nothingness, Catholicism reached for the hidden all—the everything that, because of grace, is always something. These desiring aesthetics—all-or-nothing—seemed like flipsides of the same coin. Baudrillard himself never consigns religious “simulacra” to unreality, but offers a kind of philosophical reverence for the “hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models.”¹⁷

Also linking postmodern theory and Catholic thought, Wyschogrod identifies six postmodern themes that she applies to her study of the saints: “differentiality, double coding,

¹⁶ This longing inhabits the heart of sacramental Catholic theology, particularly in the doctrine of the Real Presence, “the teaching of the Catholic Church that Jesus Christ is present at and in the Eucharist in his body and blood, humanity and divinity, under the form of bread and wine.” Richard P. McBrien, ed., *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989), 1080.

¹⁷ Baudrillard, 2.

eclecticism, alterity, empowerment (and its opposite), and materialism.”¹⁸ While the practices and representations of Marian devotion do exhibit aspects of these themes, they also contain elements that undermine some key postmodern assumptions. Wyschogrod points to the work of Pierre Delooz, whose work in the sociology of sainthood emphasizes “constructed saints” in contrast to the historical people who came to be called saints.¹⁹ Adopting the concept of construction, Wyschogrod posits four features of saints’ lives and the practice of hagiography: “narrativity, corporeality, textuality, and historicity.”²⁰ She argues that saints are ultimately constructed “*in* texts” and “*as* texts.”²¹ Wyschogrod goes on to situate the textuality and intertextuality of saints within postmodern theory:

Not only do texts have a material structure, but they have a semiotic structure as well. Texts as a system of signs do not point to extratextual ontic referents. Instead, they acquire meaning only intransignificatively by way of the difference between one sign and another. Derrida uses the term *différance* to signal a cluster of differences—spatial and temporal—that destabilize the field of signs. But if texts are unstable and saints’ lives are texts, the question of the factuality of saints’ lives—whether and how they lived—is begged.²²

Yet Catholic theology and Catholic devotional and representational logics are always appealing to “extratextual ontic referents” in their pursuits of divine grace. Although Wyschogrod’s approach brilliantly unmask the constructedness of many historical saints, her analysis does not apply as well to the Virgin Mary. In fact, Wyschogrod does not address the “Queen of All Saints” in her discussion. I argue that Marian representations within

¹⁸ Wyschogrod, xvi.

¹⁹ Pierre Delooz, “Towards a Sociological Study of Canonized Sainthood in the Catholic Church,” in *Saints and Their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore, and History*, ed. Stephen Wilson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 195.

²⁰ Wyschogrod, 29.

²¹ Wyschogrod, 30.

²² Wyschogrod, 30.

Catholic devotionism however abundant, constructed, and diverse, do not exhibit Derrida's *différance*. Images of the Madonna are remarkably flexible and varied, and their creative and divergent constructions serve to *stabilize*, rather than *destabilize* the system of Catholic signs. This paradox of representations is only possible through the Catholic notion of mediation, and the devotional understanding of Marian images as media icons that *cause* the graces they represent.

Stewart M. Hoover presents a broader consideration of the relationship between religion, media, and postmodernism in *Religion in the Media Age*:

Another claimed effect of the media in late modernity is their role in undermining traditional linguistic truth claims. Postmodernity is supposedly partly rooted in the notion that the relationship between words, symbols, and images, and the things they represent, has been undermined. In an era dominated by the media and their playful deconstruction and reconstruction of traditional meanings, the solidity of the relationships between “signs” and the things they refer to (“referents”) comes under suspicion...Many religions are grounded in doctrines and pieties that specify *precisely* the relationship between signs and referents, between metaphors and concrete meanings, and between words and ideas. If today such claims are increasingly undermined, that is an important issue for those religions and particularly for their legitimacy and authority.²³

I argue, however, that images of Mary in the Catholic imagination have been and continue to be *precise enough* to maintain the devotional economy, while *imprecise enough* to engage the apparently boundless creativity of devotees.

In his essay, “The Many Names of the Mother of God,” Robert A. Orsi addresses the multiplicity of Marian representations:

It is impossible to tell a simple story about the Virgin Mary. She cannot be held in place by a single attribute—sorrow or delight, purity or compassion—or held accountable for a single social consequence—liberation or oppression, solidarity or fracture...She is not solely the creation of theologians or of the masses; she belongs completely neither to her devout nor to culture...She is always refracted through the prism of the needs and fears of the people who approach her and so she is a protean and unstable figure. Because of this instability of meaning, Mary can be the occasion

²³ Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 11-12.

of serious cultural and psychological distress, which in turn provokes more determined efforts to fix her in place. But she continually frustrates these agendas.²⁴

I agree with Orsi that the Madonna is a complicated Catholic symbol that means many things at once, even to the point of contradiction. I also concur that images of the Madonna are constructed with a myriad of theological and popular, political and cultural, and public and personal influences. My study of devotional media, however, has led me not to agree with the claim that devotees perceive Mary's diversity as instability; this signals more of a scholarly response. In the case of mid-twentieth century American devotional groups like the MI and CAMM, I detect no traces of "frustration" at efforts to "fix" Mary's image and meaning. These devotees do not question their right to creatively adapt representations of the Madonna to their own needs and purposes. These producers of Marian media do not appear troubled by the polysemic nature of Mary, nor do they claim exclusive rights to "fixing" her place. In fact, they exhibit a voracious appetite for a wide range of Marian representations, particularly the divergent guises taken on by the Madonna in worldwide apparitions. For example, the MI did not view images of Our Lady of Guadalupe as discontinuous with or threatening toward its own representations; its magazine devoted great attention to celebrating Guadalupe and her power. What makes this attitude possible is the widely shared religious belief among most Catholic devotees that the referent of Marian images has been pre-fixed by God: Mary exists. She appears. She mediates. Destabilizing Mary would destabilize the divine order by challenging the premises of Catholic devotionism. In this devotional economy, the abundance of Marian representations is simply the "more" that reinforces belief in the Virgin's existence and her intercession in the world. Orsi himself suggests that that Marian images function as icons that assume the Madonna is somehow

²⁴ Robert A. Orsi, "The Many Names of the Mother of God," in *Divine Mirrors: The Virgin Mary in the Visual Arts*, ed. Melissa R. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4.

present in her representations. He argues that these “media of presence” are “devotional images and objects...used to act upon the world, upon others and oneself.”²⁵ These creative constructions of Mary as *media icon* affirm the referent of devotion and transform religious representations into concrete actions in the personal and public spheres.

The *Iconology* of Marian Media

The symbol of Mary within Catholic tradition has continued to change, adapted by believers situated in different cultural and historical conditions. Despite this legacy of change, believers adamantly argue for a continuity of Mary, as woman and symbol. As a *media icon*, Mary offers an evocative symbol and effective signpost for the intersection of religion and culture, medium and message. Mariologists have traced the multiple nesting and overlapping roles and representations of the Madonna from the post-Biblical era, through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, in their historical and cultural contexts. These images persist in present-day images and practices of Marian devotion, but to what extent can we assume that these traditional images maintained coherence and consistency in their historical trajectories? When classic images become unhinged from their points of origin and circulate freely, even within the “same” religious system, how are they disseminated, transformed, and interpreted in new contexts?

In his sweeping work, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture*, Jaroslav Pelikan sets out “to show historically what Mary *has meant*, by following a roughly chronological order to box the compass of some of the provinces of life and realms

²⁵ Orsi, “The Many Names of the Mother of God,” 4.

of reality in which she has been a prominent force at various periods in history.”²⁶ Pelikan introduces us to multiple Marys, with multiple images, roles and contexts, both religious and cultural, yet his work is infused with the *telos* of Mariology (and/or history). Mary’s multiplicity emerges as a religious problem (and perhaps a historical problem, too): One woman (idea), many roles. How does the one contain the many and remain coherent? How does Mary *mean*? John Gatta’s *American Madonna: Images of the Divine Woman in Literary Culture* and Sarah Jane Boss’s *Empress and Handmaid: On Nature and Gender in the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, offer more focused (but still typological) studies of Marian representations in particular historical and cultural contexts.²⁷

Similarly, this project attempts to capture the proliferation of particular Marian representations at specific cultural and historical moments, specifically from 1917 to 1970. This cultural history entails a practice of excavation that attempts to unearth what lies beneath the diverse and striking range of Marian images among American devotees. My approach draws on pioneering scholarship in material and visual culture such as that of Colleen McDannell, David Morgan, Sally Promey, and Jenna Joselit.²⁸ My research also relies on material objects and devotional imagination as sources for cultural history. Representations of Mary in devotional publications both *structure* and *symbolize* the beliefs

²⁶ Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 5, my emphasis.

²⁷ John Gatta, *American Madonna: Images of the Divine Woman in Literary Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Sarah Jane Boss, *Empress and Handmaid: On Nature and Gender in the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Cassell, 2000).

²⁸ David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) and *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). David Morgan and Sally Promey, *The Visual Culture of American Religions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). Jenna Weissman Joselit, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880-1950* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994). S. Brent Plate, ed., *Religion, Art, and Visual Culture: A Cross-Cultural Reader* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

and practices of adherents, and serve as points of departure for my own analysis and narration of Marianism in the United States.

How does Marian devotion shape the American landscape? How do we find Mary in America? Where and when do we look? For Marian devotional organizations in the United States, the construction of the Virgin Mary as a *media icon* is an ongoing, complex, and reciprocal process. The appropriation, alteration, and dissemination of Marian images by these groups transformed traditional religious images into popular ones, mass-produced and mediated by visual and textual representations in magazines and print media. Images of Mary come alive as symbols of religious, political, and social positions. The Virgin Marys depicted in magazines, such as *Immaculata*, not only reference a religious person, but also a religious *persona*.

Where does Mary wax iconic? The contested body of artist Alma Lopez's bikini-clad virgin.²⁹ The nationalistic symbols of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Virgin of Charity. A billboard for the controversial animal rights organization PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals): a Renaissance Mary cradles a dead chicken in her arms instead of baby Jesus: "Go Vegetarian: It's an Immaculate Conception."³⁰ The ongoing stream of reported apparitions and their associated miracles, both sanctioned and not sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church. Mary at Pro-Life demonstrations. Mary as Goddess force for feminist theologians. Pop icon Madonna. Mary's face pressed into a grilled cheese sandwich, auctioned for thousands on EBay in 2004.³¹

²⁹ Alma Lopez, "Our Lady" (1999), *Art*, <http://www.almalopez.net/ORindex.html>.

³⁰ Brian Carnell, "PETA Compares Veganism to Jesus' Birth," *AnimalRights.net*, <http://www.animalrights.net/archives/year/2004/000005.html>.

³¹ The Associated Press, "'Virgin Mary grilled cheese' sells for \$28,000," *MSNBC.COM*, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6511148>.

Why does Mary matter for scholars of religion and media in the twenty-first century? Mary is one of the most widely recognized religious and cultural images in the world and wields enormous symbolic capital. In many religious circles, she stands for THE WOMAN. For me, Mary raises the important question of how we recognize and interpret religious images. We typically recognize images based on their form and context. However, the range of presentations and uses of Marian images is so incredibly diverse, what makes Mary recognizable? Works by controversial artists such as Alma Lopez that reference the Virgin Mary spark controversy because they gesture to a norm, while subverting it. But “sacrilege” requires a uniform standard for what “counts” as sacred.

There’s a stillness there in the frozen moment of the icon. Mediated through image and word, color and texture, and teetering between passivity and activity, silence and responsiveness. The media icon scintillates with possibility, occupying a space between material humanity and the ephemeral sacrality. Both realms shaped by the context of belief and the enactment of practice.

The history of Christianity involves a long-standing tradition of use of visual representations. The term *icon* (from the Greek for “image” or “portrait”) refers to a “visual representation of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, angels, individual saints, or events of sacred history.” Typically “frontal, flat, laconic, and shadowless, the icon was a visual window to the meaning of the event or holy person depicted, not a realistic presentation sacred in and of itself (and, thus, idolatrous).”³² The use of icons was widely debated among early Christians, as iconoclasts sought to blot out their potential for idolatry, and those in the Byzantine and Orthodox Churches vehemently argued for their importance. The issue was formally settled

³² Jonathan Z. Smith, ed., *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion*, s.v. “Icon,” (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 476.

when the Second Council of Nicaea (787) approved the use of icons in Christian practice.

Iconoclasm resurfaced during the sixteenth-century rise of Protestantism, as reformers tried to strip away what they saw as the visual decadence of the Roman Catholic Church.

However, new traditions in Protestant iconography developed that would contribute a lasting chapter to the history of Christian art.

In Christian devotional practice, however, icons, images, and material objects are often tied to a notion of divine presence and the possibility for communication. In some cases this represents a literal means of communion between human and divine agents, as the divine power fills the material image or object with its presence. Scholar Margaret Miles explores the significance of the visual encounter with the Eucharist in medieval Catholic liturgy:

Vision was...the strongest possible access to an object of devotion. Viewing the consecrated bread with concentrated attention was considered of equal or superior value to ingesting it, and medieval congregations were often urged by their priests to communicate “spiritually,” that is, visually, rather than physically.³³

In this way, the visual, in the context of Catholic devotion, designates a dynamic encounter between devotee and object of adoration.

“Icon” suggests the captive and captivating nature of visual images. The icon preserves an essence, a frozen moment in time. The implications of visual capture were certainly troubling to the iconoclasts, who believed that any attempt to fix the divine or saintly essence was tantamount to blasphemy.

“Icon” also invokes the contemporary discourses of celebrity and pop culture, and this is another source of the term’s usefulness for this historical study. Mary is a *popular* image, one intimately engaged in the everyday lives and practices of devotees around the world.

³³ Margaret Miles, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 96-97.

She is a religious celebrity, a pop icon in her own right, a personality who many believers assign as their primary communicator and mediator with their God. In *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*, visual culture scholar David Morgan also describes the public uses of iconic symbols:

I use the term *icon* not in a merely metaphorical sense but to designate the devotional image or object of civil religion. Just as icons among the Eastern Orthodox Christians operate as apertures or windows to the sacred, so Bibles and flags in particular have acted as sacred evocations of the divinely ordained republic, the nation that is invested in these symbols to such a degree that the cherishing (or abuse) of them conveys the devotees' veneration of the nation itself.³⁴

My use of the term *media icon* follows Morgan's logic, but reunites icon with its religious context, by the tracing the way in which a symbol like the Virgin Mary enters the public space and returns to the religious context, bearing the trappings of media in the profane sense, and mediation in the religious sense.³⁵

"Media" signals both the explicit religious roles of the Virgin Mary as a mediator in Roman Catholic tradition, and the formal ways that these roles are expressed in various media in image, text, and sound. Scholars of religion and media studies suggest that "practice" is "the most logical scholarly interpretive standpoint" for evaluating the intersection of these fields.³⁶ Stewart Hoover argues that the goal of this emerging field "is to describe in some detail moments and locations where we can see active the kind of religious, spiritual, transcendent, or meaning-centered practice that seems to be evolving with

³⁴ David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 222.

³⁵ See Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2003) for a similar investigation of the iconic nature of images of Jesus. Prothero's book "charts the development of the American Jesus from an abstract principle into a concrete person, and then into a personality, a celebrity, and finally an icon." (12)

³⁶ Stewart M. Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark, eds., *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 4.

reference to, and in the context of, media culture.”³⁷ Similarly, I investigate the deployment of Marian media within a particular tradition of religious representational practices, situated in cultural and historical context. What distinguishes media studies from other approaches (for example a literary critical approach that “reads” culture and image as text), is an emphasis on operation: “the task becomes a collective enterprise which examines the way media texts are operating to reproduce the common, mediated culture...it is no longer a question of learning *from* the text, but rather *how* the text actually works.”³⁸ Hoover argues for a further shift: “Traditionally, and in common discourse, media are thought of primarily in technological terms. ‘Media’ are devices, services, publications, and channels. I’d like to suggest that we begin to think of media as *practices*, not just as *institutions*, *texts*, or *objects*.”³⁹ Studying representations of the Madonna offers a rich opportunity for examining the mediated operations of a religious symbol within a web of devotional practices.

As the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once argued, “meaning is use.”⁴⁰ Developing a theory for understanding Marian representations among devotees requires careful attention to *uses* and *practices* surrounding religious media. In their introduction to *The Visual Culture of American Religions*, editors David Morgan and Sally Promey suggest four ways that “images participate in religious practice”:

First, images are understood to communicate between human and divine realms in an economy of ritualized exchange. [*Communication*] Second, they help establish the social basis of communion by consolidating and reinforcing a range of alliances, large and small. [*Communion*] Third, images help create and organize memory.

³⁷ Hoover and Clark, 4.

³⁸ Andrew Tolson, *Mediations: Text and Discourse in Media Studies* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), xii.

³⁹ Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age*, 23.

⁴⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd ed., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1997) 20 (§43).

[*Commemoration*] And fourth, they fuel constructive, synthetic acts of imagination in the kind of meaning-making practices that form a basic aspect of religious experience. [*Imagination (Meaning-Making)*]⁴¹

The Marian representations produced and reproduced by the Militia of the Immaculata and The Central Association of the Miraculous Medal circulate in webs of engaged practices that demonstrate these four functions. For Marian devotees in these groups, Mary, as a *media icon*, communicates by intervening between human and divine realms, creates communion by consolidating and symbolizing religious and cultural identities, commemorates pasts, presents, and futures (real and imagined), and acts as a central catalyst for meaning-making endeavors and a source of religious creativity. These media images adapt the Catholic symbol of the Virgin Mary to the religious, political, and social beliefs of devotees. This Marian media is not intended to remain static on the page, but rather urges devotees to transform their beliefs into actions.

Transformation of Beliefs Into Actions

The cycle I observed in the Marian media I examined was quite remarkable because it suggested an explicit connection between symbol, belief, and action. This seems possible in this worldview because of the idea of Mary as mediator, as midwife to meaning. The iconic representations in the practices of devotees created or reinforced a set of religious beliefs; those beliefs became linked to particular ritual actions, like the Militia Immaculata's practice of "Total Consecration," a rite in which devotees offer their lives completely to the service of the Virgin Mary, or a more general call to evangelization.

⁴¹ David Morgan and Sally Promey, eds., *The Visual Culture of American Religions*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 2-3. My insertion of their category titles in brackets.

Morgan and Promey also link the uses of religious images to the “transformation of beliefs”:

First, religious images, monuments, and artifacts manifest a public visible presence and a public function in the United States and thus play a fundamental role in the formation of American public culture and national identity. Second, religion is a thoroughgoing participant in the social construction of reality, which consists of the meaning-making that believers undertake in the visual practices of daily life as well as in the corporate rituals of worship and civic cult. Finally, religious visual culture in the United States has had a significant share in the movements, innovations, and transformation of beliefs that characterize American modernity.⁴²

Religious images give form to beliefs, as they simultaneously shape the “meaning-making” processes that connect belief and action. The Marian media addressed in this study prompt many ways of acting in the world based on particular devotional beliefs. At a basic level, both the Militia Immaculata and the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal employ media to publicize the primary ritual practices of their organizations, like wearing the Miraculous Medal, consecrating one’s self to Mary, participating in Eucharistic adoration, or praying for the Madonna’s intercession. At another level, these media suggest other ways of acting in the world in connection with Marian devotion like performing one’s gender, fighting Communism, or becoming a missionary.

Mapping Marytown, U.S.A.

As my Ph.D. work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill led me to the study of Roman Catholic cultures in the United States, I found my mailbox filling—week after week—with medals, holy cards, scapulars, and pamphlets. The material culture of haphazard mailing list memberships began to infiltrate my home. Overwhelmed by the richness and diversity of these cultural artifacts at my door, a single image on a holy card stopped me in

⁴² Morgan and Promey, 17.

my tracks. A crowned woman in blue tilts her head quietly to one side, her hands gently clasped. Seven swords pierce her torso, as golden rays emanate from her head, mirroring the pattern of the firmly anchored daggers. Some of these daggers pierce her heart. Yet her eyes remain downcast, her mouth serene, her robes un-bloodied by the violence at her breast. This is not a new image. This is the classic image of the “sorrowful mother” (*mater dolorosa*)—the Virgin Mary pierced by seven sorrows that mark the sufferings of her son. I flipped the card over to see an outline of a particular devotion to “Our Lady of Sorrows”. At the bottom, a name and place: Scapular Guild, Philadelphia, PA. I read on to the smaller print: “reprinted with permission of the Servants of Mary, Berwyn, Illinois”. My knowledge of Marian devotional organizations in the United States was minimal at the time: I couldn’t recall having read any major books or articles on the topic during my exploration of Catholicism in America. I was curious, but put the card aside. Still, the mail kept arriving. The images and invocations of Mary started to fill the largest portion of my file. As I continued to read the small print on the mass-produced images and texts, a few organizations emerged as prominent promoters of Marian material culture, including The Militia of the Immaculata and the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal. I knew about the history of Roman Catholic popular piety, but I began to wonder why I knew so little about these organizations, why their dissemination of Catholic material culture is so prolific, and why Mary seems to occupy the center of their media representations and their devotional practices. Behind the shiny medals and the glossy guides, I sensed an important phenomenon, something worthy of sustained and systematic scholarship.

I then happened upon a memorable web page that has served as a focus for my work. “Come home to Marytown!” exclaims the website for the Militia of the Immaculata National

Center and National Shrine of St. Maximilian Kolbe. And the Militia makes the same invitation to potential devotees in a color pamphlet: “Can’t make a pilgrimage to Rome? Then consider a visit to Marytown!” Devotees who respond to the online or print invitations learn that Marytown is a shrine and retreat center within the township of Libertyville, Illinois. Yet, for the purposes of this study, Marytown, U.S.A., is much more than a place—it is a metaphor, a lens that illumines a great deal about the history of American Roman Catholic devotions.

For Roman Catholics, Mary is famous for her use of publicity: countless apparitions offering of messages of hope, comfort, warning, and despair to her children around the world. American Catholic devotional organizations have adopted and adapted Mary’s public persona in pursuit of evangelization. In a 2003 issue of *Immaculata* magazine, Ada Locatelli, a member of the Missionaries of the Immaculata, links the group’s evangelistic focus with Mary as exemplar:

Our work of evangelization, according to the needs of our contemporary world, requires the ability to use the extraordinary possibilities of modern communication. After Fr. Kolbe’s⁴³ example, the Institute’s apostolic choices include the use of mass media, especially by publishing and spreading periodicals and books in various languages. The intention to be “in the world,” for the salvation of the world, following *the example of Mary*, “the star of evangelization.” And the path traced out by Fr. Kolbe, have led our Institute to boundless missionary outreach.⁴⁴

The Militia of the Immaculata is not alone. Other groups—including The Association of the Miraculous Medal and The Blue Army —also turn to Mary as a model for their evangelization. They disseminate representations of Mary in multiple forms of media: magazines, direct mail, websites, books, pamphlets, audiotapes, videos, and medals. These

⁴³ Patron saint of the mass media.

⁴⁴ Ada Locatelli, “Fr. Kolbe Missionaries of the Immaculata.” *Immaculata*, March/April/May 2003, 14-15, my emphasis.

organizations also run shrines, retreat centers, and pilgrimage programs based on Marian spirituality. The Militia website asserts that “through God's grace, Marytown is becoming one of the most vibrant centers of Catholic renewal in the United States.”⁴⁵ And this study analyzes Marytown—both the Midwestern shrine and the representational practices of selected devotional organizations that aim to spark American Catholic “renewal” through the skillful use of mass media.

My research suggests that twentieth-century Roman Catholic Marian devotional organizations in the United States transformed and disseminated traditional and new representations⁴⁶ of the Virgin Mary in service of evangelism including missions to non-Catholics, “renewal” of lapsed or inactive Catholics, spiritual invigoration of devout Catholics, and the conversion of all people to the Marian message and way of life. This dissertation offers a close examination of the ways that Mary has been transformed, mediated, and commodified by American Catholic culture, especially by Marian devotional media in the United States since World War I, focusing especially on the period from 1950 to 1970.⁴⁷ This media exhibited new forms of Marian devotion that transgressed old boundaries of ethnicity, class and culture in surprising ways. Mary became a product of American

⁴⁵ The Conventual Franciscan Friars, *What is Marytown?* <http://www.marytown.com/marytown.html>.

⁴⁶ For me, the term “representations” includes material images *and* verbal descriptions, including metaphors and doctrine about the role and significance of Mary.

⁴⁷ I’ve chosen World War I as a starting point for several reasons. First, the First World War was a defining event in the early twentieth century that deeply affected both religion and culture on both sides of the Atlantic. Second, the Marian apparition at Fatima, Portugal, with its dire warnings of future destruction, took place during the war in 1917, even though as Sandra Zimdars-Swartz notes, this apparition was not widely known until the 1940s, as the Second World War began. Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary: From La Salette to Medjugorje* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 190. A third reason for choosing this periodization is that two of the devotional organizations highlighted in this study (MI and CAMM) formed around the time of World War I.

“mass culture;”⁴⁸ devotional organizations promoted, and even marketed, particular representations of the Madonna. As other studies of religion, media, and commodification have shown, such organizations use media to generate new forms of communal affiliation (national and transnational) centered around particular devotional practices, networks of prayer, and sites of pilgrimage, just as they reconfigure theological and social positions.

The Theological and Cultural Contexts

Any study of the Virgin Mary, no matter how localized, must account for the theological basis for Mariology and Marian devotion in the Roman Catholic tradition. Mariologists tend to divide their study of the Virgin Mary into two main areas: those define, first, Mary’s unique and essential nature as “Mother of God” and determine her position relevant to God and believers, and, second, the constituent and consequent special privileges and powers of that essential nature.⁴⁹ Mary’s actual and spiritual motherhood of God in the incarnation of Jesus, and the extension of that motherhood to all human beings are typically understood to be the primary components of her essence. Mediation, on multiple levels, defines her role. Mary’s special privileges and powers include her Immaculate Conception and absence of sin, her holiness and “fullness of grace,” her virginity, her Assumption into heaven, and her intervention via apparitions.

⁴⁸ In *Modernity and Mass Culture*, James Naremore and Patrick Brantlinger define “mass culture”: “In general terms, it involves a double inflection, derived from the ‘dual revolutions’ of the late 18th century: on the one hand it points to the culture of the masses, or the majority of people most of the time; on the other it points to culture mass-produced by industrial techniques...We can only say that meanings of the phrase tend to circulate around the fairly recent processes of democratization and industrialization.” James Naremore and Patrick Brantlinger, eds., *Modernity and Mass Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 1-2.

⁴⁹ Catholic Book Publishing Co., *Dictionary of Mary: Revised and Expanded Edition* (New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1997), 309.

Most relevant to this study, are the nineteenth- and twentieth-century dogmatic pronouncements asserted by the Roman Catholic hierarchy about the Virgin Mary.⁵⁰ These official proclamations solidified Mary's theological status within the Church. Where official dogma was paired with miraculous appearances, the question of Mary's modern relevance came to the forefront. Barbara Corrado Pope gives an overview of Marian devotion during the nineteenth century, highlighting the importance of French apparitions including Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal (Paris, 1830), Our Lady of La Salette (1846), and Our Lady of Lourdes (1858).⁵¹ Pope skillfully analyzes the political, social and cultural context for the apparition-based revival in Marian devotion. She characterizes the proclamation of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854 as a deliberately non-scientific and anti-modern tactic by Pius IX. Pope also puts the entire phenomenon of Marian devotion in terms of anti-modernism.

In contrast, the media sources of American Marianism in this study demonstrate an ongoing narrative of resistance *and* incorporation of "modern" themes since World War I. The self-definition of American Catholics was necessarily shaped by the broader religious and social context, including traditions of anti-Catholicism, and Protestant dialogues about modernity and evangelization.

In his comprehensive survey *The American Catholic Experience: A History from 1850 to the Present*, Jay Dolan offers a helpful periodization of Catholic history and the

⁵⁰ The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, proclaimed by Pope Pius IX in the papal bull *Ineffabilis Deus* in 1854, and The Dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary proclaimed by Pope Pius XII in the papal bull *Munificentissimus Deus* in 1950.

⁵¹ Barbara Corrado Pope, "Immaculate and Powerful: The Marian Revival in the Nineteenth Century" in *Immaculate & Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*, ed. Clarissa Atkinson and Constance Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 173-200.

formation of Catholic identity.⁵² From colonial times to the election of John F. Kennedy in 1960, anti-Catholicism was a widespread and systemic phenomenon. From nineteenth-century convent burnings to sordid convent tales, to the rise of the Know-Nothing Party, Catholics were ostracized as dangerous “others” even as they served as a source of Protestant desire.⁵³ At every step of the way, Catholics resisted the attacks upon them by asserting their own American-ness in public settings.⁵⁴

From 1920 to 1960, a period Dolan identifies as the “end of an era” in Catholic History, Catholics increased in social mobility due to widespread prosperity, many moved from the cities to the suburbs, brick-and-mortar Catholicism took over, the laity increased in power and the trappings of the immigrant Church and ethnic distinctiveness began to dissolve.⁵⁵ However, Catholics were actively involved in defining their own “Americanization.” They maintained extensive publications, belonged to devotional organizations, and developed community institutions. This was an era of Catholic pride, Dolan suggests, when to be Catholic was to be intensely American.

Assertions of American Catholic identities also emerged against a backdrop of increasing Protestant evangelicalism, beginning with the First Great Awakening in the mid-eighteenth century and infusing the Protestant-dominated culture of the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries. This brand of Protestantism emphasized emotion, conversion and missions, and the call to evangelize one’s neighbors at home and abroad. Scholars have

⁵² Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985).

⁵³ See Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

⁵⁴ See also John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton: 2003).

⁵⁵ A component of Will Herberg’s central thesis in *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*, (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1960).

typically de-emphasized the role of evangelization among American Catholics. However, devotional organizations such as The Militia and The Association of the Miraculous Medal developed their own brands of evangelization, certainly influenced by the broader religious and cultural milieu.

Two Devotional Organizations

The Militia of the Immaculata and The Central Association of the Miraculous Medal promoted different, but related, forms of Marian devotion in the United States during the mid-twentieth century. The Roman Catholic Church officially approved both organizations. Each group advocated its own methods of evangelization and renewal. The Militia of the Immaculata in the United States is tied to an international organization founded in 1917 by the Polish-born Conventual Franciscan, Maximilian Kolbe, who was canonized in 1982. The central focus of this group is Kolbe's concept of "Total Consecration" to Mary. This is the primary mission pursued by the Militia, and the ritual act of consecration defines its membership. Members become "dedicated to the conversion and sanctification of the world and share in the maternal mission of Mary."⁵⁶ Consecration.com, the web site of the American Militia, tells potential members that they will join "with Mary in the work of building up and renewing the Church of the third millennium."⁵⁷ Members gain spiritual support in the form of prayers and media support through "access to Militia conferences and resource materials...its national magazine, *Immaculata*, and to regular mailings from the

⁵⁶ The Militia of the Immaculata, *What is Consecration?* <http://www.consecration.com/learn-more.html>.

⁵⁷ The Militia of the Immaculata, *What is Consecration?* <http://www.consecration.com/learn-more.html>.

national office on how to better live out your consecration.”⁵⁸ The Militia movement is founded on the premise of “continual conversion,” evangelization, and renewal. The message of “Total Consecration” is spread primarily through mass media, and “Marytown” functions as the geographic and metaphorical center of this movement in the United States.

The Central Association of the Miraculous Medal in the United States has roots in a global movement based on Mary’s appearances to a Parisian nun in 1830. Sister Catherine Labouré reported Mary’s instructions to strike a medal according to a special design in her honor. This medal would provide protection and “special graces” to its wearers.⁵⁹ The Association of the Miraculous Medal in the United States, founded in 1918 as an “apostolate of the Vincentian priests and brothers,” promotes devotion to “Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal,” distributes miraculous medals, and advocates a Marian spirituality centered around prayer. The group clearly sees their efforts as a form of evangelization that depends on lay membership: “We are convinced of the important role and mission of the laity in the Church in the future of evangelization. As it has been said, ‘The third millennium will be the age of the laity.’”⁶⁰ The organization estimates that it has 1,000,000 members, 65,000 “Promoters,” and 350,000 current contributors.⁶¹

Both the Militia Immaculata and the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal rely on magazines (*Immaculata* and *The Miraculous Medal*) to communicate their devotional messages. This reliance was especially significant for both groups during the middle of the

⁵⁸ The Militia of the Immaculata, *What is Consecration?* <http://www.consecration.com/learn-more.html>.

⁵⁹ Association of the Miraculous Medal, *The Miraculous Medal Story and its Meaning*, <http://www.amm.org/medalp.htm>.

⁶⁰ Association of the Miraculous Medal, *The Association of the Miraculous Medal at Saint Mary's of the Barrens*, <http://www.amm.org/olmiss.htm>.

⁶¹ Association of the Miraculous Medal, *The Association of the Miraculous Medal at Saint Mary's of the Barrens*, <http://www.amm.org/olmiss.htm>.

twentieth century, the peak of Marian devotionism in the United States. I analyze these mid-century media in order to answer some of the broader questions about American Catholic representations of the Madonna asked in this study, including questions about religious creativity, the construction and uses of devotional media, and the importance of Mary for U.S. devotees.

Surveying the Field

Scholarship on popular piety and Marian devotion has increased in the last thirty years due to several academic trends. Ethnography, as a research tool to study Americans (rather than previous anthropological studies of cultural and religious “others”) has risen in popularity since the 1960s. During that era, academic, political, and social upheaval redefined many scholars’ visions of the world. Faced with radically changing times and post-structuralist and postmodern challenges to established norms, some scholars opened up new realms of research, and redefined the scope of “appropriate” topics of study.⁶² “Popular Culture Studies” and “Cultural Studies” slowly became accepted fields that emphasized the academic and political value of studying individuals and groups on the margins. “Social History” took on the challenge of representing ordinary people and everyday life. All of these factors influenced scholars interested in Catholicism to shift the emphasis from Theology and Church History, and to reconsider popular piety and Marian devotion.

Contemporary scholarship on popular devotion may be broadly categorized into two types: ethnic, local, and/or regional studies (often ethnographies) and studies that attempt to

⁶² For examples of these changes see the work of philosopher and intellectual historian Michel Foucault and the work of ethnographer Clifford Geertz. Collections of case studies influenced by these changes such as David D. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997) and Thomas A. Tweed, ed., *Retelling U.S. Religious History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) significantly impacted the field of American Religious History.

offer an *overview* of devotions, images, apparitions, figures, or concepts during an historical era. Despite these diverse and rich studies, a gap remains in the scholarship, especially in the area of Marian devotion. Devotion to Mary has been widely studied in particular historical, social, and local contexts (mostly European), but few investigations interrogate Mary as a transhistorical and transnational religious symbol.

Research on devotion to Mary in the United States is especially thin⁶³, though scholars like Robert Orsi⁶⁴ and Thomas A. Tweed⁶⁵ have made invaluable contributions to the field. Anna Wirtz Domas' *Mary U.S.A.* offers an illustrated history of the Madonna's role in America since 1492.⁶⁶ Still, studies of Marian devotion in America outside the "immigrant church" (both old and new) are greatly needed. In her article, "The Marian Revival in American Catholicism: Focal Points and Features of the New Marian Enthusiasm," Sandra Zimdars-Swartz argues that most previous work on Marian devotion was confined to official church pronouncements and the devotion of clergy and religious

⁶³ The Reverend Xavier Macleod published the first (and last) comprehensive overview of Marian devotion in North America (*History of the Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary in North America*, New York: Virtue & Yorston, 1866). Macleod's 1866 study enriches my notion of transformative Marian symbols, as Mary becomes for him the symbol of Catholic dominance in North America. Macleod narrates history from a Catholic perspective, arguing that Mary "claimed" the continent for Catholics early in its precolonial and colonial history. Aside from his Catholic triumphalism, Macleod presents an amazingly thorough account of Catholic history, religious orders, and devotional organizations and practices through mid-nineteenth-century America. Such information is often hard to come by in contemporary scholarship.

⁶⁴ Robert Orsi, *Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

⁶⁵ Tweed [*Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) offers important insights to our understanding of the devotional lives of relatively recent Cuban Catholic immigrants. He explores transnational migration and diasporic religion in his study of Cuban exiles and their devotion to Our Lady of Charity in Miami. Tweed argues that Our Lady of Charity became a translocative symbol for Cuban-Americans. Cubans could not easily return to Cuba given the political situation under Fidel Castro, but developed an intense sense of longing for their motherland. Tweed suggests that Our Lady of Charity (and the shrine built for her by Cubans in Miami) functions as a symbol that allows transnational migration through ritual, narrative, and artifact. To be in the shrine is essentially to *be in Cuba*. Our Lady of Charity reorients perceptions of time a space and sustains a community in exile. This study is especially helpful to my work, because Tweed shows how images of Mary can create and condense notions of communal identity.

⁶⁶ Anna Wirtz Domas, *Mary U.S.A.*, (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1978).

orders.⁶⁷ Less official forms of lay piety, such as Marian devotional organizations in the United States, have typically been neglected, although Paula M. Kane's "Marian Devotion Since 1940: Continuity or Casualty?" presents a broad overview of American Marianism in the second half of the twentieth century, including a brief discussion of Marian media.⁶⁸ Primary sources of U.S. Catholic devotion are abundant; there is much more scholarly work to be done in this area of study.

Robert Orsi's *Thank You, Saint Jude: Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes* (1996) serves as a primary model for my examination of Roman Catholic popular piety in the United States. Ironically, it is Orsi's research on devotion to St. Jude, rather than Mary, that has been most illuminating for my project. In *The Madonna of 115th Street*, Orsi focused on a community of Italian Americans in New York that produced a specific sort of Marian devotion. However, it is the neighborhood itself that captures Orsi's primary attention. Orsi argues that the *domus* —the web of family, neighborhood, and old-world affiliations— is actually the religion of these Italian Americans. Devotion to Our Lady of Mount Carmel is one aspect of this highly structured world that was governed by the principle of *rispetto* (respect or honor). Ultimately, the Madonna herself seems left out of major portion of the book. Orsi often portrays the Madonna as a two-dimensional, silent symbol in contrast to his rich, multi-dimensional portrait of domestic and neighborhood life.

In *Thank You, Saint Jude*, Orsi shifts to a broader overview of the history of devotion to St. Jude in the United States. Although his study is focused on the National Shrine to St. Jude in Chicago, he encounters the national influence of the devotion through the St. Jude

⁶⁷ Sandra Zimdars-Swartz, "The Marian Revival in American Catholicism," in Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

⁶⁸ Paula M. Kane, "Marian Devotion since 1940: Continuity or Casualty?" in *Habits of Devotion: Catholic Religious Practice in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. James M. O'Toole (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

League and its magazine, and the widespread practice of messages thanking St. Jude in publications across the nation. He also incorporates interviews with devotees, who explain the saint's personal significance for them. In this study, Orsi focuses much more on the intimacy and imagination of devotion. He describes how women "imagine" Jude. Since the cult of St. Jude was not widely known, Jude functioned as an empty form to be filled by the imagination for the devotees he interviewed. Perhaps, in contrast, Mary is an over-determined symbol, dense with multiple meanings from a long history of representational practices. Still, I argue that Mary, too, has captured the imagination of American Catholics who are comfortable with a diversity of re-imaginings and transformations of their beloved Mother.

Orsi characterizes the mysterious Jude as a Depression era American Catholic hero, similar to other heroes of the age like the Lone Ranger or Superman. I argue that Mary has also become an ever-changing American Catholic heroine, the primary intercessor for all last resorts. This is also evident in the alliance of Marianism with an apocalyptic Catholic worldview: it is Mary alone who can stay the hand of God's wrath for the sins of the people. Orsi asserts: "Praying is making and entering alternative stories."⁶⁹ In that sense, the practice of devotion is a creative one. It attempts to resolve for believers the dissonance between the world as it is and the world as it ought to be. The practices of popular piety offer devotees unique opportunities to transform their world by posing a realm of heavenly alternatives.

While Orsi's work has been significant for shaping my study of popular devotion, my work departs from his ethnographic approach. My study is not an ethnography, but a work of

⁶⁹ Robert Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude: Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 210.

cultural history that aims to enter conversations in media studies, Catholic studies, American studies, and religious studies. As I've noted, my approach is significantly influenced by pioneering scholarship in material and visual culture such as that of Colleen McDannell and David Morgan.⁷⁰ Among scholars of U.S. religion who analyze material culture, the most useful model for my dissertation is Jenna Joselit's study, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880-1950*. Joselit based her research on a collection of "several hundred objects" from late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century American Jewish culture that formed an exhibition at New York's Jewish Museum.⁷¹ Joselit interprets these cultural artifacts, revealing the creativity and ingenuity of Jews who created their own sense of American "Jewishness" by combining cultural and religious forms, incorporating American values, and creating new religious and secular practices that were part and parcel of this new identity. Joselit also employs material and popular culture to highlight important changes to specific Jewish customs and practices in America. Areas of change included: marriage and wedding practices, the centrality of the bar mitzvah ritual, the centering of Hanukkah as an American Jewish holiday, new images of domesticity that reflected American consumer culture and religious ideas, new attitudes toward the role of children, and new funerary practices. Joselit emphasizes the importance of objects for her study:

...objects inhabited and enlivened the lives of thousands of American Jewish families, rendering Jewishness tangible. They inhabit this narrative as well, attesting to the powerful ways in which the material world orders experience, affects memory, and sustains a sense of belonging.⁷²

⁷⁰ David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. David Morgan and Sally Promey, *The Visual Culture of American Religions*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

⁷¹ Jenna Weissman Joselit, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880-1950*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), ix.

⁷² Joselit, 7.

Like the studies by Orsi and Joselit, my research also relies on media objects, print culture, and devotional imagination as sources for cultural history. Representations of Mary both structure and symbolize the beliefs and practices of Marian devotees in The Militia of the Immaculata and the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal. Similarly, these artifacts serve as points of departure for my own analysis and narration of Marian devotion in the United States.

This study of The Militia Immaculata, U.S.A. and the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal expands the scope of American Catholic History by examining two groups that have not been the subject of any extensive scholarly attention. There are no academic books or journal articles devoted to these organizations. The majority of available information on these organizations is gathered in the self-published periodicals, pamphlets, books, and websites they have produced.

Several works on Marian devotion describe the origins of the Miraculous Medal in the reported Marian apparition to Sister Catherine Labouré in Paris in 1830, but none of them discuss the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal.⁷³ Paula Kane gestures toward the CAMM when she notes in her essay on U.S. Marian devotion since 1940, “the Vincentians advocated the novena of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal.”⁷⁴ The Vincentians (a religious order of diocesan priests founded by Vincent de Paul that focuses on missionary work and

⁷³ Works that discuss the Labouré apparition include Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary: From La Salette to Medjugorje* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), Sarah Jane Boss, *Empress and Handmaid: On Nature and Gender in the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Cassell, 2000), Sally Cunneen, *In Search of Mary: The Woman and the Symbol* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), and Barbara Corrado Pope, “Immaculate and Powerful: The Marian Revival in the Nineteenth Century” in *Immaculate & Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*, ed. Clarissa Atkinson and Constance Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 173-200.

⁷⁴ Paula M. Kane, “Marian Devotion since 1940: Continuity or Casualty?” in *Habits of Devotion: Catholic Religious Practice in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. James M. O’Toole (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 96.

first came to the U.S. in 1803) in Philadelphia founded the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal in 1915. Nicholas Perry and Loreto Echeverría devote a short chapter to the history of the Miraculous Medal in their work on militant Marianism that discusses the formation of European associations tied to this devotion. They also briefly mention uses of the Medal by various Marian organizations around the world, including in the United States, but do not address the CAMM.⁷⁵

Perry and Echeverría offer a narrow consideration of the European Militia Immaculata (also known as the Knights of the Immaculata) in their chapter, “Poland and the Conversion of Russia,” primarily focused on the role of Maximilian Kolbe, the Militia’s founder.⁷⁶ In their later analysis of 1950s devotion to Fatima, they name the U.S. branch of the Militia in conjunction with similar organizations like the Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima, and the Legion of Mary.⁷⁷ Catholic historians Thomas A. Kselman and Steven Avella discuss the American MI and its magazine in passing, grouping the organization with others “that appealed to a minority of highly motivated Catholics.”⁷⁸ Paula Kane notes the existence of Marytown, characterizing it (inaccurately) as a “Marian theme park.”⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Nicholas Perry and Loreto Echeverría, *Under the Heel of Mary* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 91-96 in particular.

⁷⁶ There are six major book-length biographies of Kolbe published in English: Sergio C. Lorit, *The Last Days of Maximilian Kolbe* (New York: New City Press, 1981), Patricia Treece, *A Man for Others: Maximilian Kolbe in the Words of Those Who Knew Him* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), Boniface Hanley, *Maximilian Kolbe: No Greater Love* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 1982), Diana Dewar, *Saint of Auschwitz: The Story of Maximilian Kolbe* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), Andre Frossard, *Forget Not Love: The Passion of Maximilian Kolbe*, trans. Cendrine Fontan (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991).

⁷⁷ Perry and Echeverría, 194-198, 253.

⁷⁸ Thomas A. Kselman and Steven Avella, “Marian Piety and the Cold War in the United States,” in *Modern American Protestantism and Its World: Ethnic and Non-Protestant Themes*, ed. Martin E. Marty (New York: K.G. Saur, 1993), 183.

⁷⁹ Kane, “Marian Devotion since 1940: Continuity or Casualty?” 109.

In the context of such limited research, exploring the MI and CAMM in depth sheds light on an understudied aspect of U.S. Catholic history, offering a more complete portrait of the dynamics of Marian devotion in the United States and its expression in media.

My research also contributes to several other fields of study. Within American Religious History, Roman Catholicism remains an understudied area. This field needs research on Catholics in the United States that employs a variety of methodological approaches, and not only the traditional historical studies of clergy, dioceses, and institutions that have dominated Catholic historiography. Within Catholic Studies, Marianism in the United States has not been adequately addressed. With the exception of film, U.S. Catholic uses of media have also been neglected. This study links Catholic uses of media to Catholic practices of evangelization, and both American Religious History and Catholic Studies will benefit from analysis of Roman Catholic evangelization in the twentieth century, since most specialists assume that evangelization is a Protestant practice.

Finally, my study contributes to Religion and Media Studies. Since these devotional organizations utilized such a wide variety of media to promote their message and sustain their membership they are ideal subjects for a substantive study of religion and media. The story of these groups is multi-faceted and complicates several of the presupposed binaries of U.S. Catholic culture: lay/clerical, popular/elite, male/female, devout/lapsed. These organizations relied on a mixture of lay and clerical leadership and participation which was evident in the range of writers, artists, and editors that contributed to their media efforts. “Popular” devotion to Mary became reconfigured in a system of official and semi-official institutions, targeted toward media-literate middle-class Catholic Americans. Gender issues circulated around the Madonna as media icon; male and female members and leaders

influenced the trajectory of American Marianism. The groups' emphasis on *evangelization* and *renewal* raised questions about what it means to be Catholic and practicing. The media, membership, and theology of these organizations depended on a vast interpenetration of literal and metaphorical worlds. Devotees employed creatively constructed Marian media icons that reflect a range of uses, from self-consciously articulated tools for evangelization to a deeply inculturated adaptations of Catholic symbolism. Despite this diversity of representations, MI and CAMM media proffered images intended to transform devotees' beliefs into actions.

As a scholar of religious media, I think it is important to clarify what can be argued based on an analysis of such representations. An important question arises at the start: what is the gap between what the Militia said and imagined they were doing and what they actually did? As scholars, how can we ever bridge that gap? Orsi also addresses this dilemma:

Because Mary exists relationally—and only relationally—it is impossible to read out from theology or iconography the quality of people's experience of her or to anticipate its social implications...While the meanings of Mary are not exhausted by theology or ecclesiastical iconography and while there are often serious discrepancies between the moralizing intentions of clerical components of Mary's cult and the prayers of her...devout, it is not the case that there are two completely distinct worlds of Marian devotion, official and popular...⁸⁰

Orsi is right to point out the tensions present in the practices and representations of Marian devotion. I do not claim to know or explain the potential or actual discrepancies between the MI and CAMM's media representations of Mary and how they were understood or used by devotees in a personal way. I do interpret the work of editors and contributors in this Marian media, however, as paradigmatic of the core beliefs and practices of their respective devotional organizations; I draw conclusions about those beliefs and practices by analyzing

⁸⁰ Orsi, "The Many Names of the Mother of God," 8-9.

the texts and images they produced. As a scholar of these groups, I am fortunate that the creators of this media are often very explicit and self-conscious about their intentions, even reflecting on their own roles in producing the final product. Some of the sources also reveal direct responses from readers, which help to (partially) bridge the epistemic gap. In my approach to these media sources, I also assume that each group is striving for coherence in its messages about Mary, despite historical and cultural changes.

Structure and Organization

Chapter Two, “Case Studies in Marian Media: Immaculata and The Miraculous Medal,” provides a brief history of the MI and CAMM and their approaches to media, placing them within the broader context of U.S. Catholic popular culture. Chapters Three, Four, and Five offer thematic case studies of Mary as media icon within the media sources of the MI and CAMM. Chapter Three, “‘Our Lady of At-One-Ment’: Mary as Missionary Mediatrix”, features Mary’s roles as Mediatrix and Evangelist in the devotional media of these U.S. Catholics by considering representations of Marian intercession and mission in *Immaculata* and *The Miraculous Medal*. Chapter Four, “‘Marylike’ Women and Men: Mary as Exemplar of Gendered Performance,” investigates models *of* and *for* American Catholic gender identities promoted by these devotional groups. Chapter Five, “‘Our Lady of the United States’: Mary as Anti-Communist Warrior,” explores how the Militia, during the 1950s and 60s of the Cold War Era in the United States, created and promoted representations of Mary in direct conversation with those advocating anti-communism and expressing apocalyptic anxiety.

The Conclusion, “Mary as Media Icon in American Catholic Cultures,” situates the case studies in chapters 2-5 within the wider context of U.S. Catholicism to make broader claims about the evolution of Mary as a “media icon” and the relationship between Marianism and evangelization in the United States. This chapter traces Mary’s multiple mediations in American Catholic culture as suggested by my case studies, and reasserts the notion that, for these devotional organizations, Marian representations are inextricably linked to ritual practices within a cycle of creativity, adaptation and transformation.

CHAPTER 2

CASE STUDIES IN MARIAN MEDIA: *IMMACULATA* AND *THE MIRACULOUS MEDAL*

This dissertation analyzes periodicals published by the Militia of the Immaculata and The Central Association of the Miraculous Medal. I examined issues of *Immaculata* magazine (Militia of the Immaculata, 1949-present) and *The Miraculous Medal* magazine (The Central Association of the Miraculous Medal, 1928-present) in depth, focusing on the period from 1950 to 1970. These magazines shared a self-consciously articulated awareness of editorial purpose. They continuously invoked the notion of a “Catholic press” as a source of authority, moral responsibility, and public pride. The editors were often explicit about the intentions behind the representations of Mary they put forth. Each of these magazines creatively constructed Madonnas as media icons by adapting Mary to their religious, social, and political contexts. These media icons encouraged Marian devotees to transform their beliefs into actions.

Immaculata

Immaculata magazine began in 1949 as the primary publication of The Militia of the Immaculata in the United States, and was run by the Conventual Franciscan Friars and the Franciscan Marytown Press. Marytown was originally located in Kenosha, Wisconsin, an area rich in Catholic immigrant diversity. During the first volume (1949), the magazine was

a bilingual French and German publication titled “*Immaculata: Revue Missionnaire des Pères Oblats de M. I. (Marie Immaculée) de l’est.*”

In 1950, the magazine changed to an English language monthly (bimonthly June/July issue). *Immaculata* developed a new glossy style with sensational headlines and numerous photographs. The cover art was now exclusively devoted to Marian images, both new and old.⁸¹ An ad from a 1950 issue reveals the editors’ goals for the magazine:

“Immaculata” is the only modern monthly Marian magazine for \$2.00 per year. Is there really any better way to spread the most vital message for our time than by spreading this Voice of Our Lady and Herald of Perpetual Adoration in your homes, schools and societies?⁸²

The editors were clearly concerned with “modernity” and evangelization under the auspices of Marian devotion.

Early on, articles about the Militia Immaculata itself comprised a central feature of the magazine. Columns like “The Militia Explained,” “The Militia Mission,” “Why the Militia?” “The Knight of the Immaculate,” and “MI Roundtable” took off in 1951 and sustained organizational publicity.⁸³ The Franciscan Marytown Press published the magazine, but lay people wrote many of the articles and editorial pieces, and remained popular and continuous contributors.

Although the critical issues changed with the times, and the magazine became slightly less sensational, *Immaculata*’s format remained fairly consistent until 1984. In 1977, the subtitle “Voice of Our Lady” was briefly appended to the magazine title. In 1979, Marytown relocated permanently to Libertyville, Illinois. In 1984, the magazine stopped publication

⁸¹ Perhaps a whole dissertation could be written on the magazine’s cover art alone.

⁸² *Immaculata*, June/July 1950, 17-18,

⁸³ These debuted in the 1951 volume of *Immaculata* and became recurring features.

due to financial problems. It resumed nearly ten years later in 1994 in what the editors termed a “more modest” form, on a bimonthly basis. In 1999, the magazine adopted another new title: *Militia of the Immaculata: National Voice of the MI*.

The Miraculous Medal

The Miraculous Medal magazine, “The National Organ of The Central Association of the Miraculous Medal,” began publication much earlier, in 1928. A comparison of style, tone, and features with *Immaculata* magazine shows the striking differences between the two organizations. *The Miraculous Medal* never engaged in sensational reporting, although it remained heavily invested in the miraculous from its inception. Although, the magazine addressed a national audience, it was firmly grounded in the activity of the organization’s Philadelphia shrine and remained under tight clerical control.⁸⁴ Each issue started with a lengthy editorial, “With the Director.” *The Miraculous Medal* reads like a family digest, filled with shrine and mission news, true and fictional stories and games. The publication’s stated mission remained consistent with its earliest articulations and emphasized devotion to the miraculous medal, support of the priesthood, assistance to the poor, and foreign missions. Fundraising pleas are frequent and unabashed. In general, the magazine portrayed Mary as a powerful force behind the scenes of the organization. The centerpiece of the magazine (and central to this study) was the column “Rays from the Hands of Mary,” which has appeared in every issue of the magazine since its beginning. This column reflected the Association’s status as a prayer network of members bound by their commitment to the Miraculous Medal.

⁸⁴ In fact, the Reverend Joseph A. Skelly, C.M., founded the magazine in 1928 and remained editor until his death in 1963.

The subtitle under the logo of Mary, hands extended and projecting rays, reads: “These rays are the symbols of the favors which I shed on those who ask for them.”⁸⁵ Selected letters of thanks and praise from those who believe in the Madonna’s intercession form the substance of the column. The short letters are always accompanied by a longer “medal story” that shows her miraculous intervention in depth. Other notable and continuous features include: “Mary’s Shrine” and “Mary in the News.” *The Miraculous Medal* was published on a monthly basis until the 1990s, when it became a quarterly.

In addition to “Rays from the Hands of Mary,” *The Miraculous Medal* often included reader comments on the magazine, which are suggestive sources for reader response to the publication, although clerical editors selected those to be printed. The majority of these comments are quite laudatory, although one reader noted, “I would prefer more stories.”⁸⁶ A reader from San Antonio, Texas, identified his/her favorite features: “I like the whole magazine from cover to cover. However, what I usually look for first and read is ‘The Medal Story—based on a true incident.’ Then, next, I enjoy ‘With the Director.’”⁸⁷ Another reader from Lawton, Oklahoma, responded with different highlights: “I like this big-little Magazine from cover to cover. But best of all I enjoy reading the lives of Saints; for instance, Flower of the Forest, The Lily of the Mohawk...Of course the lives of some Saints I have read over and over—but then such reading is just like a prayer, and we can’t pray too much.”⁸⁸ A third reader from Philadelphia took a more practical approach: “I thank you most for the Calendar.

⁸⁵ Noted in first issue, May 1928. This phrase is repeated.

⁸⁶ *The Miraculous Medal*, June 1941, 10.

⁸⁷ *The Miraculous Medal*, June 1941, 10.

⁸⁸ *The Miraculous Medal*, June 1941, 10.

I enjoy the stories and appreciate having the dates of the month and fast days.”⁸⁹ These comments reflect a range of reader reactions to *The Miraculous Medal*, at least the clergy approval for inclusion, and the magazine’s willingness to engage reader opinions and input.

Catholic Magazines as Sources for U.S. Catholic History

Immaculata and *The Miraculous Medal* form part of the broader context of U.S. Catholic popular culture during the twentieth century. Robert Orsi describes a thriving mid-twentieth-century media culture among American Catholics that was often linked to various modes of devotionism:

Catholic magazines could be found everywhere. Salesmen sold subscriptions door to door in cities, suburbs, and rural areas, often traveling in big cars with the name of their magazine painted on the side doors. Subscriptions and individual issues were offered as promotions in local parish fund-raising drives, stocked in the libraries of Catholic hospitals, schools, convents, and rectories, and given as gifts, prizes, and incentives. By 1959, at the end of the most intense period of devotional creativity in American Catholic history...the Catholic Press Association reported that there were 24,273,972 subscribers to 580 periodicals in the country. Devotionalism supported and was in turn supported by this literary culture.⁹⁰

Immaculata and *The Miraculous Medal* magazines represented modest, yet distinctive reflections of this enthusiasm for the Catholic Press. *Immaculata* reported a peak circulation of 25,000 for special issues of the magazine by 1966⁹¹, while *The Miraculous Medal* reached a broader audience with a circulation of 123,599 in 1959.⁹² Orsi notes that by the end of the 1920s Catholic magazines were transformed by editors who incorporated techniques and

⁸⁹ *The Miraculous Medal*, June 1941, 10.

⁹⁰ Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude*, xvi-xvii.

⁹¹ *Immaculata*, September 1966, 30.

⁹² The Catholic Press Association of the United States, Inc., *Catholic Press Directory for 1959* (New York: C.D. Bertolet & Co., Inc.: 1959), 102.

practices familiar to “American popular journalism” to create periodicals that were “attractive, accessible, upbeat periodicals in a self-consciously American voice.”⁹³

Immaculata and *The Miraculous Medal* incorporated many tactics of the contemporaneous American media, particularly the uses of images and advertising to “market” their devotional missions. Both magazines also sought to create a sense of identity among their readership. Orsi views mid-century Catholic media as vehicles of unity: “Catholic magazines and newspapers together sustained the community’s sense of its own distinctiveness in American culture from highways and kitchen design to foreign policy, and thus became visible expressions of the integration and unity of American Catholic culture—a coherence that did not really exist outside of these magazines and newspapers.”⁹⁴ Orsi’s comment suggests that Catholic media often offered a vision for, rather than a direct reflection of American Catholic identities, and yet they became a common point of reference within Catholic cultures. Orsi argues that these sources are worthy of scholarly attention because of their historical currency and the range of Catholic voices they represent:

The magazines have until recently been overlooked as sources for the history of American Catholic culture, but in that medium popular theology was practiced with considerable fervor and verve, literally in response to current events as they unfolded. Clergy read the periodicals and talked about them in their sermons, and issues of particular magazines were discussed in Catholic schools. Ample space was allotted for readers’ comments, and their letters were generally lively and provocative—and sometimes at odds with editorial positions. This was a thriving and important idiom, in which modern American Catholics not only discovered who they were but constituted themselves as well, and were voices of alarm and authority sought to direct, educate, and discipline the tastes and hopes of new generations of Catholic men and women.⁹⁵

⁹³ Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude*, xvi.

⁹⁴ Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude*, xvi.

⁹⁵ Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude*, xvii.

Catholic magazines illustrate an interplay of editors, contributors, and readers that shaped their content and reception and provide a rich resource for the study of U.S. Catholic identities.

Paula Kane also notes the importance of Catholic periodical literature for Marian devotional groups:

In the postwar years Catholic laity used traditional and new forms of mass media on behalf of Marian devotion. The publication of 10,000 Marian book titles between 1948 and 1957 signals the maturing of a hugely profitable niche in Catholic publishing and religious goods, which would eventually expand to include video and audio tapes, T-shirts, religious medals, anthologies of apparition messages, and Marian newsletters.⁹⁶

This niche market, however, interacted with the broader American media. Kane points to periodicals as “the first medium of mass culture in America” and suggests that although Catholic media addressed a somewhat narrow audience, “distinctively Catholic topics such as the Virgin Mary found a place in mainstream magazines” such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Ladies Home Journal*, and *House and Garden*.⁹⁷ Marian media, at the height of American Catholic devotionism, was not an expression of fringe or marginalized religious cultures, but rather an expression of images and ideas circulating in the mainstream.

Kane and Orsi both point out that Catholic magazines and newspapers, and Marian publications in particular, often brought together multiple constituencies within U.S. Catholic culture. Kane argues that

Marian periodicals united clerical aspirations and popular piety: the contents of the magazines were defined by priests and their editorial offices were staffed by the same; a combination of lay and clerical authors contributed the articles and accompanying artwork, fiction, and poetry. Marian magazines, like Catholic

⁹⁶ Kane, “Marian Devotion Since 1940,” 108-109.

⁹⁷ Kane, “Marian Devotion Since 1940,” 110.

periodicals generally, provided an outlet for devotional feelings of different cohorts: priests, women religious, lay men and women.⁹⁸

Both *Immaculata* and *The Miraculous Medal* reflected this mix of clerical and lay participation. *Immaculata* came out of the Militia Immaculata and the Franciscan tradition.⁹⁹ *The Miraculous Medal* was associated with the Vincentian Congregation of the Mission.¹⁰⁰ Both magazines had lay men and women as contributors. *Immaculata* even had a lay male editor-in-chief in the early era of the magazine. The brands of Marian devotion promoted by the MI and CAMM were not exclusively clerical or lay, but rather a blend of both approaches. In fact, the priests in charge of these periodicals openly affirmed the necessity for internal and external lay support.

An early article in *Immaculata* illustrates the degree to which lay involvement in the magazine was important. The magazine's first editor, the Reverend Dominic Szymanski, OFM Conventual, attributed its early success to Mary's intervention and lay effort. He described the difficulty of getting the publication off the ground: "In January of 1950 plans were laid to publish the first issue of 'Immaculata' in the month of May, the month of Our Blessed Mother. The difficulties were tremendous since none of the Brothers knew anything about printing. However we invoked the aid of Our Blessed Mother and she did accomplish the seemingly impossible."¹⁰¹ According to Szymanski, the task was made possible with lay

⁹⁸ Kane, "Marian Devotion Since 1940," 110.

⁹⁹ Franciscan religious orders have root in the life and rule of Francis of Assisi and place emphasis on simplicity, poverty, and service. The religious associated with the Militia, at its inception and today, are "Conventual Franciscan Friars." These friars live together in convents and "favor adaptation of the Franciscan way of life in order to serve the current pastoral needs of the Church." Richard P. McBrien, ed., *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989), 365-366.

¹⁰⁰ As noted earlier, the Vincentians are a religious order of diocesan priests founded by Vincent de Paul that focuses on missionary work.

¹⁰¹ *Immaculata*, June 1951, 18.

and even non-Catholic assistance: “At this time men from the *Kenosha Evening News*, the local daily paper, came and taught the Brothers how to run the presses and how to operate the linotype machine. Other pressmen too, including some who were non-Catholic, came to offer instruction.”¹⁰² He suggests that these good works did not go unnoticed by the Madonna: “Our Blessed Mother was pleased to bless the efforts of these men with even extraordinary graces. Among those who came was one man who had suffered hemorrhages of the nose twice and three times daily since his boyhood. On the day that he came to teach the Brothers, the hemorrhages stopped.”¹⁰³ The Militia built Mary’s mediating power into the very fabric of their origin story—a narrative that implies that the magazine was destined to do the Virgin’s work in the world. For these devotees, belief in Marian intercession prompted direct action to establish and sustain the press.

The Patron Saint of Mass Media and the “Cities of the Immaculate”

For members of the Militia Immaculata, the idea of a Catholic press was intimately bound up with the history of the organization’s founder, Maximilian Kolbe, who came to be known as the “patron saint of mass media.” A 1950 issue of *Immaculata* documents his important legacy in hagiographical terms:

Even if Father Maximilian had not died a martyr, his life would have been memorable. He was one of the really great apostles of the Catholic press in modern times. In 1938, the paper he founded in Poland, *The Little Journal*, reached a circulation of 320,000 subscribers, which is high by any Catholic press standards and phenomenally high in Poland. A magazine dedicated to the Blessed Virgin and called *The Knight of Our Lady* had a circulation of one million in 1939. He organized a group of Franciscan lay brothers who did all the printing and mailing of his

¹⁰² *Immaculata*, June 1951, 18.

¹⁰³ *Immaculata*, June 1951, 18.

publications. The Community formed the City of the Immaculate, Niepokalónov, Poland, and was the largest publishing project in the entire Church.¹⁰⁴

The magazine describes Kolbe as a man determined to maximize the resources of media to spread the Marian message. His affection for these resources took on an almost filial nature: “Father Maximilian was ever the Franciscan. For instance, he called the linotype machine at the printing plant, ‘our sister, the machine’; the presses were ‘Brother Press,’ and the ink, ‘Brother Ink.’”¹⁰⁵

Immaculata recalls that Kolbe’s early media had humble beginnings. In 1917, Kolbe and six other Franciscans founded the Militia Immaculata movement, which emphasized consecration to the Virgin Mary and evangelization based on this Marian mission.¹⁰⁶ Kolbe argued that media would be the best means to promote the mission message. He began his media effort with little means and assistance. In 1918, he petitioned his superiors for approval to begin publishing a “a monthly magazine, ‘The Knights of the Immaculate,’ which was to be the mouthpiece of the Militia.”¹⁰⁷ Again, the MI cited divine intervention in the success of this endeavor: “At first the printing was done by commercial printers while Father Max obtained the money to pay the bills from—for all practical purposes—miraculous means, for contributions were small, few, and far between. When circulation rose from five to twenty thousand in one year, however, Father Max...set up shop with lay brothers as printers.”¹⁰⁸ In *Under the Heel of Mary*, social historians Nicholas Perry and Loreto

¹⁰⁴ *Immaculata*, May 1950, 9.

¹⁰⁵ *Immaculata*, May 1950, 18.

¹⁰⁶ *Hero of Auschwitz: St. Maximilian Kolbe, OFM, Conventual* (Libertyville, IL: Marytown Press, 2002), 10.

¹⁰⁷ *Immaculata*, May 1951, 16.

¹⁰⁸ *Immaculata*, May 1951, 16.

Echeverría note the rise of the MI and its media: “Alongside new Franciscan congregations centered on the Sacred Heart and Immaculate Conception, and many others of a traditionalist nature, a series of innovatory bodies sprang up...The populist Militia Immaculatae (1917) successfully exploited mass media and branched out far beyond its native Poland.”¹⁰⁹

As Kolbe’s Militia media enterprise grew, he established the first “Marytown” to support this mission: “In 1927 he began setting up a new printing plant and separate novitiate for Brothers on a tract of land donated for this purpose about forty miles from Warsaw. This he called Niepokalanow—‘The City of the Immaculate.’ And indeed it was to become a real city.”¹¹⁰

“Niepokalanow” grew out of the Militia and the Militia in turn grew to world-wide dimensions through the work of the friars of “Niepokalanow.” In 1917 the Militia had twenty-five members; in 1920, 450; in 1926, 84,225. In 1939 the number grew to 691,219. Thus by 1939 there were 691,219 persons of all ages, races, and states of life in the world who had placed themselves in the hands of Our Lady after the example of Father Maximilian. Our Lady indeed possessed a powerful army with which to destroy the power of her ancient enemy the infernal dragon.”¹¹¹

Father Maximilian also oversaw a large expansion of his religious order: “By 1939, the City had expanded from eighteen friars to an incredible 650, making it the largest Catholic religious house in the world.”¹¹² He extended his interest into other forms of media by establishing a shortwave radio station and planning to build a movie studio.¹¹³ Kolbe left

¹⁰⁹ Nicholas Perry and Loreto Echeverría, *Under the Heel of Mary* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 169.

¹¹⁰ *Immaculata*, May 1951, 16.

¹¹¹ *Immaculata*, May 1951, 16.

¹¹² The Militia Immaculata, *Who is St. Maximilian Kolbe?* <http://www.consecration.com/learn-more5.html>.

¹¹³ The Militia Immaculata, *Who is St. Maximilian Kolbe?* <http://www.consecration.com/learn-more5.html>.

Poland in 1930 to establish a new Militia mission and City of the Immaculate in Nagasaki, Japan.¹¹⁴

In 1936, Kolbe left Japan and returned to Poland to resume his position as superior of the City of the Immaculate. In 1939, the German army arrested him and thirty-six other Friars and deported them to Germany. A booklet published by the MI describes the events that followed:

In vain the Gestapo was seeking to win Father Maximilian to their side by having him petition for German citizenship. With the explanation that he did not want to renounce his Polish citizenship, Father Maximilian refused. So on the morning of February 17, 1941, German soldiers arrived, arrested Father Maximilian and four other priests, and threw them in Pawiak jail in Warsaw. The reason for his arrest was never sufficiently explained...On May 28, 1941, together with three hundred twenty prisoners, he was transferred to the concentration camp of Auschwitz.¹¹⁵

Kolbe was put to work with other able-bodied priests and Catholics. Later, he offered his own life as a substitute for a fellow Polish prisoner who had been condemned to death. The man—Sergeant Francis Gajowniczek—had a wife and children he hoped to return home to. The guards accepted Kolbe’s substitution, imprisoned him, attempted to starve him, and eventually executed him by lethal injection.¹¹⁶ Father Maximilian’s actions at Auschwitz became the primary basis for his canonization in 1982 by Pope John Paul II, who described him as a “martyr of charity.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ *Immaculata*, May 1950, 17.

¹¹⁵ *Hero of Auschwitz*, 24.

¹¹⁶ *Hero of Auschwitz*, 24-35.

¹¹⁷ The Militia Immaculata, *Who is St. Maximilian Kolbe?* <http://www.consecration.com/learn-more5.html>.

Marytown, USA

Immaculata documents the desire of the Franciscan friars in Wisconsin to honor and expand Kolbe's media mission: "What Father Maximilian began in Poland the Friars here at Marytown, Kenosha, Wisconsin, are endeavoring to continue in America."¹¹⁸ In 1946, Father Dominic Szymanski began petitioning his superiors for permission to establish a "Marytown" in the United States.¹¹⁹ In 1948, permission was granted. The early mission started on a small scale: "Marytown began existence in a little cottage on the Conventual Franciscans' St. Mary's Minor Seminary in Crystal Lake, Illinois, with seven lay Brother candidates and their Father Superior. Later, quarters were changed to a remodeled barn on the same property and in November 1949, quarters were moved to the present location in Kenosha, Wisconsin."¹²⁰ The friars relocated Marytown to Libertyville, Illinois, in 1979 where it remains today.

A 1962 *Immaculata* article, "Marytown—What Is It?" reflects on the purposes of the cities of the Immaculate:

One might ask what was the scope, the spiritual aim and significance of these Marytowns to be? The answer is simple and the answer comes from Father Maximilian himself, who founded two such "Little Cities," one in Poland, and another in Japan. A "Marytown" is a form of life, so to speak. It is a program of action or an Ideal in which there is no truce. It has a characteristic all its own, which demands to be recognized by modern man, whose one purpose seems to be the destruction of spiritual values.¹²¹

The Militia's conception of itself as a "form of life" suggests that its members were intent on transforming their beliefs into actions, and Marian representations, even on the scale of cities,

¹¹⁸ *Immaculata*, May 1951, 17.

¹¹⁹ *Immaculata*, May 1951, 17.

¹²⁰ *Immaculata*, May 1951, 17.

¹²¹ *Immaculata*, August 1962, 3.

were shaping this transformative process.¹²² The text explicitly links belief and action: “A “Marytown” is one of those rare places where extremes meet—activity and interior life go hand in hand and where asceticism and action are not paradoxes.”¹²³ Marytown is also a place infused with the Madonna’s presence and directed by her leadership: “In it the hum of the motor becomes prayer and the presses seem to echo the Ave Maria in their rhythmic motion... Everything, every component part is labeled ‘MI’ because Mary Immaculate is the Head of every Marytown, of every Little City.”¹²⁴ This devotional landscape had physical, spiritual, and metaphorical dimensions for Mary’s adherents.

Immaculata describes the Militia’s approach to action as having two aspects—vertical and horizontal:

Unity of action is therefore necessary, for only in this unity will strength be found and success gained! This “unity” according to the teaching of Father Maximilian should be developed in a twofold direction: a) *vertically*, that is, in conformity with the will of the Immaculate, which should be the energizing principle of every action in union with Jesus, the source of all grace and the final end to every human action; b) *horizontally*, that is, synchronized with the Brothers (Marytown task force); the thousand hearts of the Militia members are to beat as one to further the Kingdom of God here on this earth.¹²⁵

The Militia located its mission at the intersection of the divine-human and human-human encounters. This understanding of Marytown fits well with the *communal* function of religious images to represent or effect, as Morgan and Promey put it, a “set of horizontal

¹²² I found this passage to be especially evocative in light of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s philosophical concept of a “form of life.” MI members were very much caught up in their own Wittgensteinian “language game,” based on a lexicon of Marian signs.

¹²³ *Immaculata*, August 1962, 3.

¹²⁴ *Immaculata*, August 1962, 3.

¹²⁵ *Immaculata*, August 1962, 4.

relations among individuals as well as a vertical communion with a reality greater than the self.”¹²⁶

The Militia promoted very specific actions in its media, as well as offering members resources to adopt a Marian “form of life.” The group’s primary ritual actions were the practice of “Total Consecration” to Mary in the tradition of St. Maximilian Kolbe and St. Louis Grignion de Montfort, and the practice of perpetual Eucharist adoration. In an issue celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the MI in 1968, *Immaculata* described the success of its adoration campaign:

In the promotion of Parish Perpetual Adoration much has been done through THE IMMACULATE. A whole issue of THE IMMACULATE, which gave details on how to start Parish Perpetual Adoration, personal testimonies of adorers and pastors on the value of Eucharistic adoration, was sent to all the parishes in the United States in 1960. In that special issue over 120 parishes were reported (in a special summary report) as having day and night continuous adoration programs. Many of these programs were inaugurated through the help of Marytown’s literature on this form of Eucharistic devotion.¹²⁷

The article continued to make direct connections between its own media and the success of parish adoration programs. The MI did not only rely on *Immaculata*, but also embraced other media in this effort:

Besides the magazine articles on Perpetual Adoration there are the monthly, color posters that are sent to various parishes having adoration programs. These attractive 17 ½ x 11 ½ inch posters are placed in the vestibules of churches to remind and inspire adorers to keep their appointment with their Eucharistic King, and to encourage all Catholics to pray. Kits of sample leaflets, posters, etc.—all the necessary material for starting an adoration program—are sent free to interested parties. The posters which have drawn favorable comments from many people are presently being translated into French by a Blessed Sacrament Father for use in French Canada.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Morgan and Promey, 6.

¹²⁷ *Immaculata* (50th Anniversary Militia of Mary Immaculate), 1968, 51.

¹²⁸ *Immaculata* (50th Anniversary Militia of Mary Immaculate), 1968, 51.

The Militia imitated the media creativity of its founder, Maximilian Kolbe, to adapt its devotional message to the times in an effort to encourage specific religious actions. The MI also described self-conscious concern for improving and refining its media output: “Although the circulation to THE IMMACULATE has not increased appreciably over the years, pages have been added, skills have been acquired, making the 32-page magazine more attractive and more solid than the original 20-page IMMACULATA.”¹²⁹ By 1973, the MI had set long-range goals that featured the expansion of media:

Increase the circulation of IMMACULATA magazine to 2,000,000. Institute a Marian Audio Visual Center which will produce high quality cassette tapes, films, radio and television programs to foster the Marian apostolate. Build a national chain of IMMACULATA lending libraries, book stores, and religious gift shops, owned and operated by local MI members.¹³⁰

Although the Militia remained on the cutting edge of media technology (including its current internet presence), a decline in Marian devotion in the latter decades of the twentieth century reduced the size of their potential audience.

Engaging with the “Catholic Press”

As I noted earlier, *Immaculata* initially rode the wave of the popular Catholic press, and the Marian devotional movement in general. Like many other Catholic publications, *Immaculata* did not portray itself in competition with other publications, but rather promoted, borrowed and shared articles, ideas, and images with them. In print, the editors of the magazine publicly supported the “Catholic Press” and put themselves in constant conversation with this diverse media enterprise. On a yearly basis, *Immaculata* celebrated Catholic Press Month

¹²⁹ *Immaculata* (50th Anniversary Militia of Mary Immaculate), 1968, 50.

¹³⁰ *Immaculata*, October 1973, 31.

with a special editorial message. An example from 1955 illustrates the broad scope and urgency of this vision:

February is Catholic Press Month. We encourage you to support YOUR Catholic Press by subscribing to Catholic publications that will instruct as well as entertain you. Secular reading, barring what is strictly necessary, can bring you pleasure, but never happiness. Happiness consists in remaining within the narrow, but happy and holy limits of our religion. If you can afford a magazine at all, you can afford one that is Catholic. Or let us say, without exaggeration, you can't afford to be without one. Time is the price of eternity, so why waste it on useless and dangerous reading? Your eyes are the windows of your soul. Beware, therefore, of what you read. You have but one soul, and only one lifetime in which to save it. Just one bad book can ruin everything. KEEP YOUR READING—CATHOLIC.¹³¹

The Militia paints a rather extreme portrait of the necessity and impact of the Catholic Press on the state of individual souls. An earlier reflection on a similar theme shows an image of printing press, sprouting tentacles including a movie camera, a microphone, artificial lights, film, and radio and television antennae. The caption reads, “Influence of Mass Media Communication on the Person of Man,” and quotes Monsignor Angelo Dell’Acqua: “The pressure of slanted news, the enticement of pictures, the importunity of propaganda—these are the means by which the coordinated activity of press, radio, movies, and television succeed in forming the individual’s conscience without his being aware of it.”¹³² Contrary to this view, the Militia sought to exploit the influence of media for its own religious agenda that it viewed as spiritually enriching, rather than spiritually draining.

The MI even conceived of a “Catholic Press Apostolate” to persuade readers to purchase gift subscriptions or refer new subscribers. *Immaculata* situated this effort within Catholic moral theology, suggesting that readers who recruited others would, “be practicing

¹³¹ *Immaculata*, February 1955, 5. A similar impulse had already been articulated by Catholic groups such as the Legion of Decency, established in 1934, that viewed and rated films on their appropriateness for Catholic audiences.

¹³² *Immaculata*, February 1967, back cover.

one or all of the first four Spiritual Works of Mercy (Admonishing the sinner, instructing the ignorant, counseling the doubtful, comforting the sorrowful). You will be lighting the flame of hope and love in the minds and hearts of men in a world that is engulfed in the dense fog of atheistic humanism.”¹³³

The Central Association of the Miraculous Medal also extolled the virtues of the Catholic Press early in its publication of *The Miraculous Medal* magazine. An editorial from 1931 argued the crucial place of Catholic publications in Catholic family life:

Every Catholic family should subscribe for a Catholic weekly newspaper. At least one such publication should come every week to every Catholic home. It is only in this way that the members of the family can keep informed on Catholic events of importance, not only in their locality and nation but throughout the entire world....Besides giving the facts and correcting errors, Catholic weekly newspapers bring a Catholic atmosphere into the home. They are a refreshing relief after the sordid stories of murder, suicide, divorce and crime of all kinds...that are carried into the home by the daily press.¹³⁴

The editor proposed the Catholic press as an antidote to the glut of societal ills reported, often sensationally, in the media. The essay goes on to describe the usefulness of “Catholic reviews” that breathe intellectual life into issues of Catholic concern.¹³⁵

The CAMM also placed its own magazine within the larger context of the Catholic Press:

One other Catholic publication remains to be considered. It is the Catholic magazine. And here we may be pardoned if we confine our attention to our own magazine, *The Miraculous Medal*. We publish it for a fundamental purpose which is three-fold: to make our Blessed Lady better known and loved through her Medal; to help young men to become priests; to enable our missions in China to live and to do their Christ-like work. Hence every one who subscribes to our Magazine is giving real assistance

¹³³ *Immaculata*, May 1970, 43.

¹³⁴ *The Miraculous Medal*, February 1931, 4.

¹³⁵ *The Miraculous Medal*, February 1931, 4.

to those three causes, shares in the glory of furthering them, and is doing a work of true charity that will be abundantly rewarded.¹³⁶

The CAMM, like the MI, also employed media to invite readers to act on their beliefs. *The Miraculous Medal* called for Catholics to wear and distribute the Miraculous Medal and to support the priesthood and missionary work as a manifestation of their Marian devotion. These practices were reinforced by numerous reports of Mary's intercession in the lives of her faithful.

Groups like the MI and CAMM remained hopeful toward the end of the twentieth century, and kept publishing, even as readership and interest in Marian devotion declined. In 1968, *Immaculata* took an optimistic attitude:

Even though the number of subscribers is now increasing, the magazine is reaching only a very small fraction of American Catholics. The majority of American Catholics have never heard of Father Maximilian nor of his Militia. Our purpose is, of course, to reach as many as possible. And since paid subscriptions seem to limit the number of people who can be reached in order to further the Militia Ideals, other possibilities are being considered. But the magazine will still definitely continue.¹³⁷

This article also reasserted the distinctiveness of *Immaculata* in the field of Catholic media:

The IMMACULATE magazine seems to be more needed in today's confusing world than even before. In the United States ten Catholic publications discontinued publication last year. Some of the most prominent existing ones seem to completely disregard devotion to the Eucharist and the Blessed Mother. Thus the great need to give the Catholics in the United States good, solid articles on these subjects. Besides these articles, THE IMMACULATE publishes articles treating current problems. These articles are inspirational rather than sensational. They quietly reflect the Council Decrees and the statements of the Holy Father.¹³⁸

The MI cast itself as a pillar of Catholic inspiration and truth—a moderating religious voice in a secular world of chaos. Despite immense changes in the world of Catholic media and

¹³⁶ *The Miraculous Medal*, February 1931, 4.

¹³⁷ *Immaculata* (50th Anniversary Militia of Mary Immaculate), 1968, 51.

¹³⁸ *Immaculata* (50th Anniversary Militia of Mary Immaculate), 1968, 51.

Marian devotionism, the MI and CAMM still publish versions of *Immaculata* and *The Miraculous Medal* today. Both groups forged a role in America's Catholic Press by creatively employing media resources to adapt their religious ideas into prescribed actions for Marian devotees.

CHAPTER 3

“OUR LADY OF AT-ONE-MENT”: MARY AS MISSIONARY MEDIATRIX

In the devotional media of the Militia Immaculata and the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal, the Madonna figured as both missionary and mediatrix. This dual role exemplifies the creativity, adaptability, and transformative aspects of Marian representations promoted by these groups. Mary the Evangelist, as portrayed in media such as *Immaculata* and *The Miraculous Medal*, served as a model missionary for these devotional organizations. Mary’s primary role as *mother* provided the central metaphor for all missions. According to devotees, her knack for capturing public attention through apparitions and prophecies made her an ideal defender of the faith. She served as the spokeswoman for Catholic universality, “Our Lady of At-One-Ment,” who unites all humans who atone for their sins.¹³⁹ From a Catholic theological perspective, Mary’s ability to *unify* derives from her ability to *mediate*, and her primary mode of mediation is evangelistic and mission minded. The MI and the CAMM employed mass media for evangelization, and represented the Madonna herself as a skillful media maven. These Marian devotional organizations creatively constructed representations of the Madonna, adapted them to their religious and historical contexts, and suggested that these images should transform beliefs into actions. Mary as Evangelist is the most transformative of Marian media icons because of this role’s call to outreach—these

¹³⁹ The title “Our Lady of At-One-Ment” first appears in *Immaculata* in Jun/July 1959 and is repeated in later issues.

icons mediate in the traditional Catholic sense, but also aim to provoke readers and viewers to become mediators themselves through evangelistic fervor and missionary zeal.

At their inception, both groups defined *mission* traditionally as the conversion of non-Catholics, usually in foreign lands. After the Second Vatican Council, Catholic definitions of evangelization, and especially those from a Marian perspective expanded to include the “renewal” of wayward Catholics, the spiritual invigoration of devout Catholics, and the conversion of all people to the Marian message and way of life. In this devotional media, Mary the Missionary functioned as an all-encompassing media icon, whose form (ultimate mother, unifier, and agent of conversion) was synchronized with its content (the evangelistic mission of spreading Catholicism and Marian devotion).

For devotees in the MI and CAMM, Mary’s role as missionary depends on her ability to intercede on behalf of human beings. The concept of Mary as “Mediatrix”—the icon who mediates “all graces”—is fundamental to understanding the Militia’s understanding of Mary as evangelist. The title “Mediatrix” embodies multiple functions of the Madonna as person and image. According to this strand of Catholic thought, Mary serves as primary mediator between people, God, and Christ. Her special relationship with her son allows her petitions for humanity to gain special hearing, inspiring popular devotional practices such as reciting the “Hail Mary” prayer for her intercession.

The Miraculous Medal and *Immaculata* magazines commonly represented Mary as an essential *intercessor* for the devotional life of American Catholics. Understanding this Marian role allows us to understand many of the *whys* behind organizations such as the MI or CAMM, and the ways that these reasons are configured in devotional media. Why Mary? Why consecration? Why wear the Miraculous Medal? A theory of cause and effect dwells

behind the logic of many popular religious devotions. Devotees want results, and they believe that the Madonna provides them in the form of answered prayers, healings, interventions, protections, and miracles.

From its beginning, *The Miraculous Medal* put forth a column entitled “Rays from the Hands of Mary” that documented the intercessory action of Mary in the lives of thankful devotees. The logo shows the Madonna in the guise of her Paris appearance to Catherine Labouré that inspired the Miraculous Medal devotion: her arms are spread, palms up, with rays of light flowing from them. In this column, editors chose from thousands of letters detailing the Madonna’s personal favors. “Rays from the Hands of Mary,” offered concrete evidence for the group’s devotional mission and an outlet for another form of ritual practice: thanksgiving. Sensational reports of miracles and prophecies in *Immaculata* served a similar purpose: they inspired awe (and sometimes fear) in the minds of faithful readers and encouraged consecration to the powerful saint.

There are important differences between the two organizations regarding the *practice* of devotion to Mary. The Central Association of the Miraculous Medal distributed a sacramental¹⁴⁰ to its members, and linked those members with the sacred emblem. This sacramentally focused organization differed from groups such as the Militia Immaculata that promoted Marianism as a *way of life* through more abstract paraliturgical practices such as “Total Consecration.”¹⁴¹ In the imagery of devotional media, benevolent Marys, arms outstretched (ready for embraces) and emanating rays, became iconic with the promise of

¹⁴⁰For Roman Catholics, a “sacramental” is a material object that serves as a “sacred sign” that enhances adherents’ experience of the sacraments either in both liturgical and paraliturgical settings. Examples of sacramentals include: holy water, ashes, palms, candles, rosaries, and medals.

¹⁴¹ It should be noted, however, that the MI also promoted wearing the Miraculous Medal and the practices surrounding this devotion.

devotional rewards. Mary, as intercessor, functioned as a living image, responsive to the needs of her followers.

The Rhetoric of Mediation

In June/July 1959, a lead article in *Immaculata* engages in wordplay to communicate important theological ideas about the Virgin Mary: "...Mary's function as Mother did not cease with Calvary; indeed it was only the beginning. She continues her office of spiritual mother and mediatrix of all grace in every age, in every part of the world, and for every soul. She is Our Lady of At-one-ment seeking to unite all men with her Son and God."¹⁴² The front cover of the same issue shows an image of Madonna and child—Mary's eyes are downcast, though she wears a royal crown and halo of stars. The infant Jesus gazes back at the viewer, arms outstretched, and cross in hand. The "Our Cover" caption puts the pun in context:

Our Lady of Atonement—Our Lady of Unity. Our Holy Father, John XXIII, has great confidence in Our Lady's intercession to bring about a cure for our many ills and to unite divided humanity in brotherly peace. He asks the faithful to pray with great fervor for the success of the forthcoming ecumenical council because "the fervent and insistent prayers of the faithful are very effective, he says. And he asks the faithful to pray especially to Mary who is ever solicitous for the welfare of the Church, particularly when she is oppressed by various trials and tribulations. Therefore, "anyone," the Holy Father advertises, "who wishes the Church well must raise fervent prayers in her behalf to the Virgin Mary."¹⁴³

According to this view, Mary's maternal care extends to all human beings and to the Church itself. Her intercession facilitates reparation and unity in the face of chaos and dissent. The Madonna, as *mediatrix*, harmonizes contradictions in favor of spiritual oneness.

¹⁴² *Immaculata*, June/July 1959, 6.

¹⁴³ *Immaculata*, June/July 1959, 2.

Immaculata featured comments by Father Paul James Francis, S.A., who founded the Society of the Atonement:

Father Paul was convinced that Christian Unity would be achieved through the intercession and love of the Virgin Mary. “All who have been validly baptized are also children of Mary,” he would say, “even though they have gone astray from Catholic Unity and are identified with some Protestant sect or belong to some division of the Orthodox millions in Russia and the Near East. Mary loves them all and her heart is torn within her as she contemplates the unhappy division of Christendom and prays in union with Christ Himself: *Ut omnes unum sint*—that all may be one.”¹⁴⁴

According to Father Francis, Our Lady of Atonement offered a means of unifying a fractured global Christianity. Mary’s ability to unify, however, depends on her powers of mediation and intercession. For Catholic devotees, The Madonna acts in the world, visibly and invisibly, to improve the human lot.

The first issue of *The Miraculous Medal* introduced a column, “Rays from the Hands of Mary,” that continued throughout the tenure of the magazine. The column printed, “Favors reported by Members of The Central Association of the Miraculous Medal.”¹⁴⁵ These favors included a wide range of perceived interventions including healings, conversions, job assistance, and family reunions. Readers who wrote in to the column linked these miraculous events not just to Mary’s watchful eye, but also to their devotional practice of wearing the Miraculous Medal. A sample letter from the first issue illustrates a few of the typical themes:

About three months ago I gave a Miraculous Medal to a Protestant woman. The same day she was in an automobile accident, her car was smashed, she was thrown out, and the Medal was bent double. Strange to say, she didn’t get a scratch. She says now she intends to become a Catholic and is going to take instructions immediately.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ *Immaculata*, June/July 1959, 6.

¹⁴⁵ *The Miraculous Medal*, May 1928, 6.

¹⁴⁶ *The Miraculous Medal*, May 1928, 6.

The magazine published hundreds of similar accounts, all noting the mark devotees felt Mary left on their lives. In contrast to the global focus of *Immaculata*, *The Miraculous Medal*'s "Rays from the Hands of Mary" emphasized the local, practical, and tangible results of the Madonna's mediation.

Mary's role as "Mediatrice" is deeply rooted in Catholic theology. Richard P. McBrien describes the dynamics of sacramentality and mediation within the Catholic tradition:

Catholicism understands that the invisible, spiritual God is present and active on our spiritual behalf through the visible and the material, and that these are made holy and spiritually effective by reason of that divine presence. Catholicism, therefore, readily engages in the veneration (not worship) of Mary and asks us to intercede for us, not because Catholicism perceives Mary as some kind of goddess or supercreature or rival of the Lord himself, but because she is a symbol, image, and instrument of God. It is the God who is present in her and who fills her whole being that is the real object of Catholicism's veneration. Her importance, like that of the other saints, is rooted in the fact that she is a "sacrament" of the divine. And sacraments both signify and cause grace.¹⁴⁷

Mary, according to Catholic teaching, both signifies and causes grace in a double movement that aligns, or even equates, "symbol, image, and instrument." This is the movement of religious metaphor, the definition of Mary as Media Icon—the one who mediates and represents simultaneously.

The Catholic notion of Mary as "Mediatrice" of grace also highlights her connection to "salvation." One reference work entry provides helpful historical background for this linkage in its article on the term "Mediatrice":

In traditional Mariology, Mary was regarded as the Mediatrice for three reasons. First, because of the specific holy acts she performed during her life, Mary was regarded as the Coredemptrix (Lat.) who cooperated with the plan of God. Second, through her continual intercessions, Mary was seen as the dispensatrix (Lat.) who distributed and applied the graces of Christ. Finally, Mary's ontological mediation was perceived to

¹⁴⁷ Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism: New Edition* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 12.

be rooted in her divine motherhood and the fullness of grace she possessed from the moment of her conception.¹⁴⁸

The Madonna exhibits several forms of mediation recognized by Catholic tradition. As Coredemptrix, Mary made the divine design of salvation possible. Her assent to God's will is upheld as a model of faith, with "cooperation" as its key value. As Dispensatrix, Mary mediates between human beings and God/Christ, by offering her prayers and concerns for humanity as a whole, and individuals who practice devotion to her. As "Theotokos" (Mother of God), Mary bears God into the world in the person of Christ. Her intimate bond with her divine son affords her a special intercessory role. The oft-repeated phrase, "To Jesus through Mary," highlights this idea. Mary is tethered to God by an umbilical connection.

Jaroslav Pelikan offers more historical context for Mary's role as Mediatrix:

The title itself seems to have appeared first in Eastern theology, where she was addressed as "the Mediatrix of law and of grace." Whether from such Eastern sources or from Western reflection, the term came into Latin usage, apparently near the end of the eighth century. It was, however, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries that it achieved widespread acceptance.,she [Mary] was "the way by which the Savior came" to humanity in the incarnation and the redemption, and she was also the one "through whom we ascend to him how descended through her to us..."¹⁴⁹

In Catholic theology, the Madonna's ability to mediate relies on her relationship to Christ.

Scholar Elizabeth Johnson notes another consequence of this mother-son dynamic: "A fearsome edge was given to the mediating role of Mary by emphasis on Christ the Just Judge. Being the mother of the Judge as well as of the ones on trial, Mary could soften the heart of her Son and obtain mercy for sinners, undeserving though they be."¹⁵⁰ Johnson suggests that Mary's shared motherhood of Christ and humanity makes her a crucial link between the two.

¹⁴⁸ *Harper Collins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, s.v. "Mediatrix," 848.

¹⁴⁹ Pelikan, 130-131.

¹⁵⁰ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 121.

As God-bearer, Mary also mediates as icon, literally functioning as a window, vessel, and channel of grace in devotional practice. She acts as both a signifier and source of divine presence in the world. Images, statues, medals, rosaries, and scapulars are all tools that acknowledge the Madonna as a conduit for grace.

According to Catholic tradition, the Virgin Mary mediates the human and divine realms through her *practice of appearing*. Marian apparitions witness to her power to intercede, and her real caring for humanity by making her presence known in the world.

Mary mediates, in another (literal) sense, by using modern *media* to get her message out. The Militia saw itself as an agent of this task by using the magazine to inform readers about the Marian way. Mary mediates between past, present, and future as a *prophetic* evangelist who attempts to warn and save the world.

Immaculata was not unique in tying Mary to contemporary media. A 1958 issue quotes from another Marian publication, *Fatima Findings*. An article titled “The Two Meanings of ‘T.V.’” offers an initial criticism of television, but goes on to compare the Madonna’s role to that of T.V.:

Television literally means the sight of far-off things. How divinely true is the Christian television of the Tabernacle Veil. The veil of the tabernacle is seemingly lifeless and silent—as quiet as the veil which enveloped our Lady as she rode with calm modesty to Bethlehem. And yet beneath that TV of the tabernacle veil rests the same Divine Child Who first rested beneath the veil of our Lady, His Immaculate Mother, on the way to Bethlehem... Yet Christ in the tabernacle is being ignored. How many of us spend more time before a television set than before the tabernacle! Let us offer Him loving reparation.¹⁵¹

The author offered Mary—the tabernacle—as a substitute for the modern medium of television, as if she could display the image of Christ *in utero* through her womb. The passage also suggests that the worship of television threatens the traditional practice of

¹⁵¹ *Immaculata*, February 1958, 2.

Eucharistic adoration. The author used contemporary technology to describe Mary’s very ancient role in the Catholic tradition—that of Theotokos, or “God-bearer.”

Mary as Theotokos

Mary’s role as *Theotokos* fully emerged in Catholic theology at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Convened to challenge the Nestorian view of Christ as comprised of two separate persons (human and divine), the council concluded that, “Jesus is one divine person,” reconfirming the unified nature of Christ declared at the earlier Council of Nicaea (325).¹⁵² This teaching also foreshadowed the concept of “hypostatic union” between the divine and human natures of Christ at the Council of Chalcedon (451).¹⁵³ The consequences for the position of the Virgin Mary in Catholic thought became known as central idea of the Council of Ephesus: Mary is not only the mother of Jesus the human being, but also the Mother of God (Theotokos).¹⁵⁴

Mary as Theotokos also formed an important aspect of the Marian devotion advocated by Maximilian Kolbe, founder of the MI. The September 1951 issue of *Immaculata* muses about the Madonna’s identity by quoting a translation of a 1947 article by Kolbe in the Polish publication, *Rycerz Niepokalane*:

Who are you, Immaculate Lady? Not just the creature, not just the adopted child, but the Mother of God—and not merely the adopted Mother, but the **real** Mother of **God**. And this is not merely a supposition, a probability, but a certainty, an utter certainty in every respect and a dogma of faith. Are you still God’s Mother? The title of Mother does not change. God shall forever call you “My Mother”...the Giver of the fourth commandment will honor you for all ages, forever...¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² *Harper Collins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, s.v. “Theotokos,” 1251.

¹⁵³ *Harper Collins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, s.vv. “Hypostasis,” 646-647, and “Hypostatic union,” 647.

¹⁵⁴ *Harper Collins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, s.v. “Theotokos,” 1251.

¹⁵⁵ *Immaculata*, September 1951, 17 (bold in original).

Although God is *creator* of all, Kolbe argues, Mary is uniquely *parent* to God. The commandment to honor one's parents secures her venerable and exclusive role as Theotokos within this devotional tradition.

Mary's status as God-bearer became inextricably connected to her role as The Immaculate Conception. If Mary was truly Mother of God, she needed to be a pure vessel, worthy to birth Christ into the world. Drawing on scriptural traditions of Mary's "fullness of grace" (Luke 1:28) and her position as "blessed among women" (Luke 1:42), the Church suggested that Mary was conceived "immaculately," without the "stain of original sin" due to the special intervention of God and the perfection of Christ as redeemer.¹⁵⁶ This concept was made an official dogma of the Catholic Church on December 8, 1854 when Pope Pius IX issued the papal bull *Ineffabilis Deus*.¹⁵⁷ Elizabeth Johnson elegantly describes the theological significance of the dogma of The Immaculate Conception:

The religious meaning of this dogma centers on the victory of God's grace, freely given in Christ. Sin is universal, and the whole human race is in need of salvation. This is offered because of God's love and mercy poured out in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, prior to any merits or deserving works on the part of human beings. The dogma of Mary's original sinlessness celebrates God's victory over the powers and principalities of this world as the woman comes into existence. In her very being, through the mercy of God, the grip of evil is broken...That God generously graces Mary, enabling her living union with God from her beginning even while not removing her from the sufferings of history, is congruent with divine mercy. It also signifies the good news that for the Church and for every human being, grace is more original than sin.¹⁵⁸

Johnson implies that the Catholic theological understanding of Mary as "full of grace" is an optimistic concept. As Theotokos and Immaculate Conception, Mary is both exceptional and representative. She is an exception because she is the only human being born without sin.

¹⁵⁶ Elizabeth Johnson, "Immaculate Conception," in *Harper Collins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 655.

¹⁵⁷ Johnson, "Immaculate Conception," in *Harper Collins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 655.

¹⁵⁸ Johnson, "Immaculate Conception," in *Harper Collins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 655.

She is representative because she stands for the gift of grace offered to all human beings. According to this perspective, the Madonna becomes radically human in her distinctiveness. Her otherness, then, is ultimately relatable and intimately bound up with the human condition.

In practice, many feminist critics have argued for a less sanguine interpretation of the theology of Marian distinctiveness. In *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, cultural historian Marina Warner investigates the potentially destructive aspects of Marian representations such as The Immaculate Conception:

As the icon of the ideal, the Virgin affirms the inferiority of the human lot. Soaring above the men and women who pray to her, the Virgin conceived without sin underscores rather than alleviates pain and anxiety and accentuates the feeling of sinfulness. The state her votaries believe to be hers must always elude them, for all creatures except her are, they are told, born in sin. Mary is indeed Eve's other face: the two female symbols excite that very emotion that the story of the Fall sought to explain and the story of the Incarnate God sought to heal: the feeling that in its very nature humanity is fatally estranged from goodness, which, for a believer, is God.¹⁵⁹

Warner's critique suggests that veneration of the Madonna highlights the impassable distance between human beings and God. The Marian models of gendered performance elucidated in Chapter Four of this work demonstrated many of the mixed messages offered to female devotees, reflecting Warner's concerns. Warner's overall interpretation of Marian symbolism, however, would not likely have been recognizable to the mid-twentieth century members of the MI or CAMM. For both groups, Mary's role as Mediatrix was central; this role is predicated on her *proximity to*, rather than *distance from*, both the human and the divine. Sally Cunneen's *In Search of Mary: The Woman and the Symbol* reinforces this idea by describing Mary as an "Icon of Human Possibility." She writes: "As God-Bearer, she

¹⁵⁹ Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 254.

reveals that God both comforts and challenges us to new creation at all times. Her very capacity to be translated into images of every culture shows that she is what Ephrem called her—the daughter of humanity.”¹⁶⁰

In *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints*, Johnson offers a contemporary “theology of Mary whose unifying vision lies in interpreting her as a friend of God and prophet within the circle of all those who seek God, the company of saints living and dead.”¹⁶¹ This understanding of the Madonna resonates with devotional images such as “Our Lady of At-One-Ment” and “Rays from the Hands of Mary” embraced by the MI and CAMM. In particular, representations of Mary as God-Bearer and Immaculate Conception inhabited the Marian media produced by these organizations.

For the Militia Immaculata, even well known images of Madonna and child invoked traditional notions of Mary as Theotokos. A 1950 *Immaculata* article by Myrtle Sommers entitled, “A Consecration” pairs a discussion of St. Louis de Montfort’s Marian devotion with the famous Roberto Ferruzzi painting, “The Madonna of the Streets.” The text elaborates on the image:

Many people say that True Devotion to Our Blessed Mother according to St. Louis de Montfort is “to [sic] deep” for them. Look at the simplicity in the accompanying picture. Nothing deep about it, is there? It is a mother with a child in her arms. This is True Devotion. As in the natural life there must be a father and a mother, in the supernatural life, the divine life of grace in a soul, there must be a mother and a father also. God is the Father and He has chosen Mary as the Mother.¹⁶²

The author analogizes the human and divine motherhood of Mary, and argues the necessity of this maternal model: “She is our Mother in the spiritual life, and we have as much need for

¹⁶⁰ Sally Cunneen, *In Search of Mary: The Woman and the Symbol* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), 306-307.

¹⁶¹ Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints*, 134.

¹⁶² *Immaculata*, September 1950, 5.

her as the infant in the accompanying picture for his physical mother! She it is who nourishes and sustains us in the life of grace... She was the Mother of ALL Grace—for she brought forth God Himself, the Author of Grace.”¹⁶³ The Virgin Mary, in this view, is quite literally pregnant with grace and participates in an endless cycle of rebirth as both mother and midwife to the human race. In this article, the idea of Mary as Theotokos also relates to Mary’s role as Dispensatrix: “...God has made her the Treasurer of all His Graces...So if we want grace, and we must needs have it in order to obtain our only true goal in live, then we must look to Mary for it.”¹⁶⁴ Not only does Mary usher grace into the world, she dispenses it to those in need.

Another article, “Mary at the Bedside of Ailing Christendom,” by the Reverend Lester M. Dooley, S.V.D., portrays the Madonna as mother and *doctor*. Part of the “healing” process depends on Mary’s “spiritual motherhood.” Dooley argues:

As our own mothers gave birth to us in the natural order, so Mary gives birth to us in the supernatural order. Her begetting of Christ in the stable of Bethlehem was wholly painless: not so, her manner of begetting us on Calvary. There, it was in the anguish and heartbreak of spiritual pain and desolation. With Christ’s words to Mary: “Woman, behold thy son,” Mary entered into the spiritual motherhood of each one of us.¹⁶⁵

Mary’s love is reproductive and connected to divine transcendence and human suffering. This love provides the basis for her ongoing intercession. Dooley casts this in human terms: “In times of peril, every mother exerts superhuman efforts to shield her child from impending disaster. With the approach of death she knows no rest. Hers is constant vigil until the soul

¹⁶³ *Immaculata*, September 1950, 5.

¹⁶⁴ *Immaculata*, September 1950, 5.

¹⁶⁵ *Immaculata*, December 1952, 3.

has fled the body. Today, more than ever before, in the history of Christendom, Mary is hovering near her sick children, because death seems near.”¹⁶⁶

Dooley suggests the urgency of the world’s spiritual health by emphasizing the frequency of Marian apparitions or “doctor’s visits.” He continues to assure readers of the Virgin’s care and to remind them of their spiritual responsibilities: “...Mary is near to administer a restorative, to apply a spiritual hypodermic needle—the easy way to health. It is the daily Rosary; penance, in the form of fidelity to one’s state of life, reparation and Consecration to her Immaculate Heart. But we are free. Shall we accept or reject it?”¹⁶⁷ Dooley asks devotees to take active part in restoring their spiritual health. This particular image of the Madonna as Theotokos and Dispensatrix required MI members to transform their beliefs into actions in order to receive the healing graces meted out by her.

Immaculata frequently depicted Mary as God-Bearer delivering not just the “person” of Christ to the world, but also Christ as Eucharist. The use of Eucharist imagery throughout the magazine might strike some viewers as oddly metonymic, with illustrations of wafers and chalices standing in for the person of Christ. Although these representations may be visually jarring, they are theologically correct within the Catholic doctrine of the “Real Presence” in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Pope Paul VI’s 1965 encyclical on the Eucharist, *Mysterium Fidei*, describes the teaching of the “Real Presence:” “This presence is called "real" not to exclude the idea that the others are "real" too, but rather to indicate presence par excellence, because it is substantial and through it Christ becomes present whole and entire, God and

¹⁶⁶ *Immaculata*, December 1952, 3.

¹⁶⁷ *Immaculata*, December 1952, 5.

man.”¹⁶⁸ Consequently, the image of the Eucharist may be used to stand for the whole substance of Christ.

The dynamics of Eucharistic representation in *Immaculata* directly affect Mary’s role as Theotokos, since she is often portrayed as giving birth to the Eucharist itself. The previously noted concept, “to Jesus through Mary,” also translates as “to the Eucharist through Mary” validating the Militia’s consistent description of the Virgin as protectress of perpetual Eucharistic adoration (one of the MI’s central forms of devotion). The back cover of a 1951 issue of *Immaculata* shows a photograph of a mass in progress. The following caption accompanies the image:

The Power of Truth is HERE! THIS is the power of Truth, that the Truth shall make us Free. It shall free from darkness because it gives us Faith. It frees us from despair because it gives us Hope. It looses our hearts from torpor because it impels to Love. Truth Is Hidden Here—in the Eucharist/Through Mary, Ours Is to Search It Out!¹⁶⁹

Through Mary, the magazine argues, one experiences the Eucharist—the “truth” of the Mass. A later issue quotes from Fr. Maximilian Kolbe in a striking play on the standard language of the mass: “The nearer we come to The Immaculate, the more holy we become...Therefore whether we feel aversion, whether we are in darkness or light, let us always advance by way of the Immaculate. It is a very important matter that our life be lived *through Her, with Her, and in Her.*”¹⁷⁰ Kolbe recast the traditional formula, “through Him, with Him, and in Him,” to emphasize the Mary’s role as Mediatrix and God-Bearer in this devotional framework.

Once again, embedded in the theology of these representations is a call to action. The back cover of *Immaculata* in June/July 1950 shows an image of Our Lady of Fatima. The

¹⁶⁸ Paul VI, “Mysterium Fidei,” http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_pvi_enc_03091965_mysterium_en.html, n.39.

¹⁶⁹ *Immaculata*, September 1951, back cover.

¹⁷⁰ *Immaculata*, August 1961, 31.

headline reads: “What She REALLY WANTS (And has been asking for over 120 years!)”¹⁷¹

The text concludes: “PERPETUAL ADORATION/All Our Lady really asks—ALL we can really do; for—ALL she wants that is NOT being done! WHAT IS OUR ANSWER?”¹⁷²

The MI viewed Eucharistic adoration as a key element of the Marian message, and asked its members to respect Mary’s wishes. Another back cover employs a classic image of Madonna and child that addresses the viewer: “**To Have and To Hold—*In Your Heart!*** If You Love My Son/Receive Him Often/Attend Mass Frequently/Receive Holy Communion... **You Can Go Every Day.**”¹⁷³ Mary’s request for daily communion symbolized, for these devotees, her profound connection to her son as Theotokos and Immaculate Conception. Although MI members might have been compelled to act on this basis alone, another layer of Marian theology motivates their transformation of beliefs into actions: the concept of Mary as Dispensatrix who intercedes on behalf of human beings and distributes the graces of Christ.

Mary as Dispensatrix

Members of The Militia Immaculata and the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal, like many Marian devotees, believed in the reality of Mary’s intercession in human affairs. Mary’s role as Mediatrix within Catholic theology makes this belief possible, and her title of Dispensatrix describes her special intercessory function. The transformation of beliefs into actions is a two-way street—devotees act in accordance with their perception of Mary’s wishes (for themselves and the world), but Mary must also take action in this spiritual

¹⁷¹ *Immaculata*, June/July 1950, back cover.

¹⁷² *Immaculata*, June/July 1950, back cover.

¹⁷³ *Immaculata*, February 1951, back cover (bold in original).

economy. Both groups proffered abundant evidence of the Madonna's intervention, and this evidence inspired or reinforced their Marian beliefs. In this circulation, beliefs shaped actions, while actions, in turn, shaped beliefs.

The Virgin's role as "Protectoress" also falls under the heading of her dispensatory functions. In the October 1952 issue of *Immaculata* Mary Dolores Fetcko wrote about "Spiritual Security in Mary." She noted that her article was written, "[i]n thanksgiving for favors received," indicating to the reader that Mary has already intervened in the life of the author.¹⁷⁴ In the text, Fetcko described the Madonna's concern extending into every aspect of human life: "Mary is our security, the only real security we have to rescue our lives from meaninglessness, repetitions, faulty activity and turn each deed and duty into something precious for her and her Divine Son."¹⁷⁵ Fetcko suggested that human beings are always under the watchful gaze of their Immaculate Mother:

Not always do we realize how steadfastly and watchfully Mary keeps us under her mantle. Sometimes, as in my own case, it takes a major emergency, heaped with relative problems to reveal how thoroughly Mary provides help, encouragement and patience. She shields us from the full brunt of life's heavy blows, bolsters our emotions, and sends us back again to meet each day as it comes...¹⁷⁶

Like any good mother, Mary gathers her children under her protective cloak, watching and listening with the utmost maternal care, ready to soothe any type of physical or spiritual wound.

In return for the Madonna's protection, adherents offered gratitude and praise. Yet, the text also gestures toward a different type of devotional action involving a surrender of ego and reliance on the self-giving love of the motherly saint. Fetcko argued that "serenity

¹⁷⁴ *Immaculata*, October 1952, 9.

¹⁷⁵ *Immaculata*, October 1952, 9.

¹⁷⁶ *Immaculata*, October 1952, 9.

of mind and heart” are the spiritual fruits of true devotion. Mary’s role as dispensatrix is only workable with a measure of human cooperation: “Mary utilizes our lives if we only tell her ‘what is mine is yours.’ She purifies our crosses with her virtues, enriches them with her perfection, and gives all to God, mingled with her love, her sorrows, and her mediations in our regard. Need anyone have more security than this?”¹⁷⁷ This spiritual attitude characterized the broader approach of the Militia Immaculata to the practice of “Total Consecration” to Mary.

Earlier in the twentieth century, the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal enthusiastically affirmed the Marian apparition to Sister Catherine Labouré in Paris (1830) and formed a devotional organization surrounding the practice of wearing the Miraculous Medal (believed to be designed by the Virgin herself and detailed in Labouré’s vision). A lengthy editorial in a 1928 issue of *The Miraculous Medal* magazine elucidates the duties of devotees, in light of Mary’s intercessions as Dispensatrix:

What has Mary done for us; and what have we done for her? We cannot, though we would, keep spiritual books, and there is in this world, no expert accountancy of the things of the soul. We will not see our debits and our credits in heavenly affairs until the last balance is struck on the Great Ledger. But it needs no angelic adding machine to convince us that we are ever in Our Mother’s debt. What wearer of the Miraculous Medal can say that he has not been the recipient of daily, almost hourly blessings and graces?¹⁷⁸

The editor identifies the constant flow of graces emanating from the Madonna and suggests that Marian devotion and evangelization are the appropriate active responses:

Our Mother’s whole delight is in giving. We can please her best by telling all men the story of her bounty; by advertising to the world that does not know her, the fact

¹⁷⁷ *Immaculata*, October 1952, 9.

¹⁷⁸ *The Miraculous Medal*, September 1928, 3.

that she is the repository and the mediatrix of all graces; by sending to her all those that are in need, that she may do for them what she has done for us.¹⁷⁹

From the CAMM perspective, admiration, thanksgiving, and outreach were intertwined, converging in the practice of wearing the Miraculous Medal. The group employed the medal as both an homage and as a recruiting tool. The editor continues by asking readers to “Make Use of the Medal:”

And we can wear her Medal! There is no better means to propagate devotion to our Blessed Mother than by bringing new members into The Central Association of the Miraculous Medal. Mary herself gave us this emblem. There is no faintest trace of superstition in the faith which millions have in it. The bit of stamped metal, impotent in itself, is the badge of love which Our Mother recognizes: that and no more. It is simply the minted coin that passes current in heaven...¹⁸⁰

With theological sensitivity, the magazine sought to allay concerns that the medals possess magical or miraculous qualities in themselves, but suggested that wearing the medal makes one a more clearly identifiable recipient of the graces dispensed by Mary. The heavenly currency of devotion provides a means of thanking the Madonna for gifts received, while publicizing credit where credit is due. Wearing the Medal is an act of recognition: “We should wear the Medal ourselves and urge others to wear it, because it is a sign of consecration, indicating that we recognize and love our Mother. And we may be sure that she in turn will recognize and protect her children.”¹⁸¹ As noted earlier, the CAMM built a long-standing tradition of honoring Marian intercessions in the recurring column, “Rays from the Hands of Mary.” For devotees, the published reports of Mary’s interventions in the daily lives of everyday individuals offered a compelling testament to the belief in her role as Dispensatrix.

¹⁷⁹ *The Miraculous Medal*, September 1928, 3.

¹⁸⁰ *The Miraculous Medal*, September 1928, 3.

¹⁸¹ *The Miraculous Medal*, September 1928, 3.

The Militia Immaculata also acknowledged the gift exchange between the Madonna and her devotees. However, the MI often emphasized that humans were unworthy to receive the graces dispensed. The December 1950 issue of *Immaculata* quotes the consecration formula of St. Louis Grignion De Montfort (1673-1716): “I praise and glorify Thee for that Thou hast been pleased to submit Thyself to Mary, thy holy Mother, in all things, in order to make me Thy faithful slave through her. But, alas! Ungrateful and faithless as I have been, I have not kept the promises which I made so solemnly to Thee in my Baptism...”¹⁸² Building upon this general sense of sin and unworthiness, De Montfort imagines his relationship to Mary:

I do not deserve to be called Thy child, nor yet Thy slave; and as there is nothing in me which does not merit Thine anger and Thy repulse, I dare not come by myself before Thy most holy Mother, whom Thou has given me for a mediatrix with Thee. It is through her that I hope to obtain of Thee contrition, the pardon of my sins, and the acquisition and preservation of wisdom.¹⁸³

Through Mary’s mediating function as Dispensatrix, De Montfort argues that devotees can reconcile themselves to God. The Virgin Mother acts as a protective buffer against the potential wrath of God the Father.

Since the debit/credit economy between Mary and her adherents remains hopelessly imbalanced, De Montfort claims that true devotion requires a complete gift of self on the part of devotees. With this in mind, he offers an official statement of consecration:

In the presence of all the heavenly court I choose thee this day for my Mother and Mistress. I deliver and consecrate to thee, as thy slave, my body and soul, my goods, both interior and exterior, and even the value of all my good actions, past, present, and future; leaving to thee the entire and full right of disposing of me, and all that

¹⁸² *Immaculata*, December 1950, 7. De Montfort’s treatise, “True Devotion to Mary,” was not found until 1842. This work became a popular inspiration for Marian devotion.

¹⁸³ *Immaculata*, December 1950, 7.

belongs to me, without exception, according to thy good pleasure, for the greater glory of God, in time and in eternity.¹⁸⁴

De Montfort refers to this spiritual “slavery” as a “little offering” in light of the endless graces dispensed by Mary.¹⁸⁵

In his 1953 encyclical *Fulgens Corona*, Pope Pius XII declared that 1954 would be a “Marian Year” in honor of the hundred-year anniversary of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.¹⁸⁶ “Helpful Hints for the Marian Year” by Marion Gale in *Immaculata*’s January 1954 issue, introduced the Marian Year as an opportunity to celebrate Mary’s role as Dispensatrix. The headline reads: “This year is going to be different somehow—different than any other year we have lived or will live through—because it especially belongs to Mary.”¹⁸⁷ Gale continues to describe the potential impact of the year on devotees:

This Marian year will be more grace-filled, more overflowing with opportunities for spiritual success. Two different kinds of people step into it: those who are totally consecrated to Our Lady (either through the Militia of the Immaculate consecration or the De Montfort consecration), and those who have an ordinary devotion to Her...¹⁸⁸

For MI members, the proclamation of the Marian Year confirmed their beliefs and also translates those beliefs into actions. Gale writes:

The cup of those totally consecrated to the Blessed Virgin is filled to overflowing with zeal these days. Something unearthly fills you as they say in a strong, joy-filled voice: “Isn’t it *wonderful* about the Marian Year?” Your heart just seems to leap up

¹⁸⁴ *Immaculata*, December 1950, 7.

¹⁸⁵ *Immaculata*, December 1950, 7.

¹⁸⁶ *Dictionary of Mary: Revised and Expanded Edition* (New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1997), 550.

¹⁸⁷ *Immaculata*, January 1954, 11.

¹⁸⁸ *Immaculata*, January 1954, 11.

at the words; then and there you propose to do something special for Our Lady, too, this year.¹⁸⁹

Devotees endeavored to “do something special” for Mary in thanksgiving for the favors she dispensed. The article notes concrete examples of actions planned for the Marian Year:

Many of our Marian friends have their new projects all set up. A stenographer has ordered a beautiful statue of the Immaculate Heart from the famous sculptor, Thedim. It will be blessed at Fatima and used as a Home Touring Pilgrim Virgin. A mother of twelve children will start a small bulletin on a comparatively new devotion to the Little Flower’s Madonna called the Virgin of the Smile. A Sister of Charity is passing out pledge cards. Those who sign promise to wear the Miraculous Medal for the Marian Year.¹⁹⁰

All of these acts involved outreach to the community on Mary’s behalf. Believers used the occasion of the Marian Year to display their commitment to a Marian way of life and attest to Mary’s intercessory powers.

Immaculata often cited papal support for Marian devotion. The back cover of a 1961 issue quotes Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical on the rosary, *Octobri mense*, to validate Mary’s status as Dispensatrix:

May it be affirmed that, by the will of God, Mary is the intermediary through whom is distributed to us the immense treasure of God’s mercies; “for grace and truth come by Jesus Christ.” Thus as no man goes to the Father but by the Son, so no one goes to Christ except through His Mother.¹⁹¹

The Pope asserted that Mary—as Theotokos, Immaculate Conception, and Dispensatrix—provides human beings the exclusive means for accessing Christ. The Militia, the CAMM, and other Marian devotional groups praised Mary as Dispensatrix, and their members negotiated the complex spiritual economies that constituted their relationships with the

¹⁸⁹ *Immaculata*, January 1954, 11.

¹⁹⁰ *Immaculata*, January 1954, 11.

¹⁹¹ *Immaculata*, June/July 1961, back cover.

Madonna. These devotees looked for communications from the Madonna to gauge her disposition to birth graces into the world. Consequently, Marian devotional traditions, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, emphasized Mary's practice of appearing, and the spiritual signs of the times embedded in the apparitions.

Mary and the Practice of Appearing

The Oxford English Dictionary defines an *apparition* as “the action of appearing or becoming visible,” specifically, “the supernatural appearance of invisible beings.”¹⁹² In *Encountering Mary*, Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz elaborates on the religious understanding of apparition:

An apparition is best understood as a specific kind of vision in which a person or being not normally within the visionary's perceptual range appears to that person, not in a world apart as in a dream, and not as a modification of a concrete object as in the case of a weeping icon or moving statue, but as a part of the environment, without apparent connection to verifiable visual stimuli.¹⁹³

In other words, an apparition is the visual manifestation of a person or spirit believed to belong to an unseen reality. In the case of Marian devotion, although believers frequently assert that Mary is continually present to them in a spiritual sense, her visual appearance is exceptional and noteworthy.

Pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758) first clarified the official status of apparitions for Roman Catholics; Zimdars-Swartz describes his position—one that remains influential today:

The approval that the Roman Catholic Church might give to a private revelation (which includes apparitions) meant only that after a careful investigation permission might be given to publicize the revelation “for the instruction and good of the

¹⁹² *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Apparition.”

¹⁹³ Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary: From La Salette to Medjugorje* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 4.

faithful.” Such revelations...should not be given the assent of catholic faith (*fides catholica*). Rather, the pope said, they should be given the assent of human faith (*fides humana*) according to the rules of prudence by which such revelations are probable and piously believable.¹⁹⁴

Although the Catholic Church has historically spent significant time and energy investigating the credibility of reported apparitions, it maintains that belief in apparitions (even those officially deemed credible) is ultimately a personal matter, not an institutional one. Zimdars-Swartz argues, however, that the Church’s emphasis on the “intercessory powers “ and “special privileges” of Mary and the saints has elevated the status of apparitions, especially Marian appearances, in the eyes of the faithful.¹⁹⁵ This emphasis formed the very basis for devotional organizations such as the MI, CAMM, the Blue Army of Fatima, and numerous others.

The Militia Immaculata and other U.S. devotional organizations relied heavily on the global phenomenon of reported Marian apparitions such as those at Paris (1830), Lourdes (1858), and Fatima (1917). For these groups, Mary’s practice of appearing signaled her active engagement in the world as Mediatrix and Dispensatrix. Followers eagerly anticipated the messages of Mary, and scrambled to decipher the often-mysterious messages offered by Marian visionaries. Zimdars-Swartz suggests that surge in nineteenth- and twentieth-century apparition-based Marian devotions derived from the repetition and communal nature of the most famous visions:

The peculiar importance that has become attached to some of the Marian apparitions of the past two centuries can be explained, in part, by the fact that many of these have been both “serial” and “public.” A serial apparition is one in which the seers have been led in an initial experience to expect that this experience will be repeated...A public apparition is simply one in which people surround the seers during their

¹⁹⁴ Zimdars-Swartz, 9.

¹⁹⁵ Zimdars-Swartz, 9.

experiences. While those gathered may witness a sign, such as a sun miracle, generally speaking they do not see (or expect to see) the Virgin themselves.¹⁹⁶

If apparitions were expected to be public in this way, the standard for judging these experiences was widely expanded. Devotees refused to interpret their own lack of vision as lack of evidence for the Madonna's presence, reducing the standard of proof. This ran counter to earlier traditions of apparitions that were mainly solitary and associated with holy people separated out from society.¹⁹⁷ Judging the veracity of the apparition became a matter of judging the devout person's character and believability, rather than confirming the facts of the event, which did not extend beyond the scope of that individual. What is distinctive about the trend toward "public" apparitions is that devotees choose to believe even when no separation of space and time makes their own vision impossible. Such apparitions are simultaneously public and selective, and both foster and limit the possibilities of group experiences. These group experiences inspired devotional identities tied to apparition events.

In the context of rising apparitional enthusiasm, it makes sense that Marian organizations in the United States hoped Mary would show herself in their homeland. The Militia celebrated the 1950 report of serial apparitions at Necedah, Wisconsin, which marked, for devotees, Mary's presence on U.S. soil. Such reports fit within the M.I. cosmology that placed the center of Marian devotion in America's Midwest. Although cautious in ascribing absolute authenticity to the apparitions, *Immaculata* covered the events with keen interest:

¹⁹⁶ Zimdars-Swartz, 5.

¹⁹⁷ Zimdars-Swartz, 5.

A few weeks ago the following story came out of Necedah, Wisconsin, a full scale repetition of Fatima and Lipa [Philippines], in which Mrs. Mary Ann Van Hoof stated to her pastor that the Blessed Virgin appeared to her and repeated her Fatima and Lipa message. There was a new warning of catastrophes to come upon the world and upon American in particular if she were not heeded this time. She especially emphasized her last words at Lipa, "Tell this to the people!"¹⁹⁸

The story from Necedah conformed to the narratives of warning familiar to earlier Church approved apparitions such as those in Fatima in 1917. *Immaculata* editors reminded readers, "according to the decree of Pope Urban VIII only human faith may be attributed to these events" and assert that they have "no intention of anticipating a decree of the Holy See."¹⁹⁹

The article goes on to reprint the public statement made by Mary Ann Van Hoof about her experiences. Mary Ann describes her second visit from the Madonna:

In my mind I asked what to do and before I could put it in words she answered me, "My dear child, pray, pray the rosary daily as a family group or a gathering. Pray with your hearts; pray for the poor souls in Russia. My dear people must all work together in prayer. All religions must work together against the enemies of God. You must love thy neighbor, you must live the Commandments, the Way of the Cross; not just try. You must love my Son above all earthly goods; you must pray to convert Russia and you shall have peace. You must do these things **NOW**, not tomorrow..."²⁰⁰

These warnings would have been very familiar to readers versed in the Fatima apparitions.

The account from Necedah confirmed the existing beliefs of many devotees and brought the urgency of Mary's message to the United States.

Zimdars-Swartz provides more of the context for the Necedah apparitions:

Mary Ann, a forty-one-year old farm wife, announced in the spring of 1950 that the Virgin Mary had appeared to her, had recommended a specific set of devotions for her, her family, and the community, and had told her she would appear to her again on several forthcoming religious festivals. Public interest in her experiences grew,

¹⁹⁸ *Immaculata*, June/July 1950, 7.

¹⁹⁹ *Immaculata*, June/July 1950, 7.

²⁰⁰ *Immaculata*, June/July 1950, 8 (bold in original).

and on the Feast of the Assumption, 15 August 1950, an estimated 100,000 people gathered around the seer in Necedah...²⁰¹

At this stage, the apparitions became public in nature; large groups of American Catholics made the journey to Necedah and assembled to witness Mary Ann's visions. Thomas A.

Kselman and Steven Avella describe the broad impact of the events in Wisconsin:

The pilgrimage to Necedah and the message attributed to Mary received national attention during the next few days. *Life* published three pages of photos featuring Mrs. Van Hoof, the shrine, and the crowd of August 15. *Newsweek* and the *New York Times* also ran stories on Mrs. Van Hoof and her revelations. The Catholic press gave the new cult significant attention, generally taking a skeptical position on the purported miracle.²⁰²

The national interest in Necedah supported the Militia's interest in the event, but *Immaculata* took a fairly conservative approach to the apparitions. An editorial, "Confidentially--about Necedah," asks, "Well is it true or isn't it?"²⁰³ After recounting interviews with the Pastor, the Bishop, and Mrs. Van Hoof, the editorial leaves belief in the apparitions up to the reader, while pledging obedience to the Church's ultimate findings:

What do you think? On these two dates...over a hundred thousand people are expected to be on hand at Necedah, most of whom will for the first or last time make up their minds. We have pretty much made up ours, subject to the decision of the Bishop, when the investigation is over. Nevertheless, we are going out there these days anyway!²⁰⁴

Although *Immaculata's* overall coverage of the event was reserved, the magazine began including the event in its standard list of Marian appeals and apparitions.

²⁰¹ Zimdars-Swartz, 259.

²⁰² Thomas A. Kselman and Steven Avella, "Marian Piety and the Cold War in the United States," in *Modern American Protestantism and Its World: Ethnic and Non-Protestant Themes*, ed. Martin E. Marty (New York: K.G. Saur, 1993, 176-177.

²⁰³ *Immaculata*, June/July 1950, 13.

²⁰⁴ *Immaculata*, June/July 1950, 14.

A few years later, in 1955, Zimdars-Swartz notes, “the local bishop, after an investigation, formally condemned the apparition...and his successor issued interdicts against Mary Ann and her followers.”²⁰⁵ *Immaculata* editors apparently adhered to their promise to respect the Bishop’s decision; mentions of Necedah seem to disappear from the magazine after this point.

The case of Necedah reveals Marian devotees’ longing for an American Madonna and apparitions that legitimized the importance of U.S. Catholics in the universal Church. The rising popularity of Catholic media images such as “Our Lady of the United States,” “Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception” (patroness of the United States), and “Our Lady of Guadalupe” (Patroness of the Americas) also reflected these desires. Kselman and Avella remind readers of the apparition fever that fostered the response to Necedah:

The apparitions at Necedah in 1950, despite their apparent oddity, were not unique events, but form part of a Marian revival that included more than one hundred apparitions in Europe and the United States in the ten years following World War II. The wave of apparitions in the 1940’s and 1950’s was in turn the continuation of a Marian revival of the nineteenth century which was centered in France.²⁰⁶

If devotees sought *recognition* from Mary, apparitions would be a good way to gauge such notice. Even after Church officials debunked Necedah, the ongoing prominence of apparitions in the devotional mindset of groups like the MI and CAMM demonstrated their emphasis on Mary’s presence and mediation in the world. For believers, apparitions like those at Fatima, Lourdes, and Paris confirmed the Madonna’s ability to intercede as Dispensatrix in dramatic, visible ways. The evolution of a healing cult at Lourdes relied, and continues to rely, on this understanding of Mary’s intercessory power. Apparitions like those at Fatima used warnings and instructions to direct Catholics to take action. According to

²⁰⁵ Zimdars-Swartz, 259-260.

²⁰⁶ Kselman and Avella, 177.

devotional media, Mary as Mediatrix was also a charismatic Evangelist who defined the whole world as her mission field.

Mary as Evangelist: The Rhetoric of Missionary Media

In 1928, thirteen years after its founding, The Central Association of the Miraculous Medal began publishing *The Miraculous Medal* magazine with clearly evangelistic intentions and under Mary's leadership. Members of the CAMM interpreted the devotional practice of wearing the Miraculous Medal as inherently evangelistic. Director Joseph A. Skelly, C.M., introduced the magazine's inaugural issue by describing Mary's role as Evangelist:

It was Mary's will that her name, her dignity, her power should be made manifest in the modern world by means of her Medal. So the Association sent throughout the land literally millions of medals, each one bearing Mary's image, each one bringing an assurance of Mary's love and protection. These medals suggested Mary to men. They preached Mary, increasing affection for her, creating interest and restoring confidence.²⁰⁷

The medals themselves—as sacramental objects created according to the Mary's design—became instruments of divine grace and signs of her mediation. Through the Medal, Skelly argues, “Catholics all over the world are growing stronger in their belief that all graces come to us through her.”²⁰⁸ For the CAMM, in the broadest sense, evangelization meant inviting all Catholics to participate in Marian devotion through the Miraculous Medal. In a narrower sense, evangelization addressed specific missionary work—work in missions abroad (especially in China) and work to promote and support the priesthood within the United States. Mary, as Evangelist, supervised all three of these missions. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, *The Miraculous Medal* produced a long-standing priest recruitment campaign,

²⁰⁷ *The Miraculous Medal*, May 1928, 3.

²⁰⁸ *The Miraculous Medal*, May 1928, 3.

often appealing to the “masculinity” of the profession. The magazine’s reports from foreign missions also attempted to inspire readers by describing the adventurous work of priests overseas. Columns like “From a Missioner’s Diary,” personalized evangelistic work in distant lands, and encouraged readers to donate to mission causes.²⁰⁹

An early letter from Cardinal William van Rossum, C.S.S.R, Prefect of Propaganda blessed the magazine and offered Vatican sanction for the CAMM and its media. A reprint of the letter in the magazine notes that the Cardinal “is at the head of all Catholic missionary activity throughout the world.”²¹⁰ The Cardinal situated his blessing within the theological understanding of Mary as Mediatrix, and the evangelistic function of that role:

I am sure that this union of the Miraculous Medal with your missionary work will procure for the latter the highest success. A Mission which is under the special protection of the universal mediatrix of all graces will advance easily, and grow in number of Catholics and in a stronger interior life, because all this is only the work of grace and by the Immaculate Mother it will receive more graces than others. And this is specially [sic] true when the Miraculous Medal is the means to propagate devotion to Mary, pure and full of graces from the first instant of her existence.²¹¹

The Cardinal continued to offer his blessing and express his hope that the magazine “may extend its influence wide over the States and bring many souls to a true and great devotion to the Immaculate Conception and to a large interest in your missionary work.”²¹²

Much of the CAMM’s missionary campaign focused on the material realm. The magazine sought donations to support priests at home and abroad. *The Miraculous Medal* also encouraged visits to “Mary’s Central Shrine” in Germantown, Pennsylvania, as an

²⁰⁹ *The Miraculous Medal*, May 1928, 10.

²¹⁰ *The Miraculous Medal*, December 1928, inside cover.

²¹¹ *The Miraculous Medal*, December 1928, inside cover.

²¹² *The Miraculous Medal*, December 1928, inside cover.

expression of devotion. The organization established a system of “Promoters” who become evangelists for Marian devotion in their communities, setting goals for numbers of medals distributed and lives touched by Mary’s message. Promoters received special recognition and commemorative medals at each level of new success. The CAMM called individual Catholics to transform their beliefs—in Mary as Mediatrix and as Our Lady of the Miraculous Medals—into specific acts of evangelization.

A few decades later, The Militia Immaculata also embraced the idea of Mary as Evangelist, which became a driving force in the group’s media output. The first Militia magazine launched in 1949 was a bilingual French and German publication, “*Immaculata: Revue Missionnaire des Pères Oblats de M. I. (Marie Immaculée) de l’est.*” The magazine offered readers articles, stories, illustrations and photographs, often of an exotic nature, based on mission life. Missions documented in the first year include such distant locales as Japan, The North Pole (Eskimos), Africa, Ceylon, and Chile. Early cover designs paired photographs from the mission field with traditional images of Mary, metaphorically overseeing the evangelistic work.

By the end of 1949, the publication invited readers to participate in the mission movement. An ad for L’AMMI (Assoc. Missionnaire de Marie Immaculée) figures prominently in the magazine and reminds readers of their religious obligations:

All Christians must help save their brothers. All Christians must be missionaries. All Christians must be apostles of Christ. By Prayer—By Sacrifice—By Action. All oblates love their congregation. All members of L’AMMI will become zealots for winning new adherents.²¹³

²¹³ *Immaculata*, November/December 1949, 3. My translation from the French.

Membership in the association promoted zealous evangelization, with Mary as model for the movement.

In August 1950, during the first year of *Immaculata*'s publication in English, a subscription order form depicts an image of Our Lady of Fatima and asks readers, "ARE YOU TELLING ANYONE?" The text continues by referencing Marian apparitions at La Salette, Lipa, and Necedah (Wisconsin) and distilling this message: "Wake Up America!...TELL THE PEOPLE—TELL THEM NOW!"²¹⁴ What follows describes the essential evangelistic function of the magazine:

Immaculata will help you tell her message to the people. Immaculata was founded for just this purpose—to be a genuine "Voice of Our Lady," voicing and revoicing her very words to sleeping America until enough people "wake up" and realize what is happening. Millions upon millions know nothing of her words. Other millions have heard a little but pay no attention because their neighbors pay no attention. We must break this vicious circle of spiritual inertia now.²¹⁵

Here, evangelization is about communicating the Madonna's message to as many people as possible. This message, however, is not a proclamation of the "Good News" of the Christian gospel, but, instead, heralds a future filled with fear and uncertainty. The call to wake up and act is urgent, and could help the world avert disaster.

An issue from 1952 depicts an image of Our Lady of Fatima emitting flames from her hands that descend to a fiery pit as the pilgrim children look on. The text, taken from the Fatima accounts, reads: "You have seen HELL and the souls of poor sinners—To save them, Our Lord wishes to establish in the world devotion to my IMMACULATE HEART."²¹⁶ The Militia suggested that members will be quite literally engaged in saving souls if they have the

²¹⁴ *Immaculata*, August 1950, inside back cover.

²¹⁵ *Immaculata*, August 1950, inside back cover.

²¹⁶ *Immaculata*, August 1952, back cover.

courage and the will to act on Mary's behalf. A back cover from 1951 pleads that the time to hesitate is over:

Now is the Acceptable Time/Now is the Day of Salvation/Now is the time to spread her Message!/Now is the time For Prayer: Daily Mass; Daily Communion; Daily Rosary; **Now is the time For Action:** Join Your Societies; Spread Mary's Message; it is High Time; If you can't give speeches, you can give Immaculata: It will tell the story for you every month, through 1951.²¹⁷

Immaculata served as a ready-made evangelization tool—even Catholics who lacked eloquence or education could preach Mary's message through the magazine. A 1951 membership recruitment ad invited personalized participation, regardless of occupation or social status:

Factory Worker? Clerk? Secretary? Executive? Teacher? Housewife? It doesn't matter **what** you are. It doesn't matter **who** you are. The Immaculate Virgin can use **you** to sanctify souls **now!** A share in her ancient yet ever modern mission is yours—if you accept—and put into practice a simple program of action, now!²¹⁸

The ad continues to give details about how to join the Militia Immaculata and suggests that everyday Catholics can be instruments of Mary's evangelization.

The magazine also gave practical advice about carrying out the Madonna's missionary work. Father John A. O'Brien suggested a method of evangelization that is "more convincing than arguments,"²¹⁹ and appeals to Christian love as the primary means of salvation:

Do you really want to win a soul for Christ? You can do it by deeds of kindness and love. That is the language which everyone understands and it is often more convincing than a ton of arguments...Kindness and love will enable you also to win

²¹⁷ *Immaculata*, January 1951, inside back cover (bold in original).

²¹⁸ *Immaculata*, August 1951, 19 (bold in original).

²¹⁹ *Immaculata*, October 1958, 2.

souls for Christ, for they are arrows of light pointing to His Presence with His Church.²²⁰ O'Brien's technique valued dialogue over debate, an important reminder for American Catholics who may have been accustomed to being defensive about their faith.

Other articles highlighted the problems and possibilities of missionizing within the United States. In "Three Years of Touring America," Stephen P. Breen, Jr. described the importance of the traveling Pilgrim Virgin statue as a tool of Mary's evangelization:

So sings the Church in honor of the glories of Mary, and so do we rejoice now in the soon to be celebrated third anniversary of the famous Pilgrim Virgin tour on the North American Continent. It has been three years of proclaiming Our Lady's message to the spiritually sleeping giant of America, three years of progress which have acquainted or familiarized more than six million souls with Our Lady's direct and explicit message delivered to the world in 1917, a message which may be summed up: "Unless you do penance you shall all likewise perish."²²¹

Breen suggested that the statue's pilgrimage from church to church and home to home challenged spiritual apathy and won souls for Mary's cause.

Mary and Modern Mass Media

In the tradition of St. Maximilian Kolbe, the patron saint of mass media, the Militia embraced the mass media and modern marketing techniques as a way of communicating important religious messages. The editors situated *Immaculata* at the forefront of this effort:

God spoke to the world through Our Lady at Fatima: these words must now be channeled to the people through "Immaculata" and similar publications. *Immaculata* in turn must be made known and spread among all people without ceasing.²²²

²²⁰ *Immaculata*, October 1958, 2.

²²¹ *Immaculata*, August 1950, 3.

²²² *Immaculata*, March 1951, 19.

The text goes on to urge direct action at the local level—a grassroots approach to Marian evangelization:

If you can do so, and if you really believe in the Fatima Message, won't you put an "ad" in your local Catholic paper? Just copy out the first paragraph or two on this page for your "ad" and conclude it with what many are beginning to say of this magazine: **If You Want the Truth—Read Immaculata.**²²³

The editors envisioned the magazine as a vehicle for Truth (with a capital T!) in Mary's name and asked readers to participate in "getting the word out" about the magazine. Part of this effort involved literal recycling of *Immaculata*. The February 1963 issue implores, "DON'T THROW THIS AWAY!"²²⁴ The author continues with concrete tips about how to stretch the magazine's impact:

Want to help the Missions? Kenrick Seminary in St. Louis advises that missionaries throughout the world are in desperate need of Catholic and good secular literature. They use these various materials to spread the Faith, to instill in the people the principles of Democracy and to combat the diabolical spread of Communist propaganda which is so very cheap and prominent in many areas. If you want to help these missionaries in this great crusade by sending them your used copies of THE IMMACULATE and other magazines and books...²²⁵

This text reveals that MI members imagined an international reach for their magazine. An article from 1956 suggests that "In These Difficult Times," ordinary Catholics can assist the Virgin in her global mission: "Pray for the success of Immaculata's new program; pass your copy on to others; solicit new subscribers and readers; send Immaculata to our men in service; ask worthy young men to join the ranks of Marytown Franciscan Brothers—be

²²³ *Immaculata*, March 1951, 19 (bold in original).

²²⁴ *Immaculata*, February 1963, 2.

²²⁵ *Immaculata*, February 1963, 2.

instrumental in bringing souls to Jesus through Mary.”²²⁶ All of these represented forms of evangelization under the auspices of the MI movement.

As part of the media enterprise in *Immaculata*, the Militia employed advertising as key component of its approach to evangelism. An article from the March 1951 argues that “It Pays to Advertise:” “The medium of advertising was long ago found to be a powerful and effective means to obtain one’s end—whether it be to sell a product or win an election. The same means can be made to serve God if the “right” people choose to do so for His Honor and Glory.”²²⁷ The Militia engaged contemporaneous media and marketing plans in order to publicize a Marian way of life.

The Militia even branched out to include other forms of media in its evangelistic endeavors. The February 1952 issue advertised an “ALBUM OF TWO RECORDS (Four Sides)” on sale for \$2.89.²²⁸ The ad tells the reader that this is “A NEW Kind of RECORD ALBUM—A NEW Way to HEAR AND SPREAD: The “Messages From Our Lady.”²²⁹ The album simply titled, “Messages From Our Lady,” was narrated by Loretta Young, and also involved the Marytown Choir. The magazine offers quite a sales pitch for the album:

Hear the Story, Spread the Story of: Miraculous Medal/Lourdes/Fatima/Guadalupe... Here at last are the stories of four of the most significant apparitions of Our Lady in later times, recorded on regular speed phonograph discs. The words of Our Lady come alive in Miss Young’s reverent and spirited narration, penetrating to the heart with their vital import. Familiarize yourself, your children, and your friends with the

²²⁶ *Immaculata*, February 1956, 3.

²²⁷ *Immaculata*, March 1951, 19.

²²⁸ *Immaculata*, February 1952, 19.

²²⁹ *Immaculata*, February 1952, 19.

words of the Immaculate Virgin through this easy, inspiring, and forceful means. Wonderful for lay apostles, teachers, youth groups and parish organizations; and ideal gift—especially for non-Catholics.²³⁰

Sales of this album were another one of the many efforts endorsed by the Militia to spread devotion to the Virgin Mary.

Immaculata also offered mass produced objects as motivating rewards for its reader evangelists. A promotional section of the magazine recalled an earlier issue's ad for "rather attractive statues which retailed for \$4.00 each."²³¹ A reader asked, "Why not give the statues away?... You will find that if you just give them away you will add far more to the growth of your work than if you sold them to millionaires for a hundred dollars apiece. Trust in Our Lady and she will take care of you..."²³² Employing a tactic similar to the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal's use of "Promoters," the editors conclude:

From now on, to ignite more human hearts, and to show our deep affection for all who go along with us, to work through the means of apostolic zeal instead of paid agents, we are going to give one of the statues of Our Lady to every apostle who sends us a group of at least five subscriptions (singles not credited). If he or she already has one of Our Lady we will send the Sacred Heart instead. And everyone who sends in ten will get both.²³³

Like any effective marketing strategy, this gesture offered a concrete reminder of the product (the magazine) and a motivation for promoting it. The magazine was able to harness the energies of devotees for evangelization to extend itself beyond its own financial and spatial limitations.

²³⁰ *Immaculata*, February 1952, 19.

²³¹ *Immaculata*, January 1951, 17.

²³² *Immaculata*, January 1951, 17.

²³³ *Immaculata*, January 1951, 17.

The MI was so deeply involved in forging its own space within Catholic media it designated a new honorific for Mary, “Queen of the Catholic Press.”²³⁴ Author Alberta Schumacher described this new Marian role: “We used to say the Blessed Virgin Mary would trail her white skirts in the gutter to pick up fallen humanity. These days she is staining her pure fingers with printer’s ink—to save the reading public!”²³⁵ For devotees, the Madonna’s participation in the public press offered more evidence of her direct mediation in human life, using the media itself to intervene. Schumacher connected her own writing (and that of other Catholic journalists) to Mary’s intercession: “The men and women who contribute to the Catholic Press know it is she who takes over when they write something really good. Through her come all God’s gifts, and worthwhile writers’ inspiration is surely a gift from God.”²³⁶ For the MI, Mary as Mediatrix guided the Catholic Press to achieve her evangelistic ends.

According to devotees, as Evangelist and Intercessor Mary is not afraid to work at the grassroots level. Robert A. Orsi also observes this humble understanding of the Virgin:

Catholics believed that Mary would be present even in the most dreadful of them...There was no place, no circumstance, so degraded that Mary would not enter it to comfort the lost and afflicted, especially if they had once loved her and had, in some way, even the most secret, remained faithful to her. When the transcendent breaks into time, as Mary repeatedly does in the belief of her followers, the transcendent is bound to get dirty. Mary may have been free from sin, but her robes got stained with the mud and blood of Calvary.²³⁷

Devotees understood the Madonna as accessible and down to earth—a woman capable of knowing their human needs and placing them before God for fulfillment.

²³⁴ *Immaculata*, February 1963, 2.

²³⁵ *Immaculata*, February 1963, 2.

²³⁶ *Immaculata*, February 1963, 2.

²³⁷ Orsi, “The Many Names of the Mother of God,” 15.

Ultimately, the icon of Mary as Evangelist encapsulated the Madonna's many other forms and functions. Her perceived capacity to evangelize depended on her ability to mediate between human and divine realms (as Mediatrix and Theotokos) and her charge to intercede and deliver graces as Dispensatrix. Mary the Evangelist's emphasis on the urgency of mission work reinforced a broader impulse within the Catholic tradition. A 1957 issue of *Immaculata* asserts that "All Catholics Are Missionaries:"

The Catholic spirit is a missionary spirit. The word "Catholic" means "world-wide." A true Catholic has genuine concern for his brother in Christ, be he near or far away...Thus the Catholic by his very name and nature is to be a missionary. The mandate of our Lord, "Teach ye all nations," is a responsibility of every Catholic, both clergy and layman.²³⁸

The author suggests that Mary called all Catholics to participate in her efforts to evangelize the world.

Twentieth-century Marian devotional organizations in the United States, like the Militia Immaculata and the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal creatively constructed media icons of Mary as Missionary Mediatrix that adapted Catholic traditions of evangelistic zeal to their historical, cultural, and religious contexts. Mary as Missionary Mediatrix employed the tools and advantages of contemporary media to convey messages of hope and warning to her devotees. These Marian representations praised the Virgin's ability to unify people in a chaotic, fractured world and called for an increase in Marian devotion:

Love for Our Lady is an essential part of Catholic life. It is for the youthful and the aging, for the married and the single, for clergy and religious, for the bishops and the pope. The emphasis on religious unity today means greater stress upon Mary's role in the Church and in salvation. Our Lady is the patroness and model of unity, its advocate and protectress...we should honor the Blessed Virgin as Our Lady of the Atonement, Mother of Unity, who prays for the unity of all men in the faith and love

²³⁸ *Immaculata*, June/July 1957, 3.

of her Son. This should be our prayer every day—“that all may be one”—through Mary’s love and intercession.²³⁹

For these devotees, Mary reigned as Our Lady of At-One-Ment—as Mediatrix—as Dispensatrix—as Evangelist: all of these Marian appellations revealed creative and adaptive understandings of the Madonna’s role in Catholic devotional life, deployed as Media Icons intended to transform essential religious beliefs into actions that would change the world.

²³⁹ *Immaculata*, June/July 1965, 2.

CHAPTER 4

“MARYLIKE” WOMEN AND MEN: MARY AS EXEMPLAR OF GENDERED PERFORMANCE

In her introduction to the 2001 documentary volume *Gender Identities in American Catholicism*, Paula Kane issues an invitation to scholars of American Catholicism to consider how the concept of gender can powerfully reshape traditional master narratives about the past. Just as deploying the categories of race, ethnicity, and nationalism has led historians to reconsider the way they narrate American history, so the category of gender should enable historians of religion to rethink their conceptualization of American Catholicism.²⁴⁰

Emerging from the social critiques posed by the women’s movement of the 1960s and 70s, gender studies and the widely accepted definition of gender as a *performance* within a social context²⁴¹, have expanded in importance in all academic disciplines, including Religious Studies. Scholars like Kane suggest, however, that there is much more work to be done to attend to the complex and significant issue of gender, especially within Catholic Studies.²⁴² This issue remains important as women’s roles within the Church continue to be questioned. I endorse Kane’s call to participate in a process of “rethinking” by examining the dominant gendered symbol in the American Catholic landscape.

²⁴⁰ Paula Kane, James Kenneally, and Karen Kennelly, C.S.J., eds., *Gender Identities in American Catholicism* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001), xxii.

²⁴¹ Distinct from biological sex. Kane’s introductory essay traces the scholarly development of this distinction.

²⁴² See Catherine A. Brekus, ed., *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007) for reflections on the role of women in U.S. religious history.

Enter: Mary. What religious figure is more gendered than the woman titled both “virgin” and “mother”—a woman whose gender performance is rooted in paradox? The turn to Marian imagery when investigating gender in American Catholicism is obvious, but the conclusions of such an investigation challenge stereotypical assumptions about Mary’s symbolic role, especially in the realm of modern devotional media. Marian representations, codified by the doctrinal and institutional apparatus of the Church, are ubiquitous in the Catholic landscape. Even as scholars, we are tempted to assume we already know what Mary *means*. The uses of Mary as a gendered *media icon*—popular images that both signify and participate in the religious worldviews of devotees—illustrate the *creativity* of Marian devotional organizations like The Militia of the Immaculata and The Central Association of the Miraculous Medal, as they grappled with cultural and religious ideas about gender identities and relations. These groups *adapted* images of the Madonna to their spiritual, political, and historical cultures, intending to *transform* their beliefs into gendered and religious actions.

As part of my broader consideration of Marian representations in U.S. Catholic devotional media, this chapter explores the reconfiguration of Mary and gender in *Immaculata* and *The Miraculous Medal* magazines from the 1950s to the 1970s. The models of gendered behavior promoted by these print culture sources provide rich insights into public assertions of religious and social identity for particular (and understudied) groups of American Catholics.

Marylike Models

“Be Marylike! Buy Marilyke Gowns!” exclaims an article from an early 1950s issue of *Immaculata* magazine.²⁴³ This article reveals more than a creative exercise in mid-century Catholic branding. An exploration of the adjective “Marylike” and its associated beliefs and practices, illumines an intricate system of gendered values within the Marian devotional tradition in the U.S. For groups of Marian devotees, such as members of The Militia of the Immaculata and The Central Association of the Miraculous Medal, images of Mary functioned as Geertzian *models of* and *models for* gendered performance enacted on a complex socio-religious stage.²⁴⁴ This sphere of action encompassed public and private, home and church, individual and community, and reflected the increasing entanglement of culture and consumerism as religion was mediated by the marketplace.

In the wider context of devotional media, “Marylike” has multiple imperatives: First, to *like* Mary and demonstrate appropriate devotion to her. Second, to *be like* Mary and model one’s self after her virtuous example. Third, to see one’s own likeness reflected in the “mirror of Mary,” since Mary *is like* us. Marian organizations accept the basic premise that

²⁴³ In *Immaculata* magazine, The term “Marylike” first appears in an October 1953 article/advertisement for women’s fashion: “Be Marylike! Buy Marilyke Gowns!” The ad repeats, and the adjective “Marylike” recurs. This phrase was used in many Catholic publications of the time, including a magazine called *The Marylike Crusader* (see Kane, et. al., *Gender Identities in American Catholicism*, 84-88, for a sample of these primary sources.

²⁴⁴ See Clifford Geertz’s well-known essay “Religion As a Cultural System” in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York, Basic Books, 1973), 87-125. Geertz discusses the *descriptive* and *prescriptive* functions of symbolic models: “The term ‘model’ has...two senses—an ‘of’ sense and a ‘for’ sense—and though these are but aspects of the same basic concept they are very much worth distinguishing for analytic purposes. In the first, what is stressed is the manipulation of symbol structures so as to bring them, more or less closely, into parallel with the pre-established nonsymbolic system as when we grasp how dams work by developing a theory of hydraulics or constructing a flow chart. The theory or chart models physical relationships in such a way—that is, by expressing their structure in synoptic form—as to render them apprehensible; it is a model *of* ‘reality.’ In the second, what is stressed is the manipulation of the nonsymbolic systems in terms of the relationships expressed in the symbolic, as when we construct a dam according to the specifications implied in an hydraulic theory or the conclusions drawn from a flow chart. Here, the theory is a model under whose guidance physical relationships are organized: it is a model *for* ‘reality.’” (93) I argue that the Marian models of gendered performance in this devotional media offer both descriptive models *of* and prescriptive models *for* gender roles.

the Virgin Mary is an object worthy of devotion and praise. The notions of *emulation* and *reflection* define Mary's iconic content in a particular devotional context, where the call to be "Marylike" is an essentially gendered command. Gender distinctions remain significant, even as the Madonna serves as a perfect *model of and for virtue* for *both* women and men. "Marylike" conduct becomes both women and men, but we discover that such virtue is often defined differently for each.

As for most devotional organizations centered on the Virgin Mary, gender issues emerged at the inception of the Militia Immaculata and The Central Association of the Miraculous Medal. Both groups were founded by priests and monks who were steeped in the institutional authority of the Catholic Church. The devotion these groups espoused, however, praised the paradigm of Catholic motherhood and femininity. At the same time, through their media, these groups also emphasized Mary's regal qualities. Mary was domestic, but not *domesticated*. Her supernatural qualities remained at the forefront.

The MI relied heavily on the devotional writings of St. Louis Grignon De Montfort (1683-1716), a French missionary priest who advocated Marian consecration, and quoted him extensively throughout *Immaculata's* tenure. An excerpt appearing in the October 1950 issue shows how significant Marian models were for Militia members:

"Mary Forms Jesus in Us—A Living Mold of God": St. Augustine calls Mary the living "mold of God," and that indeed she is; for it was in her alone that man can be truly formed into God, in so far as that is possible for human nature, by the grace of Jesus Christ...In that mold none of the features of the Godhead is wanting. Whoever is cast in it and allows himself to be molded, receives all the features of Jesus Christ, true God. The work is done gently, in a manner proportioned to human weakness, without much pain or labor..."²⁴⁵

²⁴⁵ St. Louis Grignon De Montfort, "Our Sanctification, The Will of God, Extract from 'The Secret of Mary,'" *Immaculata*, October 1950, 10.

Here, Mary is represented as a tender and compassionate spiritual sculptor, shaping each human being in her mold, just as she perfectly cast God as Christ in her womb.

De Montfort wrote within a broader devotional tradition that emphasizes the “imitation of Mary,” including Saint Ambrose, Saint Bernard, Saint Pius X, and later, Saint Maximilian Kolbe (founder of the Militia Immaculata).²⁴⁶ For all of these theologians, the imitation of Mary is bound up with an act of consecration. Through imitation and consecration, devotees open themselves up to Mary’s action in their lives. Mary does not function as a mere exemplar, but also takes hold of human hearts to guide them in the right direction. Imitation of Mary is a process of spiritual formation that depends on a surrendering of self to Mary’s maternal power. Ultimately, theologians affirm the source of Mary’s power as the Holy Spirit, who works through the Madonna to “sanctify” human beings.²⁴⁷

Mary, the image—the icon—is herself an image-maker. The MI asserts this quite explicitly in a December 1962 issue of *Immaculata* dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe:

At Guadalupe we see Mary choosing not only a poor, despised Indian to convey an exalted truth, but choosing the most poor and ill-prepared material for the most authentic likeness of herself in existence. She would show us through this “unreasonable” conduct that even as she has the power to impress her image upon such a worthless piece of material as the tilma of Juan Diego, she has also has the power to take up the coarse texture of our past lives and impress upon our souls the meek and lovable likeness of her Divine Son.²⁴⁸

With humble material, devotees argue, the Madonna weaves something spiritually resplendent. The cover of this issue shows the image of Mary on Juan Diego’s tilma. The

²⁴⁶ This devotional movement was similar to those that emphasized emulating Christ. The *Imitation of Christ* (1472), attributed to Thomas à Kempis, is a famous example of this tradition.

²⁴⁷ *Dictionary of Mary: Revised and Expanded Edition* (New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1997), 187-189.

²⁴⁸ *Immaculata*, December 1962, 2.

caption describes this as “the only self-portrait of Mary in existence.”²⁴⁹ Through action, through apparition, through impression, Mary reveals herself as model *of* and *for* human conduct. As I argue below, this traditional transnational model is particularly gendered for female and male Catholics in the United States.

Who Can Find a Virtuous (“Marylike”) Woman?

From the 1950s to the 1970s, Catholic magazines such as *Immaculata* and *The Miraculous Medal* put forth powerful, and often conflicting Marian models for women. Embracing the off/for dichotomy, Mary represents both *every* woman (as the primary symbol of feminine sacrality defined by the capacity for birth, and the act of motherhood), and *no* woman (as the exceptional woman whose fundamental gender identity is confused by an immaculate revision of the motherly role). The Virgin Mary resembles Eve enough to be recognized as *woman*, but undercuts this womanhood as her theological foil.

Model Of

In “Catholic Domesticity, 1860-1960,” Colleen McDannell describes the ways in which American Catholics entered the twentieth century reflecting broader cultural trends in the domestic sphere: “By the end of the nineteenth century, middle-class American Catholics possessed a domestic ideology as colorful and sentimental as any proper Victorian... Cloistered in their home, the domestic ideology explained, mothers devoted their energies to their little ones and modeled their homes on the Holy Family.”²⁵⁰ She goes on to describe a

²⁴⁹ *Immaculata*, December 1962, 2.

²⁵⁰ McDannell, Colleen, “Catholic Domesticity, 1860-1960” in *American Catholic Women: A Historical Exploration*, ed. Karen Kennelly, C. S. J., 48 (New York: Macmillan, 1989).

transformation of American Catholic thinking about Mary between 1860 and 1920 as newly framed norms of domesticity emerged:

The activities of the Catholic mother were also compared to the role the Virgin Mary played within the Holy Family. The association of women with Mary presented certain problems for domestic writers. The Virgin Mary enjoyed in Catholic tradition a long history that emphasized her powerful and royal characteristics. Mary was the queen of heaven who was often portrayed in medieval and Renaissance art as the “fourth member of the Trinity.” Her connection to Christ was more direct than that of her husband Joseph. In order to reduce the feminine power of the Virgin Mary, writers placed her within the domestic structure of life in Nazareth. No longer the queen of the universe, Mary became a Hebrew housewife who looked after the needs of husband and child. Advice book writers stripped Mary of her supernatural powers and presented her in the peaceful house of Nazareth industriously pursuing the vocation of a poor artisan’s wife.²⁵¹

While this shift in models of Mary’s motherhood had real effects on perceived and prescribed roles for American Catholic women, its impact on the Virgin Mary as a *religious* symbol was much less. In fact, such assertions about Mary and domestic life, enhanced tensions in her iconic nature during the post-World War I period.

At first, an article from *Immaculata* in 1958 seems to express the domestication of Mary that McDannell notes: “Christian Family, Cell of Social Regeneration Through Mary,” the “Militia Intention for June,” describes the Madonna as “the perfect Mother, the perfect wife, the perfect mistress of the home.” Mary, the author suggests, “is best suited to reestablish the true Christian spirit in the home which has been almost completely forgotten.”²⁵² However, a closer reading reveals that for MI devotees, the Madonna is inextricably linked to her supernatural graces: “Through her Immaculate Heart, she is able to turn our hearts to family charity, respectful and willing obedience, marital fidelity and an overall family harmony. This Immaculate Mother can lead us to the Sacred Heart of Jesus,

²⁵¹ McDannell, Colleen, “Catholic Domesticity, 1860-1960,” 60-61.

²⁵² *Immaculata*, Jun./Jul. 1958, 9.

our Way, our Truth and our Life.”²⁵³ Mary’s help does not come primarily from her human virtues, but rather her otherworldly status as Queen of Heaven. The article cites an address of Pope Pius XII to the Nigerian Marian Congress, calling for family consecration to the Immaculate Heart: “Let Her be Queen of your hearts.” The author concurs: “Mary by her powerful intercession and her immense love for us can help us to restore into our family lives the virtues which we may have lost of our own fault and through the powerful influence of a materialistic world.”²⁵⁴ For devotees, Mary’s “supernatural powers” cannot be chipped away as McDannell suggests. These powers form the very bedrock of Marian devotion.

Organizations like the Association of the Miraculous Medal and the Militia of the Immaculata reclaimed Mary’s power as warrior queen and universal mother. Mary could not be fully domesticated. The apparitions at Fatima (1917), and the universal Church’s response to them re-affirmed Mary’s supernaturalism and her role as protectress of human beings and prophetess of doom. Devotional organizations and the wider media culture seized images of Mary as “immaculate and powerful,” whose special place was designated both *because of* and *despite* her womanhood. For these groups, the post-Fatima Mary was not the submissive “handmaiden of the Lord,” rather, her affirmation of God’s will gave her radical power as messenger, mediator, and crusader. MI members, by consecrating themselves to Mary, gave her personal and direct power over their lives. They use the language of slavery, ownership, and property to describe their relationships with Mary:

We imitate good, virtuous, holy people, but none of these is without imperfection. Only *She, immaculate* from the first moment of her existence, knows no fault, not even the least. It is she whom one should imitate and come close to. It is she who is put up as an example of imitation for all Militia members and all Christian souls. We,

²⁵³ *Immaculata*, Jun./Jul. 1958, 9.

²⁵⁴ *Immaculata*, Jun./Jul. 1958, 9.

particularly, who have consecrated ourselves to her, should become more and more her property, become more and more like unto her. Behold the peak of perfection in man. O Immaculate, O Great Mother of God, pray for us and attract us to thyself!²⁵⁵

To become *like* Mary is to become her property. She is not a passive agent, but rather an active and interactive role model, with a firm grasp on the vicissitudes of human lives. Mary, for the MI, is director, owner, model and reward. Her motherly love is more like fire from heaven than a cup of warm milk.

Model For

Despite Mary's significant religious power, as woman elevated beyond humanity by her lack of original sin, her image was also deployed to define the terms of human femininity. Of course, many Roman Catholic women experienced Marian perfection as an impossible standard for womanhood. Was the domestication of Mary, which McDannell noted, an institutionalization of reproach, the putting of women in their place? Were the Virgin's eyes on the household wall plaque piercing the souls of Catholic women with a panoptic gaze, while she bore her rent but immaculate heart as her outer garment? Or was it an elevation of the domestic to the supernatural realm?

In an analysis of Maria devotion since 1940, Paula M. Kane ties purity crusades such as the Marylike fashion movement to political and economic attitudes:

The 1950s consolidated the conservative ideals of Catholic womanhood that had been on the rise throughout the century. During the Cold War one of Mary's most significant uses in popular Catholicism was for the protection of innocence. Within the United States the war was waged by a return to domesticity and the reinforcement of sharply divided traditional gender roles. At an economic level, the revival of domesticity was a way to remove women from the wage-earning jobs they had held during the war years. At a religious level the rhetoric of purity chose to emphasize

²⁵⁵ "MI Roundtable," *Immaculata*, August 1958, 9.

the Madonna's motherhood, homemaking, and modesty, and was especially addressed to adolescent girls.²⁵⁶

Kane situates gendered codes of Marian devotion within the wider cultural context. She foregrounds the desire of many male Catholic authors to regulate female activity. Kane argues that these men had two primary concerns:

1. Fear that the loss of clear-cut traditional gender roles would blur sexual distinctions and roles into an undifferentiated sameness.
2. Anxiety that immoral women were progressively overtaking male prerogatives in a deliberate strategy to ruin the nation.²⁵⁷

These sexist attitudes were widely expressed in 1950s Catholic media. However, in *Immaculata* and *The Miraculous Medal* magazines, the complexity of Marian representations, the frequent elision of the sexes, and the involvement of female authors challenge some of Kane's broad claims. Organizations like the Militia did often engage the rhetoric of "complementarity" of the sexes noted by Kane,²⁵⁸ but their firm insistence on Mary's supernatural powers superseded the simple relegation of woman to domestic spaces and/or an easy opposition between male and female devotees.

Certainly, female readers of *Immaculata* may have received mixed messages about womanhood through images of Mary. Representations of Mary often served as double-edged swords: venerating saintly femininity, while apparently denigrating ordinary women. Yet, the Militia offered many important spiritual opportunities for flesh-and-blood females. As Militia members, they were called to imitate Mary's power, by serving as members of her

²⁵⁶ Paula M. Kane, "Marian Devotion since 1940: Continuity or Casualty?" in *Habits of Devotion: Catholic Religious Practice in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. James M. O'Toole (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 104.

²⁵⁷ Kane, "Marian Devotion since 1940: Continuity or Casualty?" 105.

²⁵⁸ Kane, "Marian Devotion since 1940: Continuity or Casualty?" 107.

spiritual armed forces. As I will discuss later, military representations of Mary offered more unisex and less traditional models of gendered performance for both women and men.

As *model for* women in the temple of the home, Mary reigns as domestic goddess and paragon of motherly love, traits to be reproduced in daily life. The marketing and popularity of “Kitchen Madonna” plaques and prayers among other household statues and images reflects this trend in American Catholic consumerism: Mary, as icon, pervaded domestic space through religious material culture. “Marylike” women are modest, self-sacrificing, obedient, and nurturing.

Marian Modesty

As noted in the campaign for “Marylike” attire, modesty formed a central part of Mary’s model for young women, a modeling often linked to a particular consumer practices in the religious and secular marketplaces. Modest and tasteful dress demonstrated feminine purity and Marian devotion, but did not exclude beauty: “Wherever Our Lady has appeared she has been well dressed. If Fatima has meant nothing else in some cases, people have collected pictures of how Mary looked because she was so beautiful...”²⁵⁹ The magazine recounted the efforts of a group of girls at Seton High School in Cincinnati, Ohio, organized as S.D.S. (Supply the Demand for the Supply) whose response to Mary’s appeals for modesty included a boycott of immodest dress: “To be like Our Lady in the sense of being more beautiful than ever and to share none of the moral ugliness of certain modern dresses, has become the rage

²⁵⁹Brother Gabriel, O.F.M.Conventual, “These Young Ladies Say: Modesty Is the Best Policy,” *Immaculata*, May 1952, 3.

of the girls of “S.D.S.”—thousands of them.”²⁶⁰ The girls received the highest form of praise for their efforts by the article’s author:

Finally the girls paid another of their great tributes to Mary. At a formal, they discredited the idea of taking off Scapulars and miraculous medals for the sake of showing bare backs and shoulders. “If you can’t wear the Scapular, don’t wear the gown.” Sounded like hard medicine for lively youth—but the girls went this difficulty one better. They wore their Scapular *over* their gowns! Of course they don’t do it at every formal, but it showed the way they felt about hiding their devotion under a bushel and leaving off the Scapular for the sake of looking like daredevils.²⁶¹

For members of S.D.S., displaying religious convictions became a fashion statement in line with Mary’s example. The girls’ consumer choices reflected their commitment to a cause that was, in many ways, countercultural.

The theme of modesty resurfaced in many issues of *Immaculata*. Sometimes the editors employed harsh tactics to demonstrate the potential consequences of ignoring modesty, citing revealing dress as the cause of sex crimes. A headline in the editor’s note from May 1958 reads, “Women, Girls, Immodesty Can Mean Murder!” The passage elaborates:

Immodest feminine garments are greatly responsible for the horrible sex-crimes. Just a few weeks ago in Chicago a young man describing how he came to murder a youthful housewife, said that he was first aroused to passion through her immodest exposure, though in this particular instance the exposure seems to have been a mishap or at most due to carelessness.²⁶²

The article goes on to describe another incident in Detroit—the murder of a six-year-old girl by a “sex maniac.” The girl’s father offered a social commentary in the *Detroit Free Press*:

“Mr. de Caussin here did not lay all the blame for the sex-murder on the criminal himself.

He rightly laid a great share of the responsibility on a society which tolerates, and even

²⁶⁰ *Immaculata*, May 1952, 3-4.

²⁶¹ *Immaculata*, May 1952, 13.

²⁶² *Immaculata*, May 1958, 2.

promotes the sex-craze in men through sexy literature, dirty stories, immodest dress, etc.”²⁶³

The editors prompt their readers to reflection in an accusatory tone: “Are the bereaved parents of the sex-murdered in your city pointing accusing fingers at you because of your immodest or suggestive attire? And what about the uncounted spiritual murders that your immodesty may have caused?”²⁶⁴ The message is clear: behaving in an un-Marylike fashion can lead to impropriety, rape, and even murder.²⁶⁵

According to *Immaculata* inappropriate clothing emphasizes “Eve,” the temptress, in all women. Mindfulness of Marian models offers the antidote to this social ill. In 1962, the Reverend W. Laughlin wrote a piece on “Immodest Dress—Degrading to Catholic Motherhood.”²⁶⁶ This article reprints a portion of his parish sermon. Father Laughlin begins by contrasting the modesty of the women of multiple faiths he encountered abroad as a chaplain in the Army, with the thoughtlessness of American women. He writes, “...very often, too often, I had to sit down and talk to scantily dressed women with no respect for their motherhood, their womanhood, their sons, their neighbors or for a priest of God. It is disgusting, compromising, and even sometimes disturbing to find oneself in situations such as these.”²⁶⁷ Father Laughlin criticizes women for prompting male sin: “Oh, if only some mothers and daughters could know the temptations they give their sons, their brothers, or the

²⁶³ *Immaculata*, May 1958, 2.

²⁶⁴ *Immaculata*, May 1958, 2.

²⁶⁵ Kane illuminates the anxious pitch of this emphasis on modesty by connecting it to the 1950s “expansion of the Fatima cult” that related Mary’s apocalyptic warnings as a condemnation of ‘pagan fashions’ (among many other things). “Marian Devotion since 1940,” 105.

²⁶⁶ *Immaculata*, Jun/Jul 1962, 5.

²⁶⁷ *Immaculata*, Jun/Jul 1962, 5.

boys next door...”²⁶⁸ He does not accept an attitude of adapting to the times, and returns to Mary as a key example:

Instead of worrying about the very grave nature of the scandalous example they give by their immodest dress, many women and girls will give you instead some excuse such as this: “Oh, people will get used to these new fashions and these new ways”... This I would believe, if we could erect a statue of Our Lady in modern summer dress in our churches or on our church grounds, without anybody being offended, or a statue of Our Lady dressed in modern evening gown... I do know that women themselves would be the first to object.²⁶⁹

As a paragon of modesty, the Madonna served as a bold reminder of feminine perfection in contrast to Eve’s fallen nature. The priest imagined that even the least observant Catholic girls and women would be shocked at a violation of Mary’s sanctity if she was clothed in their own popular fashion.

Immaculata went beyond criticisms to suggest positive actions that women and parishes could take to champion Marylike dress (as in efforts like those undertaken by the S.D.S. girls in Ohio). The magazine’s back cover from the June/July 1962 issue features a poster that can be ordered from the Marylike Crusade to promote modesty. At the top, an image of four angels before the Eucharist in a monstrance with the words “adoration” and “reparation” appears. Below the text follows:

Out of respect to Our Lord and for the edification of our neighbor we beg women and girls to appear in Church modestly dressed. Slacks, shorts, sleeveless and low cut dresses do not meet the norm of Christian modesty. Your cooperation is evidence of your love for Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and respect for the House of God.²⁷⁰

A note inside the issue encourages the purchase: “If we would like to encourage others in dressing modestly, particularly in church, we can get one of the attractive posters...for our

²⁶⁸ *Immaculata*, Jun/Jul 1962, 5.

²⁶⁹ *Immaculata*, Jun/Jul 1962, 5.

²⁷⁰ *Immaculata*, Jun./July 1962, back cover.

parish church...Our pastors would welcome the receipt of this poster...”²⁷¹ Outward appearances mark the boundaries of acceptable gendered behavior. To respect Christ, women must conform to Marylike codes.

Mary and the “Modern Woman”

As demonstrated in the discussion of modesty, many of the articles written by priests and monks in *Immaculata* encourage resistance to modernity for the preservation of feminine virtue. However, other features of the magazine, including articles by laywomen and nuns, strove to keep the ancient model of the Virgin Mary relevant to contemporary life. In a 1955 issue, Sister M. Deborah, O.P., considered what would happen “If Mary Lived Today:”

Are you one of those who feel that Our Lady is much too perfect and too holy for you to imitate? Have you ever secretly thought, “Could Mary be as good and holy if she lived today?”... In our social life with its many problems, how would Mary solve them? We are practically submerged in temptations of every kind. Suggestive advertising abounds, widespread atheism is current; divorce, birth control and drink are accepted practices in ordinary living...What would Mary do beset by all these problems? We know she would not be overcome by their false teaching or suggestive flattery, believing every commercial she heard or “ad” she read. For some people life’s most important principles are using Smiro Soap, Snowflur Shampoo, Pearly Dental Cream and driving the latest Dreamboat. These are modern, worldly standards. Mary would rise above such emptiness and mockery.²⁷²

Sister Deborah urges her readers to resist the enticements of secular culture, while attempting to reduce the distance between the Virgin Mother and modern women. Marylike conduct is achievable, even in a rapidly changing society full of challenges to traditional gender roles:

...“to be good” means the same thing today as it did in Mary’s day...Mary is the safest model God has shown to us after Christ for our perfection...Mary has shown us the best method in the world for holiness. Mary lived simply and peacefully in order

²⁷¹ *Immaculata*, Jun./July 1962, 10.

²⁷² *Immaculata*, June/July 1955, 15.

to more perfectly follow Her Son. The more Marylike we become in our thoughts, words and actions, the closer to Christ we will be drawn.²⁷³

Sister Deborah offers a clear message to women: despite historical and cultural upheaval, Marylike models are timeless and mandatory, but not inimitable.

The periodicals reflected the pressures of social change, often depicting women (and Mary) caught between narrowly circumscribed traditional roles, and the desire for “modernized” models of womanhood. This desire opened up possibilities for redefinitions of female power through Marian iconography. Mary’s passivity—her “yes” to God—traditionally formed the locus of her strength. However, the images of Mary in this devotional media are explicitly *active*. Later, I return to discuss icons of Mary as assembler of armies and musterer of militia, and their implications for American Catholic gender norms. Yet embedded in depictions of Mary as a powerful female force, is a Foucauldian disciplinary model of gendered behavior. Mary’s panoptic gaze back at the viewer, mindful of sin, and replete with reproach, spurs the internalization of an impossible ideal.²⁷⁴ At the level of symbol, to be Marylike is a simile, not a metaphor. To *be like* Mary is not to *be* her.

This trend toward modernization continued in articles related to raising female children in contemporary society. In the February 1954 issue of *Immaculata*, Elsie Mahern begins a column called “Our Marionette” about the upbringing of her daughter. Her description is telling. On the one hand, much of Mahern’s discourse seems to reinforce stereotypical gender roles by affirming a “separate but equal” philosophy: “I want her to know that she’s special because she’s a girl, but not because she’s an only girl—to know that

²⁷³ Sister M. Deborah, O.P., “From Mother to Child,” *Immaculata*, Jun/Jul 1955, 15, 20.

²⁷⁴ See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (edited by Colin Gordon), (New York: Pantheon, 1980) for an overview of Foucault’s thought about disciplinary models.

her purpose in life is different from theirs—that she’s not just a poor imitation of a boy...”²⁷⁵ She goes on to affirm the existence of a equally important feminine role: “Still when a bunch of boys take off on their bikes and she can’t go, it seems cruel to offer the excuse; “They’re boys,” as though being a boy is some kind of privilege. Surely there is something equally exciting which she could do, “because she’s a girl.”²⁷⁶ In one way, what follows is an assertion of female power. In another, it is the constraining model so many feminists have complained about: “Yet she must learn that by the very nature of things her world is a small one. I’d like to teach her to see the dignity in that small world—to not expect the world to revolve around her but yet to know that it does revolve around women who least expect it—nuns and nurses and mothers and wives who attend to the details of living and loving God and serving.”²⁷⁷ Mahern suggests that women’s roles are limited, but that holy and servile women transcend the narrow scope of femininity by doing God’s will.

Mahern’s notion of service is not “lady-like” in the classic sense. She describes a girl who is not afraid to get her hands dirty: “I’d like for her to be gentle and a little quiet, but to know when to speak out against wrong. To know that a lady doesn’t necessarily have soft white hands—that one might very well earn the title during the process of acquiring broken fingernails and care-worn hands.”²⁷⁸ Being an ideal woman means being humble and hard working. Though woman is still on a pedestal, the distance between her and the ground is, perhaps, not too far to traverse.

²⁷⁵ *Immaculata*, February 1954, 17.

²⁷⁶ *Immaculata*, February 1954, 17.

²⁷⁷ *Immaculata*, February 1954, 17.

²⁷⁸ *Immaculata*, February 1954, 17.

Mahern makes a final connection to the Madonna, by teaching her daughter to imitate Mary:

This I want her to be: a lady—as much like Our Lady as possible. In connection with this I keep remembering a fact I recently learned. The first puppet shows were a kind of catechism lesson and the figures were so often that of the Blessed Mother that people began to refer to the figures as little Marys or Marionettes. If only our little Mary can become a Marionette—and let God pull the strings as her Namesake did. Perhaps it will help if I too can become a Marionette and let her be the way He wants her to be and not cling to the things I want.²⁷⁹

Although Mahern's language is figurative, this passage demonstrates the literal ways devotees understood Mary as a model for behavior. The little girl is a tool of Mary, and, ultimately, of God. These religious norms shape her (gendered) existence in a Catholic world.

In an article entitled, "Femininity, Freedom, and Fulfillment," Mrs. Eileen Farrell, "a housewife from Oak Park, Illinois," grappled with the complexity of woman's role in contemporary life. Mrs. Farrell was also the author of a book, *To Be or Not to Be*, subtitled "The question of Parenthood."²⁸⁰ She discussed debates over woman's social position, birth control, and motherhood. Farrell wrote, "The flight from motherhood began with a flight from Mary and from the reality of spiritual maternity. It becomes complete with modern woman's rejection of the cradle."²⁸¹ Farrell summed up womanhood in one concise phrase: "*To be a woman is to be a cradle.*" This motif recurs throughout the Militia's literature, recurring later in other issues (for example, this phrase serves as the headline for the cover of the May 1972 issue on Mary and womanhood).

²⁷⁹ *Immaculata*, February 1954, 17.

²⁸⁰ *Immaculata*, January 1965, 9.

²⁸¹ *Immaculata*, January 1965, 10.

In Mary was fully realized the dignity woman possesses in God and from God. *To be a woman is to be a cradle.* Mary, the handmaid, became the cradle of God, the cradle of the infant Mystical Body. She is now and will be even until the consummation of the world, the cradle of the Church. *To be a woman is to be a cradle.* It is the high office of every Catholic woman, the single woman, the married woman, the consecrated virgin, to be, in her own way, one through whom Love comes into the world. Feminine fulfillment? Without limit for the 20th Century mothers in and of the Church who lovingly imitate The Mother of the Church.²⁸²

The concept of woman as cradle exhibits the double modality of the Virgin Mary as a symbol. She functions as *model of* (as the ultimate cradle for the divine child) and *model for* (the mother to be imitated by Catholic women). Just as Mary is the “living mold of God” that shapes human spirits, everyday women are called to be mothers who mold their children, the Church and society in everything they do. Women, in this perspective, have a God-sent duty and a privilege to nurture the world. Female empowerment means strengthening woman’s tether to the “cradle,” rather than severing it.

Many articles and images during the 1950s exhibited anxiety about women’s increased participation in the world of work and the imagined potential for neglect of home and family. A 1957 piece, “Mother and Child Go Together,” used statistics to frame an argument advocating exclusive female domesticity:

A few telling figures from the exhaustive report presented to President Eisenhower March 13 by the National Manpower Council should give us much food for thought. The Council reported that women over 14 years of age constituted 32 percent of the national labor force as of April 1956. Forty percent of these work outside the home. More than 3,000,000 women with children under 6, and 2 out of 5 mothers of school-age children, have outside jobs.²⁸³

The author goes on to appeal to the logic and fears of readers:

The financial gain of many of these women can hardly be appreciated in view of the “extras” and provisions that must be taken care of “when mother’s out.” And what

²⁸² *Immaculata*, January 1965, 30.

²⁸³ *Immaculata*, May 1957, 3.

about the education and mother love of which the children are deprived thereby? And as for the woman herself? By trying to be mother and work outside she strains her capacities to the breaking point and accomplishes little that is satisfying. It is obvious, some mothers must work, but what about the others? No wonder many of our American homes are in a sorry state. We must again realize the importance of the mother and home which is her making.²⁸⁴

With women blissfully ensconced within the home, society's ills might be averted.

Safe and secure at home, in the image of Mary, women could seek domestic advice in the pages of *Immaculata*. Not surprisingly, the magazine blends domesticity and spirituality in articles geared mainly toward female readers. Much of this press strives to give spiritual dignity to women's roles. In March 1953, Anne Mary Gibbons introduced "Rosary Meditations By a Housewife." In the spirit of Thérèse of Lisieux, a nineteenth-century French saint known for emphasizing the sacredness of everyday labors, Gibbons wove devotion to Mary and Christ into mundane tasks:

There must be many mothers who want to talk to Our Lord, who cannot concentrate more than a few minutes at a time during their household duties...It is when a mother is alone at her ironing, or washing the dishes, after the children are off to school, that she can put herself in spirit in the stable in Bethlehem, or on the way to Calvary, or with the Queen in Heaven.²⁸⁵

Gibbons acknowledged the significant demands on modern mothers. She suggested that these busy women can access God in the in-between spaces, and serve God with commitment to their families.

Although demands on women seemed to increase, modern conveniences also took some of the sting out of domestic labor. But, readers asked, does Mary approve? Can Mary be modern? Writers revisited this issue throughout the magazine's tenure. In 1953, Alberta

²⁸⁴ *Immaculata*, May 1957, 3.

²⁸⁵ *Immaculata*, March 1953, 5.

Schumacher contributed to this conversation in her domestic advice column, “A Lady’s Apron Pocket.” Here we get a brief glimpse of reader response:

New aprons! New ideas! One woman reader sent us an airmail question since last issue of *Immaculata*. “What I want to know may seem beside the point to you, Alberta, inasmuch as you are interested in teaching us True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin, but I can’t help wondering if you every wear plastic aprons. Do you? And does Our Lady take over the pocket of a plastic apron for “Her Ideas” as readily as she does a percale or gingham one?”²⁸⁶

It’s hard to tell if this “reader” is contrived for the purpose of the article, but, at the very least, this passage shows how Ms. Schumacher imagined her readers’ dilemmas. She continued by assuring Marian devotees that the Madonna is compatible with contemporary life:

As a matter of fact, I have three new dime store plastic aprons right now and I do “dunk” them in the washer the same as the percale ones...and yes, Our Lady “takes over” the plastic pockets, too. Our Lady will adapt herself beautifully to modern streamlined living once we give our way of living into Her care for any changes She wishes to make.²⁸⁷

Here, Mary *adapts* as a *model for* female behavior in a new context. Yet she also functions as a constant *model of* propriety in an uncertain world. Devotees must surrender to Mary’s care in order to navigate the modern landscape in safety.

For instance, in a later story, Alberta Schumacher offered the Madonna as a solution to anxiety about aging. In May 1958, “At Forty...Look in the Mirror of Mary!” describes an encounter between two forty-year-old friends, Claire and Marta. Marta reveals her discomfort with her “general decline” at forty. Claire feels Marta is over-reacting and worries about the state of her soul:

Claire was disturbed. Marta was still quite lovely except for a few lines of discontent around her mouth. But as for Harvey’s feelings about her?—Well it was no secret the two had their troubles. Claire was sure thought that it had nothing to do with Marta’s

²⁸⁶ *Immaculata*, October 1953, 16.

²⁸⁷ *Immaculata*, October 1953, 16.

“general decline.” Only a critical eye doing an unnecessary amount of close study could detect even the faint beginning of a “general decline” in Marta’s physical begin. Unfortunately Marta had not devoted nearly as much time and energy to keeping herself up spiritually.²⁸⁸

Claire decides to have Marta and her husband over for dinner, while arranging her mirror in a special way to lift her friend’s spirits (and teach her a spiritual lesson):

Claire had two days to plan the dinner and her strategy...she took a particularly lovely picture of the Blessed Virgin Mary to her dressing table. She hung it so it just grazed the top of the mirror. Next she printed tiny placards, using index cards and her best pen. “Eyes Glowing With Love and Generosity.” “Ears Open To The Pleas of Others.” “Lips Curved to Smile, To Pray, To Speak Loving Words.” “Chin Showing Determination To Do God’s Will, To Relinquish One’s Own.”²⁸⁹

Claire ends her ritual with a positive attitude and “a simple prayer—‘Mary, make the most of me. I’m all yours to give to God.’”²⁹⁰

Marta and her husband arrive at the dinner party. As expected, Marta slips away to check her reflection after using the restroom. When Marta sits down to the mirror at the dinner party, Claire joins her and says:

At forty, if you can look into the mirror of Mary and see some resemblance, you are doing all right. If there is plenty of room for improvement, you are glad you still have time.²⁹¹

Mary offers a mirror of virtue for women to see their own images. Women are encouraged to “reflect” the Madonna in their everyday conduct. At the same time, using the “mirror of Mary” may show women the virtues they already possess, but that are under-valued or overlooked.

²⁸⁸ *Immaculata*, May 1958, 9.

²⁸⁹ *Immaculata*, May 1958, 9, 20.

²⁹⁰ *Immaculata*, May 1958, 20.

²⁹¹ *Immaculata*, May 1958, 20.

Claire leaves Marta alone in the room to gaze at her reflection in the “mirror of Mary.” After she returns to dinner, Marta shows a slight change by encouraging her husband to tell a fishing story (a topic she hates). Claire concludes that the mirror must have had some small effect:

I must have her look into my mirror of Mary as often as I can arrange it, Claire planned. It is the kind of mirror that can change a person with the help of grace and cooperation. I must look into it often myself, only I really prefer omitting the glass and seeing Mary behind my closed eyes. I am sure the Blessed Virgin has helped me to accept middle-age without rebellion. May she do the same for Marta.²⁹²

Ultimately, what Claire sees in the mirror is a reminder of devotion, a model for spiritual growth, and a way to reconcile the difficulties of being an aging female in American society.

Representations of Marian gender performance in *Immaculata* and *The Miraculous Medal* from the 1950s-1970s demonstrated a chronological progression of carefully crafted responses to cultural changes such as the women’s movement and the sexual revolution, moving from more traditional domestic roles to more expansive opportunities for female action in the world. Contraception, abortion, and pornography became key issues of debate. In high contrast to the perceived laxity of the broader culture, the groups showcased modesty as the central female virtue. Still, this is not a clear-cut case of religious and cultural conservatism. The magazines began to show the positive aspects of women’s more public role within the Church itself, and strived to offer resources for the “modern” Catholic woman. Of course, the religious and cultural revolution of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) greatly impacted the organizations’ self-presentations, including gendered imagery. Theological movements for Mary as Mediatrix and/or Co-redemptrix also called into question the limits of what was possible for women in the Catholic Church.

²⁹² *Immaculata*, May 1958, 20.

Women and Vatican II

One of the key debates of the Second Vatican Council was the role of women in the modern Catholic Church. The Militia responded to the question of “woman’s role” by devoting an issue to this topic in January 1965. Like their model, Mary, American women were depicted in the thick of fighting communism. The cover of this issue features a photograph of Mrs. Joseph McCarthy, president of the National Council of Catholic Women (NCCW), next to the “Red Wall of Shame” separating East and West Berlin.²⁹³ The magazine was already working on a story about Mrs. McCarthy’s travels to Europe and Africa to meet with “leaders of women,” when she was appointed as “the first American woman auditor” at Vatican II.²⁹⁴

An article by Evelyn M. Raabe documented Mrs. McCarthy’s overseas trip, co-sponsored by Radio Free Europe and the NCCW. The article is filled with many photographs of Mrs. McCarthy visiting Communist Europe and Africa, conversing with civic leaders, and representing ten million female Catholics worldwide. The coverage ascribed a great deal of power and agency to Mrs. McCarthy, showcasing her as a positive role model for “woman’s role” within the Church. However, for today’s readers, the message is mixed. Raabe ponders: “many are the roles of woman. But what is her place in the world, in the scheme of things?” She quotes her subject on this point:

“I think,” said Mrs. McCarthy, “that we are realizing more and more that woman has a job to do beyond just the household duties. Woman is to complement man—not be his equal,* for we weren’t meant to be equals, but to complement man and to supply a woman’s point of view. This is essential to solving many of the problems in the world today.”²⁹⁵

²⁹³ *Immaculata*, January 1965, 2.

²⁹⁴ *Immaculata*, January 1965, 30.

²⁹⁵ *Immaculata*, January 1965, 19.

*The asterisk goes on to clarify Church teaching: “As a child of God, of course, woman is equal to man. ‘Both man and woman are images of God; in their own way they are equal in dignity and have the same rights’ (Pius XII in “The Mission of the Catholic Woman”).²⁹⁶

The editors updated the article in light of Mrs. McCarthy’s involvement with the Second Vatican Council. They write, in an “Editor’s note,”

The former president of the NCCW, in typical womanly fashion, explained the Church’s “aggiornamento” as simply “spring house cleaning.” She added that “the window is wide open, and the doors are open too.” In referring to the recent appointment of about 15 women auditors at the council she said: “The Church recognized women in the beginning, and now it has recognized them again by inviting them to the council.” She hopes that eventually “a woman will be able to speak for women.”²⁹⁷

Throughout the Militia’s discussion of “woman’s role,” there is a delicate balance of empowerment and constraint. This doubled message reflects those embodied in the paradox of Mary. The Militia seems embroiled in a classic bind (from a feminist perspective) by arguing to put “woman back on the pedestal,”

We sometimes think it was modern society that liberated womankind from male domination. Before the 20th century women were supposed to have had very few, or practically, no rights. Actually, it was during the Middle Ages, according to William H. Lechy, that “For the first time woman was elevated to her rightful position, and the sanctity of weakness was recognized, as well as the sanctity of sorrow. No longer the slave or toy of man, no longer associated only with the ideas of degradation and of sensuality, women rose, in the person of the Virgin Mother, into a new sphere, and became the object of a reverential homage which antiquity had no conception...”²⁹⁸

The editors go on:

Yet, today it is a pretty well accepted fact that women do not receive the respect they did 50 years ago...The tendency in the West is for women to push equality with men to the extent that they become poor imitations of the opposite sex. To retain her inherent nobility and dignity woman must bring into social and public life the

²⁹⁶ *Immaculata*, January 1965, 19.

²⁹⁷ *Immaculata*, January 1965, 19.

²⁹⁸ *Immaculata*, January 1965, 2.

meekness, chastity, gentleness, modesty, dedication, and motherliness which men could admire. When women ape men and ignore these beautiful virtues the only other alternative to attract men is by their physical desirability. Thus we find the traditional Christian high regard for modesty and chastity as passé in our modern secularistic society. As a consequence woman's noble role of complimenting and completing what is lacking in the male, both spiritually and physically, is no longer in force; she has come to the low status of being a mere plaything to satisfy men's passions...the best weapon to defend modern woman from the pagan world that sees her not so much as a mother but rather an instrument of pleasure, is veneration of the Blessed Mother of God.²⁹⁹

Here, a tension emerges between spiritual equality and social equality. In fact, in the spirit of the nineteenth century cult of domestic womanhood, women, in the image of Mary, are spiritually superior to men. Woman reigns as queen in the private sphere of home and hearth. Female virtue tames, rather than incites, the lusts of men.³⁰⁰

Immaculata acknowledged and celebrated the public role of women in the modern world, but this role must be literally or metaphorically *maternal* to be acceptable from a Catholic perspective. This was true for single and married laywomen, and also women religious—this issue includes several articles on the changing lives of nuns. The headline on page three reads “The Year 1964—One for the Women.” The editors cite female observation of the council as progress: “The year 1964 will go down in history as one of the most eventful years in the long struggle womankind has had in winning her rightful place in society. Unprecedented honors were given to her when Pope Paul VI ‘welcomed the first women in history to participate in a Conciliar assembly.’”³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ *Immaculata*, January 1965, 2.

³⁰⁰ This is the same sort of “complementarity” noted by Kane in “Marian Devotion Since 1940” as discussed above. However, the substance of this issue on “woman’s role” complicates this message by dealing with many facets of Catholic “womanhood” in alternative ways.

³⁰¹ *Immaculata*, January 1965, 3.

Changing Roles: Laywomen and the Church

This issue of *Immaculata* demonstrates, without question, that by 1965 “woman’s role” in American and Catholic life had begun to change radically. Changes in societal notions of domesticity, motherhood, and femininity also affected the religious lives of women and their relationship to the Church. Both laywomen and women religious experienced these shifts. While keeping with the image of Mary, the Militia encouraged laywomen to venture outside the home to participate in Church leadership, volunteer work, and political action. This invitation to public life signaled a marked difference from earlier articles that urged women to stay at home. The Militia infused women’s new roles with spiritual significance. Women’s gendered performances now occupied a bigger stage and address a broader audience, but must still conform to Mary’s directorial gaze.

In “An End to Stag Religion,” Mary Cole reclaimed the religious sphere for women. She employed examples from Europe to showcase the impact Catholic women can have on the world:

There have been times when Catholic laywomen have been responsible for the very safety of the Church. The votes of Italian women prevented the Communist Party from coming to power there in 1948 when a Red victory seemed so certain that four countries had offered the Pope asylum, and in Brazil, only last April, the thousands of women demonstrating in rosary-carrying processions helped persuade the military to depose the left-wing President Joao Goulart and prevent a Communist coup.³⁰²

Here, women acting politically determined a positive religious outcome. By contrast, Cole noted the relative passivity among her American readers, whom she suggested had not yet realized their duty or potential:

American Catholic women have not been called upon to help the Church in any such dramatic, crisis-ridden situation, but their response to the Church’s urging that they play a much more prominent role in civic, economic and religious associations and

³⁰² *Immaculata*, January 1965, 20.

activities, all the places where they can do good and help further Catholic social and spiritual aims, has thus far been fairly limited.³⁰³

Cole cited the previously limited, though important, scope, of female service.

Of course, women continue to perform their most valuable task—having their children and helping them to grow up to be fine Catholics and good citizens. They still, too, shoulder most of the volunteer work of the parish, organizing bake sales to raise money for church repairs, providing transportation for the parochial schools excursions—routine, thankless tasks, but tasks absolutely necessary for the day-to-day operation of the parish.³⁰⁴

As mothers, volunteers, chefs, and chauffeurs, women bore the burden of the mundane chores that support the world. In a new era of Church and culture, Cole strove to expand their vim and vision:

The average American Catholic laywoman, however, does not seem yet to have realized the extent to which her intelligence, energy and spirit are needed by the Church today at a much higher, much increased level, nor does it seem yet to have realized how strongly the Church has now begun to defend her rights, her independence and her dignity and to urge her to accept corresponding civic and religious responsibilities.³⁰⁵

Cole incited her readers to action in the spirit of Vatican II *aggiornamento*, asking them to “dream big” by raising their aspirations and expectations.

Cole invoked predictions of increased lifespan to re-imagine the trajectory of a woman’s life:

Doctors are now predicting that our daughters will live to nearly a hundred. If this comes true and if, perhaps also, as being widely suggested, new methods of family planning are approved by the Church, the average woman will still have more than half her life to lead after her now smaller number of children have already grown up and left home.³⁰⁶

³⁰³ *Immaculata*, January 1965, 21.

³⁰⁴ *Immaculata*, January 1965, 21.

³⁰⁵ *Immaculata*, January 1965, 21.

³⁰⁶ *Immaculata*, January 1965, 21.

Cole suggested that this scientific reality may be an opportunity to change perspectives on women's roles. She acknowledged the ambivalence this realization may bring:

Nearly any woman, mulling this over, finds it for a moment a bleak picture. But already apparent trends demonstrate that women with their families well started or already on their own will simply begin, and in some areas are already beginning, to be as creative in outside and volunteer work as they formerly were in their homes, performing really vital, responsible, thoughtful tasks...

Cole used a range of arguments to inspire American Catholic women: comparison with Catholic women abroad, personal pride, Church sanction, more time and more freedom. Good Catholic women, she asserted, must participate in life outside the domestic sphere.

Changing Roles: Nuns Take on the World

Women religious were also facing the consequences of social and religious change. Like Catholic laywomen, nuns were also called to participate in the world in ways that not always been encouraged in religious life.³⁰⁷ Leon-Joseph Cardinal Suenens, an influential Church reformer during the Second Vatican Council, commented on the new role of women religious in "Sisters and the Apostolate" in the same 1965 *Immaculata* issue on women's role.

Cardinal Suenens emphasized the outward focus of modern nuns:

The place of woman in the world today imposes new dimensions on the apostolic action of the contemporary religious. One cannot help being impressed by the sum of devotion that the life of religious entails. But devotion and apostolate are not identical. The apostolate is a work of evangelization: to reveal the Gospel or cause it to penetrate into all human and social realities.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷ For more information about women religious and Catholic culture see Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith, *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), and Amy L. Koehlinger, *The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

³⁰⁸ *Immaculata*, January 1965, 4.

Suenens saw nuns primarily as evangelists, and asks nuns to assume a broader influence in society. He urged that nuns extend their work primarily with “children,” “the sick,” or “elderly” to participate in the formation of Catholic adults: “We hardly ever see religious playing a role on the adult level, where, nevertheless, other women make their influence felt... We do not see them playing a role among lay women either, whom the Church invites to the apostolate, but who need spiritual animators to stimulate and support them.”³⁰⁹ The Cardinal lamented that sisters are being underutilized and underappreciated: “Religious dedicate their lives to running residence or boardinghouses in many cities and towns to which pilgrimages are made; they deal exclusively with domestic tasks and management. What a pity it is that these nuns have no apostolic outlet and that so much spiritual energy is lost!”³¹⁰ He asked nuns to redirect their energies and reinterpret their role in contemporary society by developing an even broader sense of outreach.

Sister Mary Julian Baird, R.S.M. responded to the Cardinal’s ideas in “Behind Suenens’ ‘The Nun in the World’” by referring women religious back to the model of Mary.

Thoughtful sisters in the United States have welcomed Cardinal Suenens’ portrait of the modern nun—and his practical plans for her... To those who know the other writings of Suenens, no doubt arises as to what model he used for the figure he has drawn of the modern nun as she should be. Luminous and beautiful behind the new nun stands Mary, Mother of God. What he calls *new dimensions in the modern apostolate* are as old as Christianity. Every virtue that he calls for in the religious woman of the atomic age is exemplified perfectly in Mary.³¹¹

Mary is just the sort of woman to take on the “atomic age.” However, Sister Baird highlighted female action as a longstanding aspect of the Christian tradition. This is a notable aspect of Marian imagery in *Immaculata*—authors used Mary’s ancient or timeless

³⁰⁹ *Immaculata*, January 1965, 4.

³¹⁰ *Immaculata*, January 1965, 4.

³¹¹ *Immaculata*, January 1965, 11.

aspects to assert her contemporary relevance. Mary suits the times because her essence does not change with them.

Sister Baird described nuns who combined the inward and outward aspects of the religious life while being fully immersed in society:

...the religious must imitate Mary by actual presence in the world...Mary of Nazareth was not a cloistered nun. Like Christ she lived and blessed for us the mixed life—action and contemplation combined. No indication in Scripture point to the Mother of Jesus as living withdrawn; in each of Christ’s mysteries she is actively present.³¹²

Although the Madonna’s nature is unalterable, Baird saw in her a flexibility and willingness to serve that nuns should emulate as they assume new duties:

To this diversity of tasks the nun must bring our Lady’s adaptability, she who though vowed to virginity accepted maternity at the word of God’s angel...³¹³

Mary accepts new responsibilities without questioning God’s plan. For Baird, this was a dual act of risk and obedience that reflects the potentially daunting situation of women religious. Despite fear or trepidation, she argued, “with the spirit of Mary the modern nun can adjust herself.”³¹⁴

Baird spoke specifically about Suenens call to go beyond educating children to enter the realm of adults by invoking Marian symbolism:

When from the somewhat cloistered work in the schools she must go out to a more worldly atmosphere, she will go in the spirit of Mary, whose cloister was her Immaculate Heart.³¹⁵

Baird suggested, perhaps, that nuns turn themselves inside out: internalizing their cloisters and letting their hearts guide them in their mission to the world. In her reply to the

³¹² *Immaculata*, January 1965, 11.

³¹³ *Immaculata*, January 1965, 12.

³¹⁴ *Immaculata*, January 1965, 12.

³¹⁵ *Immaculata*, January 1965, 12.

Cardinal's ambitious demands for a shift in religious life, Baird turned to the image of Mary's Immaculate Heart. Though this heart, this symbol is fleshy and flexible, it pumps the blood of female suffering.

The Immaculate Heart: Symbol of Female Suffering

The Immaculate Heart of Mary appears throughout *Immaculata*. In many cases, the heart is metonymic: the image of a heart encircled in roses (or lilies) and pierced by a sword stands in for the whole of the Virgin Mother. The Immaculate Heart is the *emblem* of the Immaculata. As the *emblem* of an *icon*, it possesses an especially condensed symbolic power. We'll return to investigate this use of metonymy when we investigate the use of the Immaculate Heart image for anti-Communism in the next chapter. However, it is worth noting here that this heart is explicitly gendered. This may not be obvious at first, but the Immaculate Heart is a counterpart to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, expressing a gendered dualism of Catholic devotion.

The Immaculate Heart represents a particular style of feminine, Christian suffering. The heart frequently accompanies or substitutes for iconography of the "sorrowful mother" (*mater dolorosa*)—the Madonna pierced by seven sorrows that mark the sufferings of her son. This genre of images (including *pietà* scenes) emphasizes the pain of Mary's experience as a mother to Jesus, her crucified son, and to all human beings who, from the Christian perspective, are caught up in sin. Yes, *Immaculata* affirms "to be a woman is to be a cradle." But to be a woman, and specifically a mother, is to *suffer*. Pain is part and parcel of motherly love.

Many feminist scholars and theologians have deconstructed the role of womanly suffering in the Catholic tradition. Imagining suffering as the primary mode of female action may certainly urge gender roles toward stereotype. However, in many of the Militia's portrayals of Mary, especially those centered on the Immaculate Heart, suffering takes on intense supernatural power. Such images emphasize importance of a *relationship* between Mary and devotees. When describing immigrant devotion to Mary during the early twentieth century in Italian Harlem, Robert A. Orsi emphasizes the principle of "reciprocity" present in Catholic devotional approaches to suffering:

The people seemed to be saying during the festa that although the Madonna and the saints were to be held responsible for what happened in their lives, they were also loved in the sufferings of the people, who knew that the divine figures suffered as well...The roots of sympathy lie deep in the capacity to feel an identity between one life and another.³¹⁶

Devotees embraced a strong belief in the Madonna's power to intercede in their lives, and suffering served as one form of mediation between the human and divine experiences. The Militia adopted gendered representations of suffering such as the Immaculate Heart to reinforce this connection.

Shared images of suffering were typically not comforting, even as they solidified the bond between Mary and her devotees. On the back cover of the a 1952 issue of *Immacolata*

a gruesome image of the Immaculate Heart as described by one of the visionaries at Fatima (encircled, like the Sacred Heart with jagged thorns) occupies the page, framed by the following headline: "May this symbol of Mary's Love and Man's Ingratitude Remind Us

³¹⁶ Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*, (New Haven: Yale, 1985), 225.

Always of Her Closeness, and of the Love and Devotion We Owe Her.”³¹⁷ The disembodied heart figures the fierceness of motherly love and the consequence of human sin. The accompanying text reads: “In 1925 Our Lady appeared with the Infant Jesus to Lucy, one of the three seers of Fatima. She showed her Immaculate Heart surrounded with thorns...The Divine Infant, pointing to His mother’s heart, said: “Have pity on this loving heart, a continual martyr to the ingratitude of men.”³¹⁸ Here Mary’s power takes on an apocalyptic guise, and her suffering reproaches the reader. The Madonna suffers because of human ungratefulness; Catholics suffer for grieving their Mother—and yet the chastisement also suggests a fundamental sympathy between the two.

“Marylike” Masculinities

“Marylike” models of masculinity were primarily relational. A devoted man’s relationship to Mary functioned as a guide for his place in the world. For men, Mary, the Virgin, became the ultimate object of chaste adoration, the handmaiden whose perfect and otherworldly subservience to God makes her the perfect muse for male worldly (but moral) action. “Marylike” men were responsible husbands, strong fathers, and ethical neighbors. Or they were pious priests, enlisted in Mary’s service. In *Miraculous Medal*, Mary led an ongoing crusade to recruit new priests.

No discussion of Catholic masculinity can fail to acknowledge the role of Jesus. Mary, readers are reminded, though often at center stage, is defined by her connection to Jesus and God. “*To Jesus through Mary*” is an oft-repeated motto. In this media, however, doctrinally compliant gestures toward Jesus do not force Mary to yield her central role for

³¹⁷ *Immaculata*, October 1952, back cover.

³¹⁸ *Immaculata*, October 1952, back cover.

devotees. And the expectation that men imitate the Virgin Mary and her position towards her son complicates the gender norms for “Marylike” men.

St. Maximilian Kolbe and the Franciscan Monks

At Marytown, one of the striking images among the intricate mosaics of the chapel is an image of Maximilian Kolbe standing before a table of six seated Franciscan friars. In the middle of the table is a statue of the Virgin Mary, as traditionally represented on the Miraculous Medal. This image is also reproduced in the Militia’s brochure on consecration to Mary, in the “MI Catechism, and on the website.”³¹⁹ The image represents the moment of origin for the Militia movement, but it also shows an interesting portrait of the gender dynamics at work in the movement. In this image, a group of men show their devotion and commitment to a female figure. They continue the long line of male clerics and theologians who espoused special devotion to Mary, including Saint Ephrem the Syrian (306-373), Saint Bernard (1090-1153), Saint Louis Grignion de Montfort (1683-1716), Saint Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787), and more recent devotees such as Pope John Paul II.

The scene of the “Knights of the Immaculata” seated at their round table comes alive in a column entitled “Tools for Our Lady” by Brother M. Bernard, O.F.M. Conventual.³²⁰ This article is one of many that mythologizes the origins of the Militia movement. In 1917, Friar Maximilian was distressed at a Masonic demonstration against the Vatican in St. Peter’s square. Contemplating the state of the world, he had a realization about how to improve it.

³¹⁹ “Consecrate yourself to Mary,” and “MI Catechism,” (Libertyville, IL: Marytown Press, 2006) and <http://www.consecration.com/aboutus.html>.

³²⁰ *Immaculata*, May 1951, 15-17.

He found guidance in the story of a Jewish man, Maria Alphonse Ratisbonne, who attributed his Christian conversion to an apparition of the Virgin Mary. Brother Bernard reports, “Friar Max immediately and forcibly understood that the world would be converted only through the intercession of the Immaculate Virgin.”³²¹ Friar Max reasoned “if the Immaculate Virgin so easily turned this Jew to the true Faith to union with her Divine Son, then she could do the same for these Masons and for all the enemies and ‘lost sheep’ of the Holy Church.”³²² Brother Bernard describes Max’s transition from “contemplation to action” when “the unbounded ambitions leapt to the heart of the young Franciscan and a wonderful plan unfolded itself in his active mind” to found the Militia of the Immaculata.³²³ Max gathered a small group of other Friars together who pledged their devotion to the Virgin Mary. They used the medal of the Immaculate Conception as their emblem.

Maximilian later described his goals for the Militia along “three fronts”:

‘We must take ourselves by assault and become the trophy of the Immaculate. In this first victory let us not even dream of the other two. But after we have mastered the first we must face the others, our environment and the whole universe, all nations, all races, all without exception...we shall have no rest until we have placed the whole world at the feet of our Queen.’³²⁴

Brother Bernard praises St. Max for the simplicity of his vision: “This is the Militia of Mary Immaculate. It has no intricate organization, no lists of rules, constitutions and activity

³²¹ *Immaculata*, May 1951, 15.

³²² *Immaculata*, May 1951, 15.

³²³ *Immaculata*, May 1951, 15.

³²⁴ *Immaculata*, May 1951, 15.

schedules—only the program stated above. One started with himself, making himself the perfect slave and total property of Mary his Immaculate Virgin and Mother.”³²⁵

As “Knights” for the Immaculata, the monks became both “tools” and “fools” for Mary. These men surrender themselves completely to female power. In “The Militia Explained,” Brother Bernard quotes Maximilian again: ““For her we live, we work, we wish to die. We wish to do the will of the Immaculate, to be the perfect instruments within her hands, to let ourselves be guided by her, in the perfect obedience by which she reveals her will and disposes us...””³²⁶

What does it mean for gender dynamics when men engage in veneration of a female figure? Many scholars suggest that celibate male devotees have re-channeled their sexual energies into chaste adoration of the Virgin Mary. Mary served as a means of relation with the feminine that was not only permissible, but also pious. This relationship becomes even more complex when we consider the extreme language of “slavery” to Mary in descriptions of consecration. On the one hand, priests and friars give up their male position of power to the higher authority of Mary as most holy of saints (and human beings). On the other hand, much of the language of devotion re-affirms male gender roles by employing military metaphors such as “soldiers” and also the language of chivalry such as “Knights of the Immaculata.” To serve Mary is in one way to serve a Lady in the fashion popular of epic Romances like the “Faerie Queene” or King Arthur legends. Knights of the Immaculata

³²⁵ *Immaculata*, May 1951, 15. This language of “slavery” used to describe Marian devotion pre-dates Kolbe’s usage. Kolbe was heavily influenced by the writings of St. Louis Grignon De Montfort (1683-1716) as noted above. De Montfort’s treatise, “True Devotion to Mary,” employs metaphors of spiritual slavery without making any clear connections to racialized notions of slavery. De Montfort seems to use the terms “slaves,” “subjects,” and “children” interchangeably throughout the text to describe devotees to Mary. He also emphasizes that this spiritual slavery must be “voluntary.”

³²⁶ *Immaculata*, June 1951, 4.

were asked to demonstrate the heroic qualities ascribed to knights of legend: bravery, honor, and unwavering devotion.

However, the face of bravery in the Christian context challenges he-man norms of masculinity. Although traditions of representing Christ as King and Judge exist, Christians more frequently associate Christ with the peaceful, merciful, redeemer, who sacrifices himself and submits to authority (despite his passive resistance). It is Christ as sacrificial Lamb of God that is also emphasized in the Militia movement, since the Christ-like features of Saint Maximilian during the Holocaust. St. Max's martyrdom at Auschwitz, through his willingness to give up his life for a fellow prisoner, follows from an imitation of the sacrificial acts of Christ. Martyr masculinity is of a peculiar sort: certainly, the bravery and strength to offer one's self up in unselfish sacrifice is immense. Yet, this bravery manifests in submission and peace, rather than active violent rebellion. This is a strange mixture of "muscular Christianity" and the ambiguous/ambivalent masculinity of Christ in the Gospels.

Militia masculinity also had important implications for the "Jesus through Mary" concept so heavily emphasized by the group. These Catholics contextualized their devotion to Mary in terms of access to Christ: "Marian consecration in the MI is a formal act of self-giving that does not stop at Mary, but is Christ-directed. It is really consecration to Jesus. The MI motto is 'To lead every individual with Mary to the most Sacred Heart of Jesus.'"³²⁷

In the Christian tradition, Jesus himself is not a figure antithetical to maternal representations. In *Jesus as Mother*, Caroline Walker Bynum traces the emergence of feminine Christ imagery during the medieval era, particularly linked to theological and

³²⁷ Brochure: "Consecrate Yourself to Mary."

mystical emphasis on Christ's humanity and infancy.³²⁸ Bynum's *Holy Feast and Holy* vividly illustrates this trend by analyzing medieval paintings that depict Christ "nursing" humans with his blood, or becoming the nourishing "wheat" of the Eucharist. Bynum connects these images to an artistic tradition representing the Madonna as nursing mother and reveals the multi-valence of these religious symbols:

If medieval people turned to the Madonna and child as a symbol that the awfulness and mercy of God have already reached across the abyss of humankind, how much more confidently did they turn to God himself, lactating on the cross, bearing the soul in his womb, feeding the faithful from the hands of his special cooks and servants, the clergy? When Catherine of Siena spoke of God as table, Christ as roasted flesh, and the Holy Spirit as waiter and servant, she was not indulging in an odd feminine need to use domestic images; she was expressing a startling reversal at the heart of Christian imagery...not gender confusion on the part of male authors and worshipers but the polysemous, fertile, paradoxical quality that Christian symbols share with all symbols. In the mass, priest and God are symbolically woman...woman as food preparer, woman as food.³²⁹

The Militia's gendered imagery of Mary, Christ, and devotees also demonstrated this full range of symbolic complications. In the devotional imagination of the MI, a "Knight of the Immaculata" can be male or female, and embodies a wide spectrum of gendered interactions with both the Virgin Mary and Christ.

A column introduced in February 1957, "MI Roundtable" by Father Leo Gabriel, reinforced the theme of "knighthood." The heading for the column even features a drawing of a medieval knight on horseback, dressed in armor and carrying a flag. Opposite the knight appears the Virgin Mary in the guise of the Immaculate Conception. Father Leo writes: "A knight and militant of the Immaculate must consider himself called personally by the Most

³²⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 18.

³²⁹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 278 (and plate illustrations).

Holy Virgin to be a close cooperator in the divine redemption...The MI therefore is not simply an association of mercy and devotion but a real Militia fighting under the orders of the Valiant Woman, the Queen of Heaven.”³³⁰

MI Roundtable also articulated the Militia’s understanding of Mary as “Mediatrice” or primary mediator between human beings and God (and Christ):

Mary is God’s Port of entry into His world. Through her virginal body, God became flesh: Love was made visible. Mary is, therefore, our contact point with God and the treasures of His grace. God contacts His world only through Mary. He bends down in love where Mary is...The graces of Redemption have been won by the triumphant victory of Jesus in his life and death. They are stored and waiting for us, and are ours for the asking. However...There is one Divine catch. Though won and merited by Jesus, they are to be dispersed through the worthy, tender, and Immaculate Heart of Mary...Mary is the divinely appointed treasurer of the coin of the kingdom, grace...Our task as Knights and Militants of the Immaculate is to bring Mary into the lives of everyone...Every action that we perform in the spirit of our total consecration to her means that we extend her hands, her hands that are filled with graces.³³¹

If Mary is Mediatrice, the Knights of the Immaculate protected and enabled her acts of intercession. According to the MI, the Madonna gave birth to the world by bearing the son that ensures its salvation, and then sustains the world by her mediation.

Recruiting Men for Mary’s Service

Although the Militia includes both religious and lay members, *Immaculata* periodically portrayed the masculine life of a Franciscan monk. In 1953, an advertisement reads: “Notice

³³⁰ *Immaculata*, February 1957, 9.

³³¹ *Immaculata*, February 1957, 9.

to Brave Young Men: Would you be interested in giving your ALL for Jesus as a Franciscan Lay Brother? For information write to: the Reverend Father Superior, Marytown.”³³²

In a similar campaign, *The Miraculous Medal* magazine vigorously recruited priests for the Marian mission. Early issues of the magazine described the excitement of missionary life in stories of priests triumphing over adversity in the four corners of the world. Articles such as “From a Missioner’s Diary: Heat, Storm and Flood and the Soul of a Chinese Maid” by Felix M. Bonanate, C. M., emphasized the adventuresome aspects of missions not intended for the faint of heart.³³³ According to the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal, missionaries were doing the work of Mary as evangelists to the world. Over the years, a mission focus continued to influence the magazine’s image of Catholic manhood. Father Skelly, the CAMM founder and an important role model for devotees, shares in these journeys of faith elucidated in “Following Mary: Father Skelly’s duties as Director of the ‘Central Association’ took him to many lands.”³³⁴

Later issues of the magazine shifted from missionary recruitment to a plea for parish priests. A 1933 advertisement asks, “Have You a Priest in Your Family? It is truly a gift from God to have one of your boys enter His priesthood; to know that someone near and dear to you has you in his heart every time he offers the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.”³³⁵ This effort intensified after World War II, with a series of ads that link the priesthood with masculinity. A March 1955 advertisement shows a photo of a little boy dressed in a cowboy

³³² *Immaculata*, November 1953, 9.

³³³ *The Miraculous Medal*, May 1928, 10.

³³⁴ *The Miraculous Medal*, September 1933, 58.

³³⁵ *The Miraculous Medal*, October 1933, back cover.

outfit, holding a toy gun in one hand and a glass of milk in another. The headline reads: “Your Son a Priest.” The text continues: “Today he’s dutifully drinking his milk. He must be strong to fight the rustlers and Indians. Twenty years from now he may be strong in the fight against the enemies of God and of men’s souls as a priest.”³³⁶ Another layout shows a boy holding a baseball glove, dreaming of a professional ballplayer (shown as an illustration). The words “I can hardly wait!” are superimposed on a baseball logo. The text reminds the reader that he “wouldn’t be the first ‘Little Leaguer’ to decide that what he really wanted to be was—a priest!”³³⁷ These images offered models of gendered performance for Catholic men as they promote the priesthood and solicit financial contributions from CAMM members to support seminarians. Similar ads appeared through the 1960s and 70s, an era of declining vocations, depicting young boys as aspiring engineers, astronauts, and devoted altar boys whose masculine futures might include the priesthood.

The Madonna and Laymen

The Militia also promoted the Madonna as a model for laymen—the husbands and fathers that form the backbone of the Catholic family. Alberta Schumacher’s 1963 article, “Moods? Make Mine Mary’s,” suggested that men should look to Mary for marital guidance. A discussion about married life ensues between Bill and his older male friend:

“A woman is a creature of moods. It’s an old cliché, but it’s true, Bill. So resign yourself. You married Ruth, so you married her moods. You can’t beat it so you

³³⁶ *The Miraculous Medal*, March 1955, 41.

³³⁷ *The Miraculous Medal*, March 1958, inside front cover.

better join it.” Bill eyed his older buddy fiercely. “I’m not giving in to a woman’s moods. Either she gives or I go...out with the boys, that is.”³³⁸

Bill presents himself as a fairly typical masculine man, frustrated with his wife’s mercurial nature. The illustration accompanying the text shows a man yelling at his wife, who is crying, holding a handkerchief to her face. Bill meets his friend two months later, describing similar problems:

“It’s that woman of mine. She gives me fits with her mood swings. One day she’s all sweetness and light. Next day she wakes up with a dark brown taste in her mouth and a tongue to match. Blames it on her cycle—are all women like that, heaven forbid?”³³⁹

Bill’s friend replies affirmatively, but probes Bill about the nature of his own moods. The older gentleman admits, “All I can say is I make mine Mary’s.”³⁴⁰ When Bill inquires further, his friend explains:

“I make my moods Mary’s. I give her mine and take hers instead—Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious. I forget my troubles by meditating on hers as I pray the Beads. Keep a Rosary in my pocket—I’m not always rattling nickels when I stand around with my hand in my pocket. When life gets too much for me I pray a decade.”³⁴¹

Bill responds, reluctantly, “I’m not a praying man.”³⁴² His friend replies,

“Bad thing for a married man to have to admit. You might say Mary was the first marriage counselor—Cana. She looked into the material end—the lack of wine—to spare the spirit from injury. Successful married folks have been consulting her ever since—on foot, on their knees, in bed, in transit. That’s how life is. You’ve got to have a guide—a Mood Mediatrix! You can’t go ulcerating your stomach with venom when resentment fills your veins with poison. You take it to Mary for a chemical

³³⁸ *Immaculata*, October 1963, 25.

³³⁹ *Immaculata*, October 1963, 25.

³⁴⁰ *Immaculata*, October 1963, 25.

³⁴¹ *Immaculata*, October 1963, 25.

³⁴² *Immaculata*, October 1963, 25.

changeover. I don't know...somehow thinking through a sorrowful decade of the Rosary your old Adrenal glands simmer back to a slow burn to no burn at all, and then speed up with enough love and compassion to keep you from going stale. Things work out—you'll see."³⁴³

For this Catholic man, Mary provides both a model and a guide. He gives his troubles up to Mary, and embraces her positive attitudes. Bill misunderstands his friend and tells him he will get his wife a new rosary. The older man shakes his head, as Bill misses his point.

A year later, the friends meet again, and Bill reveals that his marriage is breaking up. Bill offers excuses, saying he gave his wife a new rosary, but she did not use it. The older man is discouraged, as Bill once again places the blame outside of himself. He gives Bill his own rosary and walks away hoping for the best. "Just for a moment the older man felt near despair. He remembered to begin a Joyful Mystery...on his fingers. Make mine Mary's...A few minutes later he saw Bill standing at the window staring down at the street...his hand in his pocket."³⁴⁴

This article illustrates an encounter between men, mediated by Mary. The older, wiser man encourages his younger friend to live by Mary's example, and also to show devotion to her. As with women, Mary served as both a *model of* and *model for* appropriate male behavior.

Mary's Army: Militancy, Evangelism, and Egalitarianism

Magazines like *Immaculata* and *The Miraculous Medal* offered prescriptive notions of womanhood and manhood filtered through Marian theology and practice that both reaffirmed

³⁴³ *Immaculata*, October 1963, 25.

³⁴⁴ *Immaculata*, October 1963, 26.

and challenged traditional gender roles in the Roman Catholic Church and American culture. The Militia Immaculata and The Central Association of the Miraculous Medal provided unisex opportunities for devotional participation that in some ways elided gender distinctions. The MI called both women and men to serve in “Mary’s Army” as Christian warriors. The CAMM universally encouraged wearing of the “miraculous medal” as a symbol of personal devotion and the mark of Mary’s care and protection. The equalizing imagery associated with these devotional practices counters some more traditional gender norms. A militant Mary demands female warriors as well as male ones. As commander, she has power over men in her service. In fact, the Militia requires both male and female members to become “slaves” to Mary through the practice of “Total Consecration.” Chapter Three will probe the complex Marian representations during the Cold War era.

Mary the Evangelist, as portrayed in media such as *Immaculata* and *The Miraculous Medal*, served as a model missionary for these devotional organizations. Mary’s primary role as *mother* became the central metaphor for all missions, but *both men and women* are asked to participate in zealous evangelization.³⁴⁵ The Madonna’s knack for capturing public attention through apparitions and prophecies made her an ideal defender of the faith, despite traditional male models of evangelism in the Catholic tradition. She acted as spokeswoman for Catholic universality, “Our Lady of At-One-Ment,” who unites all humans who atone for their sins, as I noted in Chapter Three.³⁴⁶

In many ways, the multiple Marys of this devotional media defy most scholarly (particularly feminist) assumptions about gender roles, and models *of* and *for* gendered

³⁴⁵ At the inception of both groups, mission is still traditionally defined as the conversion of non-Catholics, usually in foreign lands.

³⁴⁶ The title “Our Lady of At-One-Ment” first appears in *Immaculata* in Jun/July 1959 and is repeated in later issues.

action, within American Catholicism during the mid-twentieth century. For producers of *Immaculata* and *The Miraculous Medal*, being “Marylike” entailed a broad range of dispositions and practices whose performances differed between the genders. “Marylike” images functioned as mediated icons for perfected (and gendered) Catholic selves, reflected “in the mirror of Mary.” Thus, “Marylike” men and women not only were performing as good Catholics, but as appropriate models of gendered behavior. Attending thoughtfully to gender issues in the creative, adaptive, and transformative representational practices of Marian devotees reveals some of the diverse ways that Mary as media icon has shaped twentieth-century American Catholic History.

CHAPTER 5

“OUR LADY OF THE UNITED STATES”: MARY AS ANTI-COMMUNIST WARRIOR

The December 1954 front cover of *Immaculata* shows an original drawing entitled “Our Lady of the United States.” A young and beautiful Mary stands against the backdrop of an American flag, arms crossed at her breast, and eyes raised heavenward. This Mary, protectress of America, serves as an emblem of American Catholic purity, courage, and national pride. When I first saw this image, something inside me rejoiced: here was yet another familiar assertion of U. S. Catholic patriotism challenging the long-standing anti-Catholic prejudices of American culture. My Master’s thesis explored the writings of nineteenth-century Catholic authors, who championed their faith as inherently democratic, and legitimately American, in response to Protestant critiques.³⁴⁷ The *Immaculata* image appeared to express this same nationalistic impulse and crown the twentieth-century Catholic ascendancy to mainstream America, as described in Will Herberg’s *Protestant, Catholic, and Jew*.³⁴⁸ This seemed to be a particularly fitting gesture, since Catholic devotion to Mary has been a key issue of Protestant dissent. Paula Kane notes that “devotion to the Virgin Mary in the United States...defined a boundary against the other Christian Churches...The Virgin had

³⁴⁷ Maryellen Davis, “‘Popery’ or Patriotism?: Constructions of U.S. Catholic Identity in Antebellum Fiction” (master’s thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2001).

³⁴⁸ Will Herberg, *Protestant—Catholic—Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960). See pp. 136-171 for discussion of “Catholicism in America.”

long defined one such limit between the nation's two historical antagonists, Roman Catholics and Protestants."³⁴⁹ Here in this image, Catholics creatively adapted the Virgin Mary to represent their American identity, and a particular set of religious and political views. Such images inspired the transformation of beliefs into actions, reflected significantly in the American Catholic anti-Communist movement.

Another front cover reinforced the Militia's alignment of Catholicism and patriotic values. In a summer 1960 issue, an image also named "Our Lady of the United States"³⁵⁰ depicts a statue of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception with the Statue of Liberty superimposed on it. The inside caption reads: "The Immaculate Virgin, Patroness of the United States watches over the Lady of Liberty. With outstretched arms she seems to say in the words of Emma Lazarus—'...Give me your tired, your poor/Your huddled masses...'"³⁵¹ These two covers represent the MI's fusion of religious and nationalistic values. Indeed, the discourse of American (Catholic) identity saturated the organization's Marian rhetoric and imagery. Like many Catholics of the era, the group imagined a special connection between the Virgin Mary (particularly in the guise of the Immaculate Conception) and the United States. A 1959 article praises the building and dedication of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D. C., as "Mary's Triumph."³⁵² Thomas A. Tweed argues that the construction of this national Catholic shrine (later cast as "America's Church") allowed Catholics to "symbolically claim their place near America's political

³⁴⁹ Paula M. Kane, "Marian Devotion since 1940: Continuity or Casualty?" in *Habits of Devotion: Catholic Religious Practice in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. James M. O'Toole (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 93-94. Kane goes on to note that this clear division over Mary diminished somewhat after Vatican II.

³⁵⁰ *Immaculata*, June/July 1960, front cover. Copyright, C. F. Rank, 1958.

³⁵¹ *Immaculata*, June/July 1960, 2. The editors noted: "The cover picture is available in beautiful tapestry tone, decorator-framed in rich polished oak ready for the wall."

³⁵² *Immaculata*, December 1959, 5.

center.”³⁵³ For Militia members, this also meant locating the Madonna at the heart of American public life.

As I noted earlier, editors David Morgan and Sally Promey elucidate “four operations by which images participate significantly in religious practice.”³⁵⁴ For Morgan and Promey, the “power of images” in religious life may be broadly categorized into four functions: “communication,” “communion,” “commemoration,” and “imagination” or “meaning-making.”³⁵⁵ The Militia Immaculata engaged the powerful image of Mary as media icon in all four of these complex ways in the pages of its key periodical between 1950 and 1968. The MI used representations of Mary to *communicate* between the human and divine realms. Another layer of communication offers specific messages about what it means to be both Catholic and American. The MI also *commemorated* the life of its founder, St. Maximilian Kolbe, and his martyrdom during the Holocaust. Devotees sought *communion* in Militia membership, as they unite as Mary’s Army behind common causes and experience shared devotion to the Madonna. MI members also *imagined* their religious and social identities vis-à-vis Marian devotion in ways that give meaning and order to their lives and translate into ritual and political action in the public sphere.

The Militia and the Cold War

In the context of 1950s U.S. politics and culture, I was not surprised to find all four dimensions of Marian imagery to be operative in *Immaculata*’s anti-Communist rhetoric.

³⁵³ Thomas A. Tweed, “America’s Church: Roman Catholicism and Civic Space in the Nation’s Capital” in *The Visual Culture of American Religions*, eds. David Morgan and Sally M. Promey (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 86.

³⁵⁴ David Morgan and Sally M. Promey, eds., *The Visual Culture of American Religions* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 2.

³⁵⁵ Morgan and Promey, 3-15.

During much of the Cold War era,³⁵⁶ many public voices argued that to be American was to be opposed to Communism. The Militia's commitment to fighting communism might be explained by Catholics once again climbing aboard the patriotic bandwagon. The use of Mary as an anti-Communist icon was not unique to the MI. Many Catholic organizations chose to interpret the Marian apparitions at Fatima in 1917 in light of the current world turmoil as apocalyptic warnings against the tyranny of Communism. Some scholars have derided this apocalyptic rhetoric as a Catholic version of the "Red Scare" that fostered its own brands of ideological tyranny. Perhaps this was simply the reactionary impulse of conservative Catholics in a tumultuous world, who saw "Red bashing" as a way to solidify their social acceptance in American culture. As I explored the periodicals more deeply, however, anti-Communism emerged as one of the *predominant* themes of the MI and its media. Why was this the case?

A more satisfying and somewhat surprising answer came to me when I visited Marytown. In the basement of the current shrine in Libertyville, Illinois, is the Kolbe/Holocaust Memorial at Marytown. Of course, I knew that Marytown is the National Shrine of St. Maximilian Kolbe, but, until I saw the images of the Holocaust Memorial in front of me, I didn't quite comprehend the centrality of the Holocaust and World War II to the Militia's mission. The exhibit mixes actual photographs with paintings that depict the atrocities of the Holocaust and the life of St. Maximilian. Images show the deportation of Jews and Poles, life in concentration camps like Auschwitz, and, finally, the martyrdom of

³⁵⁶ The Cold War is traditionally defined as the period between 1946 and 1991, which was characterized by political conflict between the United States and allied Western European nations and the former USSR and other communist nations. The threat of global nuclear destruction permeated this era. This chapter focuses on 1950-1980 as the era in which Cold War politics figured prominently in *Immaculata* magazine. See Dianne Kirby, ed., *Religion and the Cold War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

St. Maximilian at the hands of the Nazis. As a Pole, a Catholic, and a human being, Kolbe fought against fascism. The Militia personalized this battle in commemoration of their founder. Kolbe's traditional holy card image features him dressed in his traditional Franciscan robes, but partially garbed in the striped uniform of a concentration camp prisoner with an inverted red triangle badge signifying that he was a political prisoner from Poland. The Militia's media can only be fully understood against this backdrop of the Holocaust, and the cosmic battle of good and evil members discerned in Kolbe's resistance toward the Nazis. The Militia drew on the wider climate of fear, instability, and anxiety present in American culture to apply Kolbe's history to the Cold War era.

Catholic historian James T. Fisher notes that the American alliance between anti-fascism and anti-Communism countered some of the broader perceptions of the Catholic position. Peter R. D'Agostino's *Rome in America* sheds light on this perspective:

Important strands of Catholicism and Fascism shared notable affinities, particularly a disdain for liberalism, socialism, and political democracy...American Catholics participated in this ideological transformation. As the world watched Pope Pius XI (1922-39) and Mussolini perform unprecedented gestures of reconciliation, American Catholics reiterated the Vatican's positions, embraced the symbols of Fascist Italy, and accepted the legitimacy of Italy's official state representatives...Debates about the nature of Fascism were central to religious tensions in the 1920s, when Mussolini became a protean American icon with different meanings for Catholics and Protestants.³⁵⁷

Despite this shared symbolism, D'Agostino points out: "Among American Catholics, there was never an anti-Fascist movement."³⁵⁸ Groups like the Militia Immaculata, in fact claimed to be deeply anti-Fascist and anti-Communist.

³⁵⁷ Peter R. D'Agostino, *Rome in America: Transnational Catholic Ideology from the Risorgimento to Fascism* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 13.

³⁵⁸ D'Agostino, 14.

While many Americans developed fear of Communism after World War II, Fisher asserts “Catholics had been deeply hostile to communism since the 1920s, when the U. S. S. R. began persecuting Christians.”³⁵⁹ He continues:

After the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, most American Catholics supported the forces of General Francisco Franco, who sought to oust the Soviet-backed regime that had replaced the Spanish monarchy in 1931. Franco was backed by the Spanish church as well as by the fascist governments of Germany and Italy, prompting many American liberals to link Catholic support of Franco with sympathy for the dictators Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini.³⁶⁰

Connections between Catholicism and fascist regimes may have fit well with some anti-Catholic strands of American Protestantism that were suspicious of the Church’s institutional authority. John T. McGreevy discusses the reinforcement of these suspicions among liberal intellectuals by Paul Blanshard’s popular books *American Freedom and Catholic Power* and *Communism, Democracy and Catholic Power*. The latter work “defined Catholicism and Soviet communism as parallel threats to American democracy” that both undermined free thought.³⁶¹ Fisher points out that many U. S. Catholics, such as the prominent media figure Fulton J. Sheen, responded to these accusations by arguing that fascism and communism were essentially the same, and that the Church disdained both movements.³⁶² Catholic organizations like The Militia Immaculata that identified anti-Communism as a central element of their mission might have read Blanshard’s accusations with a great sense of irony. The Militia in particular resisted totalitarianism in both its fascist and communist forms.

³⁵⁹ James T. Fisher, *Communion of Immigrants* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 120.

³⁶⁰ Fisher, 120.

³⁶¹ John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton: 2003), 166-167.

³⁶² Fisher, 120.

This resistance was intimately tied to the MI's veneration of Maximilian Kolbe, and, in fact, opposition to fascism offered the basis for the group's anti-Communism.

The battle against Communism was so important to the Militia that the editors of *Immaculata* made it the subject of their front-page commentary in the very first English language issue of the magazine in May 1950:

The world is neither at war nor at peace. Americans must get used to the idea of living dangerously. Ever since the cold war started at Potsdam in July, 1945, [sic] Stalin has been on the offensive, the U. S. and other nations retreating, as one after another nation has fallen, hoping that something would happen to stem the tide of advancing world Communist domination. Nothing has. In the background has always been the awful spectre of atomic shadows over the world, a threat which has grown worse with the passing years and months.³⁶³

The editors propose solutions to the advancing Communist cause: "true devotion to the Blessed Virgin and true devotion to the Blessed Sacrament."³⁶⁴ These two forms of devotion are the basis for all of the Militia's ritual action, and the Militia's mission is firmly grounded in this political climate.

The same issue of *Immaculata* features an article entitled "Prison Camp Martyr" by John Cogley³⁶⁵ commemorating the persecution of Maximilian Kolbe at Auschwitz. This article links the anti-Nazi and anti-Communist causes, but with a fair degree of subtlety, asking readers not to forget the evils of the Holocaust too quickly:

Nowadays we read things like this: "**Stalinism makes Hitlerism look like timid stuff,**" or "**Stalin, infinitely crueler than Adolf Hitler...**" "**Communism, a system twice as terrible as Nazism...**" The worst that could be said about Stalinism is that it is as bad as Hitlerism (as it well may be), but to be "infinitely crueler" or "twice as terrible," that would take some doing. It is, it seems to me, impossible for the human mind to imagine evil more thorough, malice more absolute than that symbolized and practiced by the Nazi party...The six million dead Jews alone—and they are only part

³⁶³ *Immaculata*, May 1950, 2.

³⁶⁴ *Immaculata*, May 1950, 2.

³⁶⁵ This article was reprinted from *Today* magazine, but is annotated by *Immaculata*'s editors.

of the story—should make us think twice before making any comparisons in Hitler’s favor...Whenever I see these gentle, almost tolerant references to Hitlerism as apposed to Stalinism, I suspect that propaganda, not pity, is moving the pen of the writer.³⁶⁶

Cogley cautions his readers not to minimize the Holocaust in their zeal for anti-Communism. By recalling the role of Kolbe, he frames the opposition to oppressive governments in Christian terms.

Since MI members interpreted their anti-Communism through the memory of the Holocaust, this may have tempered their willingness to support the type of “Red-baiting” championed by Catholic Senator Joseph McCarthy. In *Catholics and American Culture*, Mark Massa highlights the scholarly debate over American Catholic endorsement of McCarthy and his tactics. According to Massa, while some scholars see a clear Catholic allegiance to the senator, others “have convincingly argued that from McCarthy’s first appearance in the national consciousness, Catholic support for the senator and his cause was divided at best and cannot ever be termed monolithic or in any way ‘official.’”³⁶⁷ Massa finds a middle-ground and reframes the terms of the debate:

McCarthy’s anti-Communist “mission” clearly resonated with the spiritual ideals, fears, and political perceptions of great numbers of American Catholics, resulting in a fairly widespread perception—among both Protestants and Catholics—that indeed it *was*, somehow, related on *some* level to “being Catholic” in America. But granting this to be the case, it would be a gross simplification (as well as historically untrue) to portray “McCarthyism” as *Catholic* in any strictly institutional or ecclesiological sense: some bishops supported him, others did not; some Catholic periodicals valorized him, others roundly condemned him.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ *Immaculata*, May 1950, 7, bold type appears in the original.

³⁶⁷ Mark S. Massa, *Catholics and American Culture: Fulton Sheen, Dorothy Day, and the Notre Dame Football Team* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 60.

³⁶⁸ Massa, 61.

The tenor of the Militia's anti-Communist rhetoric seems to support Massa's contention that U. S. Catholic disagreement with McCarthy arose primarily from *religious* motives.³⁶⁹

An editor's piece from 1951 on Fatima reveals the Militia's frustration with McCarthy-esque approaches to Communism, and portrays them as counter to the message of Mary. The article identifies "prayer and penance" as requested by the Virgin at Fatima in 1917 as the only productive means of combating Communism and blames human neglect of Mary's demands for the global conflict: "We have tried to change the meaning of her words. We have tried to substitute human action for penance; are resorting to lobbying and Red-baiting to gain our ends...which is why Russia has captured half the world...and now threatens the whole world."³⁷⁰ On a spiritual level, McCarthyism is impotent, the piece suggests, and a distraction from the Madonna's message: "Our Lady has asked us to pray, not to make speeches. She has asked us to do penance, not write to Harry Truman to say we are against Communism. The air is full of speeches and anti-communist trash, but has it availed anything? Had we prayed with half the energy we have wasted on preaching to others..."³⁷¹

The Militia Immaculata's anti-Communism was squarely at odds with McCarthyism because it was a religious campaign that imagined Communist *others* as potential *non-others*—as subjects worthy and capable of conversion. McCarthy-inspired anti-Communism, as political discourse, relies on the presupposition that Communists are distinct *others* that are immutable enemies. This "Us vs. Them" approach facilitated the inward turn to conspiracy, and the effort to root out Communist sympathizers—the "Them" within "Us."

³⁶⁹ Massa, 81.

³⁷⁰ *Immaculata*, January 1951, 16.

³⁷¹ *Immaculata*, January 1951, 16.

The Militia substituted Christian principles and self-reflection for the particular brand of political paranoia promoted by McCarthy-ites:

Is it better to keep working on the principle “Down with Communism! The Reds are no good!” Or would it be better to go to the last pew, and strike our breasts saying, “O Lord, be merciful to us, sinful men. We have not done the work Thou gavest us to do. We have been more interested in watching television than in the message of Mary, we have sought money instead of holiness, we have been more concerned with the fortunes of the Yankees and Notre Dame than with the fortunes of the poor folks over on the other side of the railroad. Be merciful, spare us, O Lord, for what has come upon us is of our own making!”³⁷²

Here, the Militia offered a spiritual critique of American culture, and a redefinition of first principles along Marian and Catholic lines. These principles yielded a plan of action: “First we have to unlearn about Communism! It is necessary to fight against evil, yes, but it is more important to fight FOR the good. It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness. Our preoccupation with Communism and Communists has been almost pathological.”³⁷³ The article suggests that Catholics, by conscience, should reclaim their basic religious values and “start shouting about what’s right about Christianity, for Heaven’s sake—because hardly anyone seems to know, really.”³⁷⁴

By then end of the 1950s, the Militia did occasionally report on the proceedings of the House Un-American Activities Committee, and admitted some solidarity with Senator McCarthy as a victim of an “Anti-Anti-Communist Smear” campaign.³⁷⁵ Some articles waxed conspiratorial, such as 1959’s “Reds Ordered to Infiltrate, Split Church” which describes a “set of directives, issued by the Chinese Communist Party, ordering party

³⁷² *Immaculata*, January 1951, 16.

³⁷³ *Immaculata*, January 1951, 16.

³⁷⁴ *Immaculata*, January 1951, 16.

³⁷⁵ *Immaculata*, September 1961, 2.

members ‘to enter into the heart’ of the Catholic and Protestant church to bring about their destruction... published here [Rome] by Fides, mission news agency.”³⁷⁶ In line with Massa’s argument, even the Militia’s media was not internally monolithic regarding McCarthy and his strategies. In general, however, *Immaculata* portrayed his style of anti-Communism as unfavorable, unproductive, and, perhaps, un-Christian.

Issues of *Immaculata* later in the decade also reconfirmed the MI’s *evangelistic* approach to anti-Communism. Exposés such as “Mary — Behind the Iron Curtain” strove to keep readers sympathetic to the effects of Communism on Catholics abroad and aware of Mary’s special interest in their cause: “A priest in exile from Communist-captured Romania disclosed last May that the Blessed Virgin Mary is reported to have appeared repeatedly to a saintly woman there, encouraging faithful priests and people, reproaching priests who went over to the Kremlin-dominated Orthodox Church, and promising through her Immaculate Heart, victory for the Church over the enemies of God.”³⁷⁷

A 1958 article titled “Adopt a Communist” reminds readers “...God does not need us to judge and condemn those who are failing. But God does need us to save them.”³⁷⁸ The author goes on to quote the “Benedictine publication, NAROD” on the issue:

Those who are Communists by persuasion are relatively few. If we lined up all sincere Catholics against all Communists by conviction, sincere Catholics would surely by far outnumber real Communists. Our surest and perhaps they only effective weapon against Communism is of a spiritual nature. Communism is basically a spiritual malady and can be successfully fought by spiritual weapons alone... Catholics are invited to adopt one Communist and make him a special object of their prayers and sacrifices...³⁷⁹

³⁷⁶ *Immaculata*, October 1959, 2. Courtesy NCWC.

³⁷⁷ *Immaculata*, December 1950, 14. Article “reprinted with permission from the Universe Bulletin, Cleveland, Ohio.”

³⁷⁸ *Immaculata*, May 1958, 2.

³⁷⁹ *Immaculata*, May 1958, 2.

The spiritual war that the Militia waged through image and rhetoric was indeed an evangelistic crusade. Again, the MI did not attempt to alienate its members from Communists, but rather, promoted identity between the two. An inset box later in this issue shows the silhouette of an ordinary looking man. The heading reads: “REMEMBER...This Unknown Communist has a SOUL as dear to God as your own soul...and that Christ died on Calvary as truly for him as He died for you. Will you be generous enough to pray for the conversion of this one Soul? If enough prayers are offered, Communism may be eliminated from the world!”³⁸⁰ The text goes on to reprint text on the topic from the Green Scapular Foundation of Valley Stream, New York:

Communism is Godlessness—and no Communist will ask for the Grace of conversion, but you may obtain this gift for him if you will pray. Everyone has a Guardian Angel. Will you join in prayer with the Guardian Angel of an unknown Communist and ask for his conversion? Then when you stand before God you may meet face to face the Soul which has been brought there through *your* efforts. Our Lady of Fatima asked us for Penance, Reparation, the Daily Rosary, Holy Communion, the Five First Saturdays, and Consecration to Her Immaculate Heart. *Do your best!*³⁸¹

The *Immaculata* editors inserted an extensive note into Cogley’s article, highlighting the importance of St. Maximilian, under his picture:

Father Maximilian Kolbe was one of the martyrs spoken of by Our Lady at Fatima in 1917, when she said that if her requests were not heard during the years to come, there would be persecution of the Church and martyrdom for millions. One of the reasons his enemies were so avid for the shedding of Father Maximilian’s blood was the fact that his whole life had burned like a hard, gem-like flame of love for his Heavenly King in the Eucharist of His Love, and his Heavenly Queen, for whom he labored in the vineyard of souls.³⁸²

³⁸⁰ *Immaculata*, May 1958, 8.

³⁸¹ *Immaculata*, May 1958, 8.

³⁸² *Immaculata*, May 1950, 7.

The note continues to describe Kolbe's influence in the realm of Catholic media, citing his Marian publications with a circulation of "over two million."³⁸³ The editors tied Kolbe back to their own work, suggesting his intervention on behalf of the Militia: "like all saints, he is to have his most spectacular success after his death, namely, in the labors which he will assist by his prayers in Heaven."³⁸⁴ The magazine itself shows the influence of St. Maximilian:

Surely, Immaculata owes not a little of its existence to the merits gained by Father Maximilian's prayer and blood. Immaculata is a magazine published by his successors in the U.S. and dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary at Fatima, as would have it, and to the spread of Perpetual Adoration here as America's answer to Our Lady's requests for reparation, Rosary, and consecration. (If a sufficient number of people respond she has promised deliverance from the horrors of World War III, now threatening—more so than ever since the U.S.-Russian controversy over the "privateer" plane shot down by the Russians.)³⁸⁵

In the spirit of St. Maximilian, Militia members embraced Marian devotion and mass media to raise a religious army they hoped would protect America from "World War III."

MI devotees mapped the world—literally and figuratively—by using their values as a compass. An image from 1951 illustrates this act of mapping in dramatic fashion. A map of the world embedded in an article on Fatima and anti-Communism shows a rosary weaving through the seven continents.³⁸⁶ The legend tells us that the hammer and sickle designates "places where Communism exists" and "places where Communism is a threat." Sites of Christian significance, including many Marian apparition sites, are labeled with names and crosses. Revealingly, the only locations distinguished in North America are Wisconsin and Chicago—the centers of the Militia universe that constitute Marytown, U.S.A.

³⁸³ *Immaculata*, May 1950, 7.

³⁸⁴ *Immaculata*, May 1950, 7.

³⁸⁵ *Immaculata*, May 1950, 7.

³⁸⁶ *Immaculata*, January 1951, 15.

Mary's Army and the Rhetoric of Militancy

Chapter Four briefly examined the ways that the Militia Immaculata called both men and women to militant service in the name of Mary. By examining this rhetoric in the context of Cold War politics, we can see that this organization sought to develop an army of “crusaders” against Communism and world strife. In a 1950 issue of *Immaculata*, the editors write “confidentially—about crusaders:”

In the last issue of *Immaculata*, we informed our readers about the Holy Year Crusade of Prayer and Penance for World Peace. This Crusade is sponsored by the Catholic War Veterans of the United States of America and the Ladies Auxiliary to the Catholic War Veterans, and is under the Spiritual Direction of the Franciscan Fathers of Marytown, Our Lady of Fatima Friary, Kenosha, Wisconsin.³⁸⁷

The friars placed themselves and Marytown at the spiritual center of the battleground for world peace. Those who participated in the crusade were required to meet rigorous standards of devotion and conduct: “We remind all Peace-loving people everywhere that people must make themselves worthy of Peace. Our Lady is not only asking for prayers but also for a change of heart. THERE CAN BE NO PEACE WITHOUT A MORAL CHANGE.”³⁸⁸ Mary’s message is one of reform. MI members pledged themselves to a life of moral examination through prayer as part of their obedience to Mary.

The back cover of this issue closes with a striking image of a rosary around the globe. The heading reads: “The World’s Chain of Hope...” The advertisement interrogates the reader:

Are you prepared—TO JOIN THE ARMY? The Army making the World Wide Crusade of Prayer and Penance for PEACE?” The Veterans are marching again—this time to the shrines of the world on six continents, to storm heaven to stop the war NOW! Marching men with guns can destroy the world: Marching men with prayers

³⁸⁷ *Immaculata*, September 1950, 17.

³⁸⁸ *Immaculata*, September 1950, 18.

will save it! WHEN MILLIONS JOIN THEIR RANKS, WILL YOU ENLIST?
Make the Catholic War Veteran Novena privately; or join the many Post-Novenas
held publicly...³⁸⁹

The public novenas were held at locations across the world, from St. Peter's to Fatima to Japan to Marytown. The MI employed many ads in the style of Army recruitment, with Mary serving as a Catholic "Uncle Sam," beckoning readers to serve on her behalf. The May 1950 back cover depicts a statue of Mary at Fatima, with headlines imploring, "Wake Up America! Now... Before it is too Late...Our Lady Needs You!"³⁹⁰ The Virgin's eyes look squarely in those of viewers, calling concerned Catholics to action. For the MI, the most potent mode of action was prayer. Prayers serve as powerful weapons is the rosary crusade, led by Mary as its general.

The public prayer campaigns of the Militia exemplified the shift away from strictly private devotions among many American Catholics catalyzed by twentieth-century wartime concerns: "In the Bible-centered Protestant culture of America in the nineteenth century, Catholics felt obliged to express their devotions privately. It was not until the 1930s and 1940s that massive public rallies and parades came to characterize popular Catholicism. During the First and Second World Wars Catholics were encouraged to solicit the Virgin Mary to boost resolve at home and on the front."³⁹¹ The Militia's Cold War appeals for the Madonna's protection intensified these earlier impulses, as the spectre of nuclear destruction loomed over the global horizon.

³⁸⁹ *Immaculata*, September 1950, back cover.

³⁹⁰ *Immaculata*, May 1950, back cover.

³⁹¹ Kane, "Marian Devotion since 1940: Continuity or Casualty?" 94.

Numerous images continued the Militia's propagandistic approach to membership. The June/July 1951 back cover shows a photograph of a young girl in a Catholic school uniform with her hands clasped in prayer. The caption reads:

Many Are Called, But...Few Are Fit to Be Chosen
THE GLOBAL STRUGGLE TODAY IS NOT FOR
Separation of Church and State
but for
Separation of God and State
Separation of God and People!
THE PEOPLE MUST FIGHT!³⁹²

The text quotes Pope Pius X on the perils of separating Church and State: "God is driven out of politics by this theory of the separation of Church and State, which he labels a "great error of modern times."³⁹³

This rhetoric is especially noteworthy given the long history of American Catholic support for separation of Church and State as a defense against anti-Catholicism. Influential Catholics during the Republican Era (1790-1830) such as John Carroll and John England tried to distance Catholics from European notions of unity of Church and State. Here, the Militia called for a reintroduction of God into political life. The argument runs parallel (if not counter) to political arguments against Communism in pursuit of free and democratic governments (which advocate principles such as the separation of Church and State). The Militia's argument focused, however, on preserving freedom to believe in God, and casts Communism as a "godless" ideology.

The advertisement attempts to inspire the reader to take ritual action as a means of political change: "THE VOICE OF GOD, THE VOICE OF THE POPE CALLS YOU NOW,

³⁹² *Immaculata*, June/July 1951, back cover.

³⁹³ *Immaculata*, June/July 1951, back cover.

BUT Are you fit to be chosen? The Sacraments, Prayer, Holy Hours, Retreats if possible, are of prime necessity NOW. Begin with total consecration to Our Lady NOW.”³⁹⁴ The text ends with a Militia slogan: “WHEN YOU CONSECRATE YOURSELF TO OUR LADY, AND MEAN IT, THINGS BEGIN TO HAPPEN.” This slogan suggests that when devotees act to transform the world, the Virgin transforms their own lives, in turn. Militia members—Mary’s soldiers—became instruments of “grace” for humanity:

...Our Lady is looking for help to well the channels of grace. “Immaculata” is designed to reach the active agents for such channels rather than the passive, well taken care of by older publications. The need now is not for passive Catholics, but active, militant lay apostles, who will take Christ to the people in the Christian message and bring the people to Christ, dwelling in the Church and in the rectory. Since the present world crisis is at the bottom a religious issue, and since the issues are not of one belief against another, but of all-out war between belief in good and belief in evil, we must suspend much of our business as usual and be drafted for Christ.³⁹⁵

These “militant lay apostles” imitated their founding “knight” St. Maximilian Kolbe and fight under the banner of Mary in the ultimate religious battle between good and evil. Their actions, however small, were significant in this spiritual war.

In the MI’s militant Marian imagery and rhetoric, the four operations of Mary as media icon—communication, commemoration, communion, and imagination—collapse into each other, propelled forward with the expectation of saintly and divine intervention. These representations claim to *communicate* the “message of Mary,” just as they *commemorate* the devotion of St. Kolbe. The Militia’s media fosters *communion*, by making members feel at one with the Virgin and their fellow knights. Perhaps most importantly, this media creatively *imagines* a totalistic view of the world, through the lens of Militia theology and its images of Mary as media icons that participate in the realities they represent. This worldview is also a

³⁹⁴ *Immaculata*, June/July 1951, back cover.

³⁹⁵ *Immaculata*, February 1951, 18.

call to specific ritual and political actions: Total Consecration, Eucharistic Adoration, and Catholic anti-Communism.

Apocalypticism and the MI: The Legacy of Fatima

The urgent and apocalyptic nature of the MI involvement in the Cold War had roots in the 1917 reported apparition of the Virgin Mary at Fatima. Many devotees read Mary's message at Fatima as a prophetic warning against the total destruction of the world. Advocates of Marian prophecy believed that Mary had "foretold World War II in 1917, before World War I ended."³⁹⁶ Mary, they argued, also had envisioned the present political situation as a consequence of human intransigence:

She foretold the rise of Communism as well; and today, because (as she herself complained in her apparition in 1948) few did as she asked, or even believed in her, more than half the world is under the Soviet iron heel. The other half is seriously threatened. Her last known warning was the destruction of entire nations: so far there is not the return to prayer and penance which she asked—and—the H-bombs are getting worse, now capable of annihilating all earthly life, as the scientists proclaim.³⁹⁷

Devotees cite lack of prayer and attention to Mary's warnings as the cause of a violent, unstable world situation.³⁹⁸

There is little comforting about the Madonna in the guise of apocalyptic prophetess for an atomic age. In February 1951, the lead story shows the image of a city skyline and an atomic blast with the headline: "We Can Still Change ~~WE COULD HAVE CHANGED THE~~

³⁹⁶ *Immaculata*, May 1950, 13.

³⁹⁷ *Immaculata*, May 1950, 13.

³⁹⁸ Many Marian devotional groups grew out of the Fatima apparitions. One notable organization is The Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima, established in the U. S. in 1946. The Blue Army still exists today. See its website at <http://www.wafusa.org/>.

HISTORY OF THE WORLD.”³⁹⁹ An illustration diagrams the potential impact of an atomic blast and its zones of destruction. The caption reads: “Pictures like these were recently released by civilian defense authorities to prepare the American public for the emerging possibility that American cities may be vaporized into atomic smoke at some time in the future.”⁴⁰⁰ Once again, the authors connect their predictions to Fatima while inspiring fear and awe in devoted readers:

These pictures show just how atomic fission would look at close range. Curiously enough, they look like this sun prodigy of Fatima transferred to scenes over New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, etc. Even the diagrams like the above and right looked not so much like atomic bursts over our cities but like Fatima’s sun come closer. At Fatima, where Mary “swung the sun, a trinket at her wrist,” she showed the enormous power she had over the sun’s prodigious energy, to preserve its place as light of the world, rather than its crematory. This same power is ours—if we ask it!⁴⁰¹

Witnesses at Fatima reported visions of an intense and spiraling sun in tandem with miraculous apparitions of the Virgin. Here, the sun is a potential evil demiurge manifested in an atomic blast, or, by contrast, the supernatural force of the Virgin Mary to save the world. The way to harness the sun-like power for the good is by practicing Marian spirituality, penitential prayer, and perpetual Eucharistic adoration.

The prayer crusade is directed toward

...the modern world, where the armies of Communism are bent upon destroying the people of God and claiming the world for His enemies. If enough arms are raised in prayer, the fortunes of war turn in favor of Christian triumph; when they are not, the tide of battle turns against us in every case.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁹ *Immaculata*, February 1951, 2-3.

⁴⁰⁰ *Immaculata*, February 1951, 4.

⁴⁰¹ *Immaculata*, February 1951, 5.

⁴⁰² *Immaculata*, February 1951, 2.

The MI offered evidence to justify its crusade and God's justice in the world, by suggesting that devotion and prayer brought about an end to World War II, rather than the atomic bombs themselves. The editors argued that the war's end was an act of divine intervention:

The true explanation seemed to be that God, pleased with so many prayers and sacrifices, had allowed the atomic bombs to be used as instruments to bring the war to quick end on the feast of the Assumption... It had happened as Our Lady had indicated in her revelation of 1917. Prayer and reparation were ascending to heaven in sufficient volume to secure peace, and so God had sent it.⁴⁰³

The article suggests that a decrease in prayer and penance led to the rise of Communism, and "God showed His displeasure in Korea."⁴⁰⁴ The solution, according to the MI, was renewed zeal in prayer and direct action. The article discusses a woman on the West Coast who acted through Mary's influence to begin a Perpetual Eucharistic adoration program at her parish: "The lady mentioned in this story, on the other hand, is an instrument in the preparing of thousands of Americans for a better day, a day in which atomic power will serve man and man in turn serve God. Is there a similar lady in your parish? If there is, seek her out; make her task your own! She is your best friend!"⁴⁰⁵

Rituals of Engagement

An article from 1951 on "The Militia Mission" by Brother Bernard, O.F.M. Conventual, situates the origin of the MI within a cosmic battle. The Militia claimed to be engaged in an "ancient war" for souls that began in the Garden of Eden, when the serpent was told that

⁴⁰³ *Immaculata*, February 1951, 2.

⁴⁰⁴ *Immaculata*, February 1951, 2.

⁴⁰⁵ *Immaculata*, February 1951, 4.

Woman would crush him under her heel.⁴⁰⁶ The Virgin Mary is the woman who can crush the “dragon,” and redeem the blunder of Eve in the garden. This is her *raison d’être*: “In this war of souls the Militia has a special mission, a mission springing directly from the mission of Our Lady herself. Our Lady’s mission is to crush the head of the serpent...just as the serpent’s avowed purpose is to lead all souls to destruction, so Our Lady’s purpose is to resist, overcome and totally conquer him, upsetting all his schemes.”⁴⁰⁷ The Madonna “has been given the mission of restoring the human race to Grace through her Divine Motherhood and the Mediation of all Graces, making void the Serpent’s victory in the Garden.”⁴⁰⁸ She fulfills her sacred mission in two primary ways: by giving birth to Christ, the Son of God, and redeemer of humankind, and by serving as “Mediatrice,” primary mediator between human beings, Christ, and God. Militia members were duty-bound to allow the Madonna to work through them for her own purposes and battles: “All that happens to the Militia soldier is in the mysterious strategy of the Immaculate Virgin. The soldier who knows this, and keeps himself on the alert accordingly, will carry his warfare into every sector that opens itself to him, knowing that it is the Immaculate Lady who is directing the operation.”⁴⁰⁹

The Militia employed the language of “cooperation” to describe soldiers’ relationships to the Virgin. Soldiers pledged to “serve her in such a way that through it she may bring her protection and mediation directly to individual souls.”⁴¹⁰ They yielded to Mary’s will in all things as part of the spiritual “slavery” of their consecration: “The knight

⁴⁰⁶ *Immaculata*, August 1951, 2.

⁴⁰⁷ *Immaculata*, August 1951, 2.

⁴⁰⁸ *Immaculata*, August 1951, 10.

⁴⁰⁹ *Immaculata*, August 1951, 2.

⁴¹⁰ *Immaculata*, August 1951, 10.

of the Immaculate forms the habit of dutifully placing all things in her hands as her absolute property...”⁴¹¹

Readers are reminded “the effectiveness of the Militia and the individual member does not depend on his own particular natural gifts or surroundings, but rather on the degree of participation which the member shall attain in this mission of Our Lady by his cooperation with grace.”⁴¹² Prayer reinforced this act of *cooperation*:

“I ask of you, O my August Queen, only that I might cooperate with you as a worthy soldier in your divine mission, for the expected coming of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ in to the world.” The soldiers of the Militia pray this daily in the daily renewal of their total consecration.⁴¹³

Brother Bernard identifies “cooperation ‘as a worthy soldier’” as “the whole story of the Militia’s Program of Action.”⁴¹⁴ As members of the army, “they know by cooperating with the Conqueress of the Author of evil, they shall repair their broken wills and crush Satan as he raises his head in their own personal lives. Wearing the Medal of the Immaculate Conception (Miraculous Medal) and invoking the Immaculate daily they shall obtain for themselves a share in the graces which crushed this diabolic head.”⁴¹⁵ Soldiers for Mary directly fought the forces of evil directly by cooperating with her wishes.

The August 1951 issue of *Immaculata* closes with a photograph of construction workers on a high scaffold, apparently returning a statue of Christ to its place on a building. The headline reads: “Put Him Back—Cooperation is the Key. RESTORING the world to

⁴¹¹ *Immaculata*, August 1951, 11.

⁴¹² *Immaculata*, August 1951, 11.

⁴¹³ *Immaculata*, August 1951, 10.

⁴¹⁴ *Immaculata*, August 1951, 10.

⁴¹⁵ *Immaculata*, August 1951, 11.

Christ is everybody's job. To be Christ's followers today takes courage, skill and a certain amount of daring—the courage, skill and daring which Our Lady herself teaches and imparts to her soldiers.”⁴¹⁶ A small caption under the image reads: “It takes cooperation to preserve lives and accomplish impossible tasks on towering buildings. Likewise in the war for souls it is cooperation which is the life principle—cooperation with Grace, with Our Lady, and with fellow knights of the Immaculate.”⁴¹⁷ Cooperation and surrender to the will of Mary returns Christ to the world and expands the work of evangelization. “In the War for Souls, One soul is enough, as a docile instrument in the hands of Our Lady to open up a whole new front in the conquest of souls. WHEN YOU CONSECRATE YOURSELF TO OUR LADY, AND MEAN IT, THINGS BEGIN TO HAPPEN.”⁴¹⁸ Once again, the rituals of devotion translate into action.

In April 1952, lay contributor Clementine Lenta wrote “As the Battle Quickens—Check Your Weapons”: “We know, too, that at Fatima Our Blessed Mother showed us the way to victory. She pointed out the three weapons which we must use—SACRIFICE... PRAYER... CONSECRATION TO HER IMMACULATE HEART.”⁴¹⁹ The militia soldier lived and fought by these *rituals of engagement*. MI members observed these rituals with the appropriate *attitude*, *armor*, and *ammunition* prescribed by Mary. The knights must demonstrate an attitude of devotion to the Virgin Mother and her son, cooperation with her intentions and the work of other members, and sacrifice of self for others. For armor, they sought protection through prayer, Marian consecration, and wearing of the Miraculous

⁴¹⁶ *Immaculata*, August 1951, back cover.

⁴¹⁷ *Immaculata*, August 1951, back cover.

⁴¹⁸ *Immaculata*, August 1951, back cover.

⁴¹⁹ *Immaculata*, April 1952, 10.

Medal. As ammunition, they employed prayer, Eucharistic adoration, evangelistic fervor, and Catholic mass media.

Some images depicted the power of prayer quite literally: the back cover of a 1958 issue of *Immaculata* reads “Mankind’s Hope” and shows a hand on a lever marked “Nuclear War,” being held back by a hand marked “prayer.”⁴²⁰ The Militia referred to itself as the “Weapon of the Warrior Queen” and part of Mary’s plan for world redemption.⁴²¹ *Immaculata* also frequently described the Eucharist as a potent armament. In April 1953, an image of the communion chalice and consecrated host on a target is superimposed on an atomic blast photo with this heading: “INFINITELY MORE POWERFUL THAN THE A Or H-BOMB! THIS IS GOD.”⁴²²

Like many of their American Catholic contemporaries in the public sphere, *Immaculata*’s editors were notably self-aware of their roles as defenders of the faith. They proposed the Catholic Press as an antidote to America’s spiritual ills and ammunition in Mary’s spiritual crusade:

Fight the Father of Lies, the Devil of Impurity...Mary Means PEACE—for YOU/ Your Family, Our Nation, the World/ Help Others to Understand. Keep America Spiritually Strong/ Our Freedom, Security Depends on it. READ THE BEST!!...By Supporting Your Catholic Press.⁴²³

Each year, the magazine widely publicized the national Catholic Press Month, and celebrated its participation as an agent of Catholic information.

⁴²⁰ *Immaculata*, September 1958, back cover.

⁴²¹ *Immaculata*, October 1953, 18.

⁴²² *Immaculata*, April 1953, back cover.

⁴²³ *Immaculata*, February 1954, back cover.

An advertisement from 1953 takes the weapon metaphor farther. The headline reads: “Help Knock Out Secularism, Communism, Materialism.” The central image shows soldiers loading a Howitzer artillery piece labeled “Catholic Press” with shells labeled “TRUTH.” The words “Secularism,” “Communism,” and “Materialism” are individually ablaze, under fire from the “Catholic Press.” The caption asserts:

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER...KNOW the TRUTH ABOUT LIFE and LOVE...KNOW HOW to LIVE HERE and HEREAFTER...YOUR CATHOLIC PRESS WILL HELP YOU TO DO THIS! It will help you to be able to successfully fulfill your destiny as a Christian, as a disciple and an apostle of Jesus Christ. BUT IT ALSO NEEDS YOU—YOUR SUPPORT! We hope “Immaculata” is contributing substantially to the above cause. You can help us do our part by your continued support and by passing on to others your used copies of our magazine.⁴²⁴

The Militia placed itself at the heart of Catholic media and on the frontlines of a global battle for “Truth.” The ad also acknowledged the inherently evangelistic intentions of Mary’s army.

The Militia also made an effort to connect its values with mainstream media. In March 1954, *Immaculata*’s back cover reprints a political cartoon from the *Chicago Daily News* that portrays a downtrodden Christ, bloodied by his crown of thorns. Each thorn is marked separately with the phrases “EMPTY RITUAL,” “COMPROMISE,” “MATERIALISM,” “UNBELIEF,” “HYPOCRISY,” and “CYNICISM.”⁴²⁵ This inclusion suggests that *Immaculata*’s editors did not see themselves on the fringes of public discourse, but rather saw the “Catholic Press” as an instrument within the broader media context.

⁴²⁴ *Immaculata*, February 1953, 19.

⁴²⁵ *Immaculata*, March 1954, back cover.

The Militia's striking use of graphic art to communicate its message, especially surrounding issues of war and peace, shows its currency with mid-century media trends. The magazine created its own aesthetic by grouping images by theme or style from month to month, and often relies on readers' memories to connect the dots. The end page of December 1952 shows a realistically drawn image of the earth, encircled by a menacing serpent and perched upon by a grotesque vulture and the Soviet hammer and sickle. The heading reads: "TRAGIC PLIGHT of the WORLD...All have a share in the guilt! All must seek refuge in The Infinite Mercy of God." Captions elaborate on the drawing: "The serpent, advocate of sin and materialism has wormed its way into the very core of our Christian civilization. The Bird of Ill-Omen, the carrion-eating vulture, eagerly awaits the spiritual death rattle of its victims."⁴²⁶ Readers are left to ponder this frightening image of global destruction.

January 1953 offers a companion image on its back cover. A similar globe is wrapped not in a serpent, but in a rosary. Hovering over the earth is a dove of peace (symbol of the Holy Spirit) and Mary's immaculate heart (on fire, encircled in roses, and pierced by a sword). A contrasting headline suggests, "A NEW YEAR—A NEW OPPORTUNITY...To Help Build a New, Peaceful World, But a World Submissive to Its Creator, and His Laws...THE REIGN OF MARY WILL ASSURE THE REIGN OF CHRIST AND HIS SPIRIT OF LOVE AND PEACE."⁴²⁷

Another powerful image inhabits back cover of the May 1953 issue. A traditional image of Our Lady of the Rosary at Fatima is juxtaposed with a drawing of a Communist soldier with a gun, accompanied by text: "The Commies KNOW who their greatest enemy

⁴²⁶ *Immaculata*, December 1952, back cover. Caption notes: "painting and design by Hildegard Kaufman."

⁴²⁷ *Immaculata*, January 1953, back cover. The artist is not listed, but it looks like another work by H. Kaufman.

is... ‘The thing that impressed me most, and what I’d like to impress on our people, is that what the Communists hate most is Mary.’”⁴²⁸ The display also cites biblical support for Mary’s threat to Communism: “Who is she that cometh forth...terrible as an army set in battle array?” (Cant. 6: 3 & 9); “I will put enmities between thee and the woman and thy seed and her seed and she shall crush thy head and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel.” (Gen. 3:15)⁴²⁹ The editors did not portray Mary’s role as a general in the Cold War as rhetoric or hyperbole, but as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

The Militia and the U. S. Armed Forces: Korea and Vietnam

As the Militia’s rhetoric of militancy suggests, members of this organization certainly envisioned themselves as soldiers in a spiritual army led by Mary. However, the Militia also expressed a clear reverence for the work of more corporeal defenders—the U. S. armed forces. The Militia was not unique among Marian organizations in showing its support for American troops. *The Miraculous Medal* magazine, published by the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal, featured extensive coverage of World War II and the plight of U. S. soldiers. In the pre-war years, *The Miraculous Medal* included a column entitled “Our Lady in the News” that places the Madonna at the center of global happenings. During 1941, the magazine anticipated U.S. involvement in the war by addressing the many soldiers in training. Editor Father Skelly’s “With the Director” column from March 1941 implores

God Guide Our Leaders: Mary Guard Our Boys...Thousands upon thousands of our Catholic youth are today being mobilized and assigned to various Government training camps, there to undergo a year of intensive defense education. Safe though

⁴²⁸ *Immaculata*, May 1953, back cover. This quote is attributed to the Reverend Robert Greene, M. M., “Maryknoll, January 1953.

⁴²⁹ *Immaculata*, May 1953, back cover.

we believe them to be, there may be many hazards. Certain it is that every Catholic boy in such camps should wear on his breast the Medal that Our Lady has given us. Already I have sent 5000 Miraculous Medals and some literature to the priest in charge of religious activities and spiritual facilities in the Government's defense program.⁴³⁰

The CAMM continued its campaign, "Medals for Soldiers," throughout the war, with many enlisted men and their relatives writing to laud the benefits of wearing the medals and to recount stories of Mary's miraculous intervention.

A column called "Under Mary's Protection" appeared in December 1941 and continued as a regular feature.⁴³¹ The header illustration for this column features a drawing of the Miraculous Medal, superimposed on a cross, with rays of light emanating from it. Storm clouds fill the background, as warplanes circle overhead. In the left foreground, armed soldiers on foot march into battle. In the right foreground, a naval ship sails in ocean water with guns pointed toward an unseen enemy. Mary's arms are extended and spread in the medal that recreates the famous Parisian apparition, as if to gather the soldiers under her protective mantle.

The Miraculous Medal featured many war stories (some true, some fictionalized, and others not designated) that suggested Mary's importance to the troops. One notable piece, "Mamma's Boy," by Lieutenant J. T. Materi, describes the story of Private Jim Corning who is taunted by his fellow soldiers for writing a letter to his mother every day. After Jim's heroic showing and narrow escape from harm during a dangerous training exercise, his friend discovers that Jim's biological mother died when he was a baby. Jim reveals that he has been

⁴³⁰ *The Miraculous Medal*, March 1941, 2-3.

⁴³¹ *The Miraculous Medal*, December 1941, 28-29.

writing to his other “mother”—the Virgin Mary—who protects and cares for him. No one in the battery calls him “Mamma’s Boy” after that day.⁴³²

By the time *Immaculata* magazine began in 1949, the MI was ready to embrace the established tradition of supporting the armed forces. However, this practice had special significance for the Militia because of their self-defined military status. As we have seen, the Militia interpreted Cold War global politics on a grand scale. Anti-communism formed an essential component of the group’s identity during the 1950s and 60s. Consequently, *Immaculata*’s treatment of the Korean and Vietnam wars offers insights into the Militia’s politics and theology.

U. S. involvement in the United Nations’ “police action” against a Communist-led invasion of South Korea by North Korea began in 1950, just a year after the Militia *Immaculata* organized.⁴³³ The Korean conflict serves as a frequent point of reference in the early years of *Immaculata*, supplying a concrete example of the more abstract anti-Communist fears emphasized by the Militia. As I noted above, the MI read events in Korea as evidence of God’s “displeasure” with the rise of Communism, and Christians’ failure to convert the Communist world according to Mary’s requests at Fatima.⁴³⁴ Editors issued an urgent call to prayer to end the violence. One back cover showed an image of war boats accompanied by the following plea:

Would you rather pray now OR LATER? Would you rather pray that this corrupt, sinful world return to godly living now, while there is still a little time, OR—Would you rather wait until a little later when you, or your husband, or your son, or brother is dying...on the battlefield like perhaps the boy next door is already doing in Korea?

⁴³² *The Miraculous Medal*, September 1942, 4-7.

⁴³³ Department of the Navy—Naval Historical Center, *The Korean War, June 1950-July 1953, Introductory Overview and Special Image Selection*, <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/events/kowar/kowar.htm>.

⁴³⁴ *Immaculata*, February 1951, 2.

Would you prevent their being killed NOW—while the war is still localized? Or would you rather assist at the requiem when the situation is beyond correction—when God has required your life, or that of your dear one [as] a just recompense for the failure of all of us to heed the warnings of Our Blessed Lady at Fatima? Don't you think it's time now to... "Come to the Foot of the Altar...Here great graces will be bestowed upon all who ask for them." (Words of Our Lady to St. Catherine Labouré at Paris in 1830.)⁴³⁵

Here, the Militia called its members to arm themselves with prayer as a means of assisting U. S. forces in the "containment" of Communism and restoring peace to the world. A May 1951 article continues this theme with a photograph of a tank and soldiers. The caption reads: "Korea: the nightmare of brutality, death and destruction have abated somewhat but the lull is an uneasy one. The question hovers over all like a shifting fog: 'What next?' The answer comes from Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane: 'Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.'"⁴³⁶

The Militia also demonstrated concern for the welfare of American troops and places them under Mary's care through the Scapular devotion. A photograph shows two soldiers, with one pointing to his helmet: "Glad someone's missing! In South Korea, Sergeant Michael Zipay of Kingston, Pennsylvania, shows the bullet hole in his helmet to Private First Class Arthur Barnes of Macomb, Illinois. The North Korean bullet awoke him but did not hurt him. A "close shave" indeed (—"haircut" would be a better word), all of which goes to emphasize just why our servicemen should never be without a Scapular."⁴³⁷

During the 1950s-1970s, the Militia trod a narrow beam between supporting anti-Communist military efforts and advocating peace. The complexity of U. S. participation in the Vietnam War further unsettled this balancing act. The Militia's attitude toward conflict

⁴³⁵ *Immaculata*, April 1951, back cover.

⁴³⁶ *Immaculata*, May 1951, 9.

⁴³⁷ *Immaculata*, February 1952, 6.

in Vietnam reflected some of the changes in broader American public opinion. During the course of the war, the Militia changed from being strongly in favor of the government's efforts to quell Communism in Vietnam, to a more pacifist, or at least more ambivalent, position.

James T. Fisher provides helpful background information for understanding American Catholic investment in Vietnam:

The year 1954 also witnessed the emergence of a Catholic leader in South Vietnam, a nation created when the former French colony of Vietnam was divided into two parts. The communist Viet Minh, who had driven the French from Vietnam in the climactic battle of Dien Bien Phu in the spring of 1954, assumed control of the North, while the American-backed government of Ngo Dinh Diem took charge in South Vietnam. Diem had spent time in Catholic seminaries in New York and New Jersey during a period of exile in the early 1950s, when he made numerous important contacts with U. S. political and religious leaders.⁴³⁸

Fisher goes on to describe U. S. Catholic support for Diem as prime minister endorsed by Cardinal Francis Spellman ("leader of the American hierarchy") and Catholic naval doctor Thomas A. Dooley's best-selling 1956 book, *Deliver Us from Evil*. The book "described the Catholic refugees as pilgrims seeking religious freedom, an image that quickly took hold in the American imagination and further enhanced the stature of Catholicism at home and abroad."⁴³⁹ As the 1960s began, the conflict in Vietnam escalated, and the United States became further enmeshed in anti-Communist military action in Southeast Asia. By March 1965, the United States began full military participation and sent "combat troops" to Vietnam.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁸ Fisher, 121-122.

⁴³⁹ Fisher, 121-122.

⁴⁴⁰ Vassar College, *The Wars for Viet Nam: Viet Nam War Overview*, <http://vietnam.vassar.edu/overview.html>.

Early on, the Militia exhibited strong support for U. S. intervention overseas. Images in *Immaculata* show how the plight of Catholics in Vietnam captured the imaginations of Militia members and fit within their Marian, anti-Communist worldview. The back cover of September 1966's issue juxtaposes two photographs. One shows "Communist troops enter[ing] Hanoi in North Vietnam," while another documents a "military cemetery in Namdinh" inhabited by "mostly Catholic Vietnamese soldiers killed in the Red River delta."⁴⁴¹ Such images inspired sympathy for Vietnamese Catholics and support for the war.

In a 1965 issue of *Immaculata*, the Militia voices its disapproval of protests against the war in "The Highest Realism in Vietnam" by Martin Kemper:

In the past two months there have been no end of demonstrations and declarations by college professors, students and clergymen, United States policy in Vietnam. Most of these peace appeals have strong emotional overtones but few, if any, offer a realistic alternative to the present policy of the government. One of the most impressive of these protests of the "militaristic" government handling of the situation in Vietnam appeared in the April 4 issue of the NEW YORK TIMES. A full page advertisement signed by 2,700 ministers, rabbis and a handful of priests called upon President Johnson, "in the name of God," to stop the war in Vietnam. What influence such protests (and demonstration marches on Washington) will have on President Johnson's justifiable firm stand in Vietnam, only time will tell. Fortunately, there are enough realists in America who see another Munich in the making, in which the whole southeastern portion of Asia would fall under Red China's domination.⁴⁴²

Kemper dismisses the concerns of anti-war activists, and argues from a Catholic perspective that the U. S. is proceeding correctly in its exercise of "realism." He suggests that Catholics can support the government in good conscience:

President Johnson is in full accord with the traditional Catholic teachings in regard to warfare (the Church has never advocated a strict pacifist stand) when he insists on remaining in Vietnam until that country is assured of remaining free and independent of outside domination...It is misplaced compassion that would insist that the United

⁴⁴¹ *Immaculata*, September 1966, back cover.

⁴⁴² *Immaculata*, June/July 1965, 9.

States should pull out of Vietnam and leave these courageous people to fend for themselves.⁴⁴³

The article continues to condemn the “guerilla warfare” and “terrorist” tactics of the “Viet Cong” as atrocities that merit a military response.⁴⁴⁴ Lastly, Kemper appeals to Christianity and the role of Mary in Vietnam to justify both corporeal and spiritual warfare:

...throughout its troubled history the Church in Vietnam has steadily grown stronger and is today the largest Christian community in southeast Asia. These devout and determined peasants, who have weathered so many persecutions, have ever found safe refuge in Mary's benevolent care...The valiant Vietnamese have given us the answer of how to efficiently oppose Communist aggression. The two million Catholics of Vietnam have turned to Our Lady of Fatima to stop a Viet Cong take-over...The Catholics of South Vietnam in bringing into the struggle the weapons of the spirit are effectively stopping the diabolic thrust of the Godless Communists from the north; they are opening the way for peace in their poor war-torn country; they are showing the highest realism.⁴⁴⁵

Many of the magazine's reports on Vietnamese Catholics portrayed them as model devotees to the Virgin Mary, whose special attention to Our Lady of Fatima would be their salvation. The Militia used these exemplars not just to inspire sympathy, but also to reproach American Catholics for their apparent indifference to Mary's requests.

“A ‘Different’ Kind of War in South Vietnam” informed readers of broader humanitarian efforts abroad:

The war in South Vietnam is often misunderstood. The daily press, by concentrating on battles, casualties and civil discord in Saigon, has failed to describe the essence of the war in which Americans have a deeper commitment than only military aid. While a small and vocal minority of anti-war demonstrators condemning American “aggression” are making headlines, another “war” against poverty, disease, and political chaos is being waged in South Vietnam by both civilians and military personnel which is receiving too little publicity...⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴³ *Immaculata*, June/July 1965, 10.

⁴⁴⁴ *Immaculata*, June/July 1965, 10-11.

⁴⁴⁵ *Immaculata*, June/July 1965, 11-12.

⁴⁴⁶ *Immaculata*, September 1966, 2.

The editors emphasized the human face of war—a face that demands a Christian response. They praised the works of “government administrators, doctors, teachers, and engineers” alongside those of enlisted soldiers, arguing that by “their humane and Christian compassion which finds expression in countless acts of charity, they are winning more and more the confidence of the Vietnamese.”⁴⁴⁷ The 1966 article concludes by connecting the future of Vietnam to the past of South Korea:

And so the battle for souls, more than bodies, goes on. American’s [sic] compassion to human suffering and their dedication to freedom helped to establish the strong, independent, economically developing country of South Korea (one of our most staunch allies today). If Americans do not grow weary of what might be a long, drawn-out struggle, and “pull out” of South Vietnam too soon, the same happy result will be realized.⁴⁴⁸

The Militia offered a clear endorsement of the U. S. government’s course in Vietnam, for religious, ethical, and political reasons.

Immaculata continued its sustained, supportive commentary on Vietnam up until about 1968, when the magazine began to change its tone, perhaps reflecting the influence of changing cultural responses to the war. Chester Gillis summarizes the wider context:

The 1960s were like no other decade. America was being dragged deeper and deeper into the conflict in Southeast Asia. Many Americans disagreed with government policy on Vietnam. Student protests paralyzed colleges and universities from coast to coast. Catholics, who as an immigrant community had been so anxious to demonstrate their loyalty to America, now demonstrated in equal numbers with others against U. S. government policy. Some of the most prominent leaders of the antiwar movement were Catholic priests and sisters such as Elizabeth McAlister, a member of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, and Daniel and Philip Berrigan, Jesuit and Josephite priests respectively. In the early stages of these protests, the American bishops were reluctant to side against the government though they interfered little with the protesters. By 1968 antiwar sentiment was widespread, and the bishops finally spoke out.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁷ *Immaculata*, September 1966, 2.

⁴⁴⁸ *Immaculata*, September 1966, 31.

⁴⁴⁹ Chester Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1999), 104-106.

The Militia Immaculata—Marianist and anti-Communist in focus—would probably have identified itself as more “conservative” than the average American Catholic at the time, and certainly far removed from the most “liberal” Catholics involved in the peace movement. Especially on social justice issues, however, Catholics in general tracked more “liberal” than the mainstream:

Regarding their political attitudes, Catholics described themselves as more liberal and less conservative than the rest of white America. When compared with Protestants “on a variety of controversial social questions,” Catholics proved to be as liberal as Protestants. A case in point was the Vietnam War, when, as early as 1967, 24 percent of the Catholic population opposed the war, while only 16.5 percent of the Protestants adopted such a position.⁴⁵⁰

By 1968, *Immaculata* had begun to soften its position on military action in Vietnam, emphasizing peace as the best solution to the religious and humanitarian needs of the Vietnamese.

The September 1968 issue of *Immaculata* reflects a turning point in the Militia’s attitudes, resonant with changing attitudes toward the war in American culture by that same year.⁴⁵¹ In August 1968, hundreds of thousands of anti-war protestors rioted outside the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.⁴⁵² Although the riot is not directly mentioned in the September issue, it provides part of the context for understanding the Militia’s shift in tone. The front cover shows an illustration of the pietà image of a sorrowful Mary holding the dead Christ lovingly in her arms in the foreground. The background is a photographic

⁴⁵⁰ Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 426-427.

⁴⁵¹ “In March 1966, only about one-in-four Americans (26%) told a Gallup poll that they thought sending U.S. troops to Vietnam was a mistake. But as that involvement deepened and lengthened, the number taking that view increased more or less steadily, rising to more than half in August 1968 and to 60% by early January 1973.” The Pew Charitable Trusts, *Public Opinion and Polls: Iraq and Vietnam: A Crucial Difference in Opinion*, http://www.pewtrusts.org/ideas/ideas_item.cfm?content_item_id=4047&content_type_id=18&page=18&issue=11&issue_name=Public%20opinion%20and%20polls&name=Public%20Opinion%20Polls%20and%20Survey%20Results.

⁴⁵² Vassar College, *The Wars for Viet Nam: Viet Nam War Overview*, <http://vietnam.vassar.edu/overview.html>.

montage of images from the battlefields, refugee camps, and cemeteries in Vietnam. An inside caption describes the cover:

The sorrow of war. Mothers on the move with their brood, mothers crying for their dead, mothers huddling their families in dugouts and shelters as men fight to death... reminding us of the Mother of the Savior sorrowing over her dead Son, killed by cruel men, killed by the cruel sins of men. Wars, too, are caused by sinful men—wars are a punishment for sin.⁴⁵³

The cover and its explanation interpret war from the perspective of mothers and the Divine Mother. An end to the violence on all sides seems to be the most viable way to stop that suffering.

The issue's lead article "Vietnam's Dilemma No Problem for God" by Father Werenfried van Straaten, a priest who had been to Vietnam three times, laments the situation there in romanticized language: "My God, this paradisiacal country is too good for this war! Grant that the flooded paddy fields may once more reflect back the golden sun like stained-glass windows..."⁴⁵⁴ The priest portrays Vietnam as beautiful and sympathetic—worthy of the reader's compassion. Van Straaten also pleads for peace:

Grant that it be no longer necessary for the helicopters to search carefully through the vast hevea forests; that carpet-bombing may no longer drop death-shrouds over the country; that military convoys may no longer creep menacingly along the beach of the South-China sea; that no more mothers need mourn for brown, white or black sons that are losing their precious lives in this hopeless massacre. You must see that this red aggression is no more to the advantage of the Vietnamese people than the American reaction it inevitably calls forth...⁴⁵⁵

While the author does not condemn America's part in the war, describing it as "inevitable," he suggests that the time for fighting is done, and that continued warfare is doing more damage than good among the Vietnamese. Ultimately, he tries to provoke readers to action:

⁴⁵³ *Immaculata*, September 1968, 2. Cover photos are credited to "UPI."

⁴⁵⁴ *Immaculata*, September 1968, 3.

⁴⁵⁵ *Immaculata*, September 1968, 3.

It cannot be said that no honest attempts have been made to put an end to this unholy conflict. The Pope and many others have not ceased to incite the opponents to peace and justice. But have WE done everything to extinguish the fire? Has each one of us done his utmost to restore peace in Vietnam?⁴⁵⁶

This turn toward the reader is a common gesture throughout the Militia's media. Ultimately, for the MI, issues of war and peace can be resolved through the penance, prayer, and devotion of Mary's spiritual army.

The same issue features "Mary and Vietnam," by Father A. Tuyen, C.S.S.R, that offered an account of Marian apparitions and the Madonna's influence in Vietnam, dating back to 1789. This established a precedent for Mary's interest in Vietnam, and a reason for why her devotees should care about the country's fate: "The special affection of Mary towards the Vietnamese and this confidence and recourse of all the Vietnamese towards Mary, their incessant prayers which are offered in the North as in the South, allow us to hope that the chains in which our compatriots now groan under the grip of communism will soon fall and that the day of deliverance is not far distant."⁴⁵⁷ "Favors from Mary" gives accounts of Mary's miraculous protection of soldiers at war.⁴⁵⁸ A column called "'Significant Sixties'?" recounts the positive and negative events of the decade. Of special note is a UPI photo of a student protest with the following text: "Students challenge order and authority throughout the world, an outstanding characteristic of the decade."⁴⁵⁹ This is a curious inclusion given the magazine's outspoken criticism of student protests a few years earlier, but reveals some of the Militia's ideological movement.

⁴⁵⁶ *Immaculata*, September 1968, 3.

⁴⁵⁷ *Immaculata*, September 1968, 15.

⁴⁵⁸ *Immaculata*, September 1968, 28.

⁴⁵⁹ *Immaculata*, September 1968, 27. Photo credited to UPI, location not noted.

Anti-Communism Beyond Vietnam

After 1968, specific references to Vietnam decreased, while the theme of anti-Communism remained. In June/July 1969, the Militia published a special “Captive Nations” issue in honor of a Congressional resolution issued in 1959 (Public Law 86-90) that “designated the third week in July of each year as Captive Nations Week” to “remind the world of the plight of our fellow human beings behind the Iron Curtain.”⁴⁶⁰ Once again, the editors used images to communicate their message on the front and back covers of this issue. The front cover illustrates the face of the crucified Christ, behind strands of barbed wire (evoking similar imagery used to represent St. Maximilian’s imprisonment at Auschwitz). Above Christ’s face are several photographs depicting various political situations around the world. The text on the front cover reads: “Until the end of time I am in agony, condemned, struck on the face, tortured, crucified. I die but they act as though they see nothing. They are blind. If they were true Christians they could not bear to turn away from me as I am dying.”⁴⁶¹ Inside, the editors offered an explanatory note:

Christ suffers His passion again in the members of His Mystical Body, as seen in the various scenes at the top of the page: Communists in China executing “enemies” of the state, bodies of Yugoslavians [sic] murdered by the Communists, women are “freed” to serve in Fidel Castro’s militia in Cuba, Korean women identifying the dead bodies of their husbands, Soviet tanks crush the freedom fighters in Hungary, loading slave-labor for Siberia somewhere in Estonia.⁴⁶²

The photographs commemorated sites of political repression, while attempting to inspire sympathy in viewers. The back cover shows a photograph of the Kremlin with Soviet

⁴⁶⁰ *Immaculata*, June/July 1969, 4, 59.

⁴⁶¹ *Immaculata*, June/July 1969, front cover.

⁴⁶² *Immaculata*, June/July 1969, 2.

soldiers marching in front, and a photograph of a Our Lady of Fatima statue superimposed in the sky above, apparently praying for the conversion of those who tread below.⁴⁶³

In the issue's introduction, the editors discuss their intentions:

This special issue of THE IMMACULATE is but a feeble attempt at covering a subject that is incomprehensible, both in terms of human suffering and eternal implications. Who can appreciate the fact that in the past fifty years of Communism's ascendancy that some 100,000,000 human beings have been murdered through civil wars, man-made famines, purges, genocidal deportations and executions. The very magnitude of this figure of those who lost their lives under Communism escapes us. One must think more of individuals than statistics. Each of these persons loved and was loved.⁴⁶⁴

A lead article, "Silent Church Behind the Iron Curtain," by Monsignor John Balkunas, continues the theme by describing the political and religious situations of countries affected by Communism including Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine.⁴⁶⁵ The author describes the treatment of Catholics in those countries and the state of their religious freedom.

An optimistic piece, "Mary's Triumph Over Marxism" by Brother Francis Mary, O. F. M. Conventual, predicts the ultimate end of Communism brought about by the Madonna.⁴⁶⁶ The feature "What to Do To Hasten the Day of Liberation of Captive Nations" provided practical advice for individual Catholics to make a difference in the world situation.⁴⁶⁷ Suggestions ranged from writing to your congressman about legislation to fight

⁴⁶³ *Immaculata*, June/July 1969, back cover.

⁴⁶⁴ *Immaculata*, June/July 1969, 2.

⁴⁶⁵ *Immaculata*, June/July 1969, 4-6.

⁴⁶⁶ *Immaculata*, June/July 1969, 7-9.

⁴⁶⁷ *Immaculata*, June/July 1969, 59.

the spread of Communism and to promote Captive Nations Week, to educating people in your community about Captive Nations by hanging posters or inviting guest speakers, to “display[ing] the flag at half-mast” during the week.⁴⁶⁸

The article also listed organizations to contact for more information including the “World Anti-Communist League,” Young Americans for Freedom,” “Ukrainian Information Service,” “Friends of Free China Association,” “Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation,” “Mirror—The Iron Curtain Church Relief,” and the “League of Prayer for Captive Peoples,” among others. The author distinguishes different types of activism:

What has thus far been mentioned is on the natural plan; of still greater importance is the supernatural aid by which we must seek to liberate the Captive Nations. Prayer, penance, an amendment of life are fundamental and indispensable. Unless we live truly Christian lives, can we expect God to lift the scourge of Communism?... MORALLY, we must clean up our own house before we can hope to see the day when Communism is a thing of the past. Fight the widespread moral corruption of our times in movies, TV shows, printed filth, immodesty in dress.⁴⁶⁹

Spiritual activism, according to the MI, involves praying the Rosary daily, “consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary,” and sacrificing “some legitimate pleasure, such as smoking, that extra dessert, etc. and with the money saved mak[ing] a donation to the Iron Curtain Church Relief.”⁴⁷⁰ For the Militia Immaculata, politics and religion could not be fully separated—to be a good Catholic is to be an activist who recognizes the sacred in what is labeled secular.

By 1977, *Immaculata* still retained its anti-Communist message, and bemoaned the diminished press interest in this cause. “Why the Blackout on Communist Threat?” (March 1977) addressed this issue:

⁴⁶⁸ *Immaculata*, June/July 1969, 59.

⁴⁶⁹ *Immaculata*, June/July 1969, 59.

⁴⁷⁰ *Immaculata*, June/July 1969, 59.

A priest reader of *Immaculata* wrote us a while back commending us in our work. He liked our magazine because of its devotional content (something the world is starving for today) and because of our explicit anti-Communist stand. He went on to comment that after poring over a fair number of Catholic publications he had the decided feeling that the editors were not living in the same world as he was. One would get the impression that Communism didn't exist or at least it presented no serious problem. It is hard to explain why there is a blackout in this very crucial area of Catholic journalism.⁴⁷¹

Here, the editors assert *Immaculata's* distinctiveness, while making a case for continued Catholic concern over Communism. An article in the same issue, "Alternatives We Have to Face," by Brother Charles Madden, O.F.M. Conventual, portrays the Soviet Union as the greatest threat to world security, and emphasizes the horrors of nuclear war. For the author, the only effective way to combat this threat is through devotion to Mary:

Consider what the situation would be if the communists ruled the whole world. There would be no rival military forces or any form of world opinion to check their actions. Violence and bloodshed would reign supreme, and the whole planet would be one vast death camp. And all of what has occurred and all of what may very well occur, has, or is coming about, simply because there are not yet enough of us willing to accede to Mary's requests at Fatima!⁴⁷²

According to the MI, the fate of the world resided in conversion—to a Catholic and Marian way of life. Conversion formed the locus of the Militia's universal mission.

The Militia Mission for All

Although outsiders might read the Marianist perspective of the Militia *Immaculata* as just one way of being Catholic, the group does not draw clear boundaries between its own mission and the mission of all Catholics. To be a MI, *is* to be Catholic in the most faithful and desirable way. In many ways the group is exclusive, but its membership is open to all

⁴⁷¹ *Immaculata*, March 1977, 2.

⁴⁷² *Immaculata*, March 1977, 5.

willing to observe its practices and values. This is why much of the MI's evangelization effort is directed toward other Catholics. Even devout Catholics must be converted to a Marian way of life through the ritual of Total Consecration. The Militia's broader social critique is also a Catholic critique.

In "WAKE UP! Brother Catholic," author Andree M. Gonzalez defines the stakes of conversion in terms of the Cold War:

All mankind is actively involved in a new kind of warfare...the 20th Century Red Totalitarian creation...COLD WAR. And, because it is *seemingly* bloodless, on the surface, because armies and navies are not openly in combat, it is looked upon by the vast majority of the free peoples, as a kind of war preferable to a HOT WAR! There isn't a HOT WAR historically recorded that has ever won the horrible king of victories that our present Cold War has won these past thirteen years. The Caesars of the ancient Roman Empire could never have imagined the vast proportions of the victories that the U. S. S. R. is winning on all six continents.⁴⁷³

Gonzalez asks his fellow Catholics to "wake up" to the perils of Communism. Communist victories, he argues, are "Satanic and evil, spreading the gospel of hate, poisoning all men, inculcating enmity between them, regardless of age, sex, race, or nationality."⁴⁷⁴

Communists "have extinguished the lights of all freedoms, in every country they have vanquished."⁴⁷⁵ The Marxist assault against religion "destroy[s] the conquered because they believe in and worship God."⁴⁷⁶

Gonzalez extends his address by criticizing the apathy of American culture:

Meanwhile, the Americans, Catholics, Jews, and Protestants alike, are filling their lives and houses with material possessions, evidences of their high standard of living, complacently watching the same television programs, reading the same "best sellers" (books or magazines), lazily conforming to everything and anything that doesn't

⁴⁷³ *Immaculata*, May 1959, 3.

⁴⁷⁴ *Immaculata*, May 1959, 3.

⁴⁷⁵ *Immaculata*, May 1959, 3.

⁴⁷⁶ *Immaculata*, May 1959, 3.

require any thinking for oneself, indifferent and apathetic to world-wide conditions; they seems to be unaware that they are the prime objects of the hatred that the Cold War Hate Campaign is promulgating throughout the world.⁴⁷⁷

According to the author, everyone is guilty of ignorance and inaction on the issue of Communism. He recommends education as the primary solution to this problem and suggests a list of books that “should be required reading for all U. S. citizens” so that all will “be able to combat intelligently *all* citizens should have a thorough knowledge of Communism...”⁴⁷⁸ For the Militia, this is an issue of moral responsibility: “All free peoples have a sacred duty, to themselves and to their children, and especially, to those who are no longer free...the sacred duty of combating...intelligently and unceasingly...the Red Scourge of Communist slavery...on all fronts in the Cold War.”⁴⁷⁹

In addition to the primary duties of every citizen, Gonzalez asserts “all Catholics have *several extra sacred duties or obligations*” including meeting the requests of Fatima, engaging in prayer, the Rosary, personal sacrifice, and “Consecration and Reparation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.”⁴⁸⁰ Catholics must also heed teachings on “social justice” and “pray for the bishops, priests, nuns, lay people who are in prisons behind the Iron and Bamboo Curtains.”⁴⁸¹

Lastly, “*Universal Love is a Christian obligation for Catholics from the north to the south pole!*”⁴⁸² Gonzalez concludes: “In the Cold War, Communists are using an infectious

⁴⁷⁷ *Immaculata*, May 1959, 3.

⁴⁷⁸ *Immaculata*, May 1959, 4.

⁴⁷⁹ *Immaculata*, May 1959, 4.

⁴⁸⁰ *Immaculata*, May 1959, 4.

⁴⁸¹ *Immaculata*, May 1959, 4.

⁴⁸² *Immaculata*, May 1959, 4.

poison which is affecting the minds and hearts of men all over the face of the earth, namely...HATRED. The only know antidote for hatred is LOVE.”⁴⁸³ He encourages every Catholic to “start an Active Love Campaign within his or her own circle” and “contribute to a Universal Love Campaign” by “begin[ning] the day with prayer fro the conversion of Russia and *all* Communists.”⁴⁸⁴ By observing the model of the Virgin Mary’s perfect love, the Militia affirmed, Catholics can convert the world. Through creatively adapted images of Mary that *communicate*, foster *communion*, and *commemorate*, the Militia *imagined* a world without Communism. This imaginative world provoked devotees to transform their religious and political beliefs into ritual and public actions, including acts of evangelization.

⁴⁸³ *Immaculata*, May 1959, 4.

⁴⁸⁴ *Immaculata*, May 1959, 4.

CONCLUSION:

MARY AS MEDIA ICON IN AMERICAN CATHOLIC CULTURES

I am sitting at my dining room table as I carefully open a well-wrapped parcel. Gingerly opening the bubble wrap, I unearth my latest specimen, direct from EBay. The gold lettering on the porcelain plaque reads “Madonna of the Kitchen” and the maker’s mark on the bottom shows it was produced in 1960. The plaque, in three-dimensional relief, depicts the Madonna, wearing a blue veil and white robes, covered by a light pink apron decorated with stars. She holds a loaf of bread in her right hand, and her halo is a protruding golden circlet of metal. Her left hand is on the head of a child, the boy Jesus, who clings to her skirts and reaches out his hands for a taste of the freshly baked bread. Dishes and pots are visible on the shelves in the background. A few days later arrives another variation on this theme—this time cast in bluish-green. The Madonna holds a bowl of frosting as Jesus lifts up his cake to ask for more. I hang these side by side in my kitchen—not knowing whether to call them kitsch, art, artifact, or sacramental—and I think of the elderly Catholic women, now deceased, whose estate sales probably brought them to my door. What did they see when they regarded these Madonnas on their walls? What do I see?

What I see makes me realize this actually is my Catholicism. This is the mystery, the paradox, the sensuality, the contradiction, the texture, the diversity, the awful potential to destroy or uplift, all condensed into one vexing image—a shape shifter—the Madonna herself who is singular in the Catholic tradition, but always plural in her manifestations.

Although I do not share all the beliefs and values of my historical subjects, my desire for images implicates me too.

Dizzy with images, ones that arrive at my door and ones I find in the archives, I keep returning to the three devotional themes that attracted me to the Militia Immaculata and the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal: *creativity*, *adaptability*, and the *transformation*. Chapter One put Catholic devotional understandings of Mary as media icon in conversation with postmodern theories of representation. Despite the diversity of Marian images, the Madonna stabilizes the field of Catholic signs—those who are committed to her simultaneously affirm her unity and multiplicity. In the Catholic devotional lexicon, belief in God mandates that Mary’s referent is authentic and fixed although she assumes many guises. Our Lady of Lourdes and Our Lady of Guadalupe are not signs of essential *différance*, but rather are evidence of the creativity and adaptability of Marian devotees around the world.

Chapter Two described the media enterprises of the MI and CAMM, primarily focusing on their periodicals, *Immaculata* and *The Miraculous Medal*, from 1917 to 1970. Each organization had a unique approach to utilizing media to spread Marian devotion. This chapter revealed the self-conscious fashioning of devotional media within the larger context of the American Catholic Press. Both groups adapted media techniques to disseminate their messages in the most effective way possible to promote both ritual and political actions on the Virgin’s behalf.

Chapter Three addressed Mary’s role as Missionary Mediatrix and Evangelist within devotional media. Mary’s mediating role returns us full circle to where we began, suggesting that belief in Mary’s intercessory powers undergirds the logic of Marian devotionism. “Our Lady of At-One-Ment” unifies and converts humanity, even as she mourns for its

unrepentance. The concepts of Mary as Theotokos and Dispensatrix describe different aspects of her mediating function. Marian media itself, in the tradition of St. Maximilian Kolbe, employed the most current technologies and practices to disseminate Mary's messages to the world.

Chapter Four probed a deeper layer of transformative actions linked to Catholic identities by analyzing "Marylike" models *of* and *for* gendered performance. These models were not only focused on individual actions, but also implied a total way of being within the Marian devotional world. Mary as Exemplar deployed explicit and implicit codes of Catholic conduct that both reinforced and challenged traditional expectations about Catholic gender roles.

Chapter Five introduced Mary as Anti-Communist Warrior, the Holy Queen who leads her faithful into battle. American Catholic patriotism and anti-Communism reflected socio-political anxieties as well as strongly held apocalyptic beliefs. Devotees constructed a cosmic battleground where only Mary could intercede to protect humanity. Devotional media asked devotees to wage war in defense of values and beliefs perceived to be under siege.

Although I observed similar themes at work in MI and CAMM media, the organizations differed in several important ways. The Central Association of the Miraculous Medal was, from the start, a larger and more mainstream organization that sought to infuse the lives of everyday American Catholics with devotion to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, while garnering support for foreign missions and priestly vocations. The CAMM did not present a radical Marian theology, nor did it place excessive devotional expectations on

its members. This group offered strategies for incorporating Marian devotion into a broadly Catholic way of life; it did not suggest adopting a completely Marian lifestyle.

By contrast, the Militia Immaculata demanded “Total Consecration” from its members, and even suggested “spiritual slavery” as a metaphor for devotion. The MI worked to convert Catholics to an entirely Mary-focused existence. This organization was smaller and more politically active than the CAMM. Perhaps as a consequence of its marginality, MI media was more creative in its adaptation of Marian images for its own purposes. While the CAMM was content to inhabit “Mary’s Central Shrine” in Philadelphia, the Militia strove to re-map the world as the Madonna’s territory, by establishing Marytowns across the globe.

This project expands our knowledge of Marian devotional practices in the United States by documenting and analyzing the understudied media sources of the CAMM and MI. In the fourteen years since Leslie Woodcock Tentler puzzled over American Catholic History’s place “on the margins” of American Religious History, significant work by scholars in the field, particularly on the history of lay and ethnic Catholics, has affirmed Tentler’s conclusion that, “Catholics need to be integrated, more fully and intelligently than heretofore, into our reconstruction of the past.”⁴⁸⁵ Tentler argues, “The ‘new’ Catholic history points to a past far richer in human creativity than many of us had supposed, and deepens our understanding of the complex process by which a varied people built a nation.”⁴⁸⁶ An emphasis on Catholic “creativity” has led many scholars to pursue the rich alternative sources of visual, material, and media culture to inform their case studies. What has changed somewhat since Tentler’s piece is a deeper recognition of the importance of

⁴⁸⁵ Leslie Woodcock Tentler, “On the Margins: The State of American Catholic History,” *American Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (March 1993):122.

⁴⁸⁶ Tentler, 122.

Catholic history, fueled by interdisciplinary work with compelling sources. What hasn't changed much is the understanding of Catholics as marginal figures, however interesting, in American history.

Tentler was troubled by “premise of Catholic ‘otherness’” in academic research, and rightly so, when it implied that the study of Catholic history was not worthwhile.⁴⁸⁷ But if we admit that Catholics are important, does that mean moving them to the mainstream? In the case of the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal and the Militia Immaculata, this is not possible. Although I argued that the CAMM was more “mainstream,” this adjective only makes sense relative to the fairly insular mid-twentieth-century Catholic culture during the height of devotionism. *The Miraculous Medal*, like many Catholic magazines, assumed that its readers occupied a separate Catholic culture, and provided resources for sustaining that culture at home and at church.

The Militia described itself as marginal and countercultural, understanding its members as warriors confronting the world in the name of Mary. *Immaculata* magazine portrayed countless images of conflict and difference that were key symbols of the Militia's mission. The MI's embattled representations reflect a militant zeal grounded in the logic of devotion. The Militia proposed a radical way of being, overtly outside the mainstream.

In this project, I visited the margins and returned with three valuable insights: creativity, adaptability, and transformation. These elements are at work in all expressions of religious meaning-making, but out of necessity, they are particularly alive at the margins. Devotional organizations like the MI and CAMM constructed media icons of the Virgin Mary that both reflected and shaped their beliefs and practices.

⁴⁸⁷ Tentler, 105.

Paula Kane describes the Madonna as a “boundary figure” between Catholics and Protestants and among Catholics themselves.⁴⁸⁸ For Catholic devotees, Mary as media icon marks a literal, but permeable boundary between human and divine, between sin and salvation, between emptiness and fullness of grace. In analyzing the Marian representations of the MI and CAMM, I have suggested that these Catholic signs resist the destabilization posed by postmodernists, while sharing their delight in paradox.

With this project, I hope to contribute to an emerging interdisciplinary movement in Catholic studies that is able to synthesize history, theology, and media studies with rigor and integrity. In *Belief in Media: Cultural Perspectives on Media and Christianity*, Robert A. White discussed the role of theology in the study of media, religion, and culture:

...theology has increasingly begun to see itself as the science of the explanation of symbols, that is, to explain what this symbol signifies in the experience of the particular religious group. Cultural sciences may state the relationship of symbols to ritual and experience, but theology is able to go into the subjective experience of the person to explain why this symbol is generated by this personal or group experience...This ‘symbolic theology’ becomes the point of intersection with the cultural sciences, spirituality (description of the interior experiences) and theology, the explanation of why this symbol is understood to be related to this experience.⁴⁸⁹

By discussing Marian representations within the context of Catholic theology, I attempted to understand the mindsets of devotees as expressed in their media. These images, I pointed out, cannot be separated from devotees’ sincere beliefs in the immediacy of grace, the ability of the Madonna to mediate, and the authenticity of supernatural power. This study helps to broaden media, religion, and culture studies by examining particularly Catholic forms of media. Much of this field has emphasized Protestant-dominated models of beliefs, practices,

⁴⁸⁸ Kane, “Marian Devotion since 1940,” 93-94.

⁴⁸⁹ Robert A. White, “Major Issues in the Study of Media, Religion and Culture,” in *Belief in Media: Cultural Perspectives on Media and Christianity*, eds. Peter Horsfield, Mary E. Hess, and Adán M. Medrano (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 211-212.

symbols, and economies. Investigating Mary's role as media icon incorporates a Catholic theological understanding of iconic mediation, while filling in historical gaps in our understanding of Catholic media. For these Catholic devotees, Mary embodies the medium, message, and process of mediation simultaneously. The study of Marian icons is particularly compelling for media studies because of their immense adaptability to religious, political, and cultural influences.

The MI and CAMM Today

The Militia Immaculata and the Central Association for the Miraculous Medal still exist today, and both continue to publish their respective magazines at a reduced level. The MI uses various forms of media, including the Internet, to invite Catholics into lives of Total Consecration to Mary. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops named Marytown the National Shrine of St. Maximilian Kolbe in the year 2000, and the shrine now includes a Holocaust museum.⁴⁹⁰ Marytown is also a thriving retreat center, hosting Marian conferences as well as events for the Archdiocese of Chicago. The MI kept up its publishing efforts with the Marytown Press, and markets a wide range of books, videos, cds, and gifts related to Marian devotion. The Militia also supports a small network of MI Villages across the country, and sponsors outreach programs like MI Youth and MI Prison Ministry. The group retains strong ties to the international MI movement.

The Central Association of the Miraculous Medal continues to maintain "Mary's Central Shrine" in Philadelphia (Germantown), Pennsylvania. The CAMM has expanded its mission goals:

⁴⁹⁰ The Militia Immaculata, *Marytown: National Shrine of St. Maximilian Kolbe*, <http://www.marytown.com/chapel.html#anchor871009>.

To render honor to Mary Immaculate and to encourage the use of her Miraculous Medal with prayers and devotions to her under the title of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. To support the education and formation of men for the priesthood and brotherhood in the seminaries of the Congregation of the Mission. To support the aged and infirm Vincentians of the Eastern Province of the Congregation, the parent body of The Central Association of the Miraculous Medal. To support the apostolic works of the Eastern Province on behalf of the poor.⁴⁹¹

The CAMM seeks new members and promoters by distributing free medals and offering honorary and memorial masses for members. Like the MI, the CAMM also has a web presence, including a virtual tour of the shrine, an email newsletter, and membership information.

Mary as Media Icon at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century: A Marian Revival?

Scholars of American Catholicism have noted the steady decline of Marian devotion after the Second Vatican Council, despite the Council's Mary-affirming statements in *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. The Constitution established a precedent for understanding Mary as "Mother of the Church" and perfect exemplar.⁴⁹² Paula Kane describes the changing era marked by Vatican II as full of possibilities: "Located at the convergence of several diverse streams of Marian doctrine, the period of 1964 to 1977 represents a catch-all era when every kind of Marian devotionism was advocated simultaneously—from the most traditional pieties to the most progressive interpretations of

⁴⁹¹ The Central Association of the Miraculous Medal, *Miraculous Medal Association Mission Statement*, <http://www.cammonline.org/pages/missionStatement.html>.

⁴⁹² *Dictionary of Mary: Revised and Expanded Edition* (New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1997), 477-479.

Lumen Gentium.”⁴⁹³ Kane draws an interesting conclusion, “Seemingly, the Rosary and novena devotions could continue as before, yet they did not.”⁴⁹⁴

Kane challenges scholars who lump decreasing Marian devotion in with the other sweeping changes of Vatican II. She suggests, “it is possible that the Council only accompanied a decline in devotional life already in progress, since there is evidence that the waning popularity of devotions could be remarked at least ten years before the Council.”⁴⁹⁵ Kane cites Catholic upward mobility and inclusion, the downplaying of religion’s role in defining individual identity, and increased opportunities for women’s employment and independence as contributing factors to the devotional decline during the 1960s and 70s. She argues, “In short, Catholic women (and anyone who was seeking Mary’s help) were enjoying material gains that made recourse to supernatural power less necessary.”⁴⁹⁶ Implicit in Kane’s analysis, however, is an economic model of devotion that does not apply directly to highly committed devotees like those in the Militia Immaculata. Although devotees asked for the Madonna’s intercession in their lives, they also sought the spiritual graces they believed only she could provide. For the devout, the need for grace would not necessarily be diminished by an improvement in their socio-economic status.

By the 1980s, however, scholars began to notice a resurgence of Marian devotion that has persisted at the turn of the twenty-first century. Much of this revival has been primarily associated with a new wave of apocalypticism among some groups of right leaning U.S.

⁴⁹³ Kane, “Marian Devotion Since 1940,” 114.

⁴⁹⁴ Kane, “Marian Devotion Since 1940,” 114.

⁴⁹⁵ Kane, “Marian Devotion Since 1940,” 116.

⁴⁹⁶ Kane, “Marian Devotion Since 1940,” 116.

Catholics. Sandra Zimdars-Swartz points to the alleged apparitions at Medjugorje, Yugoslavia, as an important, but not the sole, impetus for this new strand of devotion:

It would be a mistake to say that the apparition at Medjugorje has been the cause of the recent resurgence of some traditional forms of Marian devotion. But in the United States, Medjugorje has clearly been related to and has provided a context for such a resurgence. It has been associated with demands for a return to traditional understandings of Catholic doctrine, with a renewed campaign for papal statements declaring Mary to be Coredemptrix and Mediatrix of All Graces, and with some strident calls for public protests and other forms of political action on issues such as abortion, artificial birth control, and homosexuality.⁴⁹⁷

Devotional organizations linked to Medjugorje construct media icons of Mary in their own ways, asking members to express their beliefs into political actions. Zimdars-Swartz also investigates the influence of American apparitions such as those ongoing at Conyers, Georgia, and South Phoenix, Arizona.

Zimdars-Swartz highlights the importance of new groups of immigrant Catholics in the United States, particularly Latinos, whose devotions to the Madonna as Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lady of San Juan, and Our Lady of Charity, continue to flourish on U.S. soil, even piquing the interest of the Anglo Catholics that share their parishes and communities.⁴⁹⁸

Kane also documents more liberal Catholic efforts to reclaim or redefine Mary: “Lay and religious women of the postconciliar era have pursued discussion about Mary along several paths: Mary as Virgin-Goddess, Mary as symbol and even instrument of women’s subordination, and Mary as the feminine face of God or of the Church.”⁴⁹⁹ Such discussions,

⁴⁹⁷ Zimdars-Swartz, “The Marian Revival in American Catholicism,” 218.

⁴⁹⁸ Zimdars-Swartz, “The Marian Revival in American Catholicism,” 233-35.

⁴⁹⁹ Kane, “Marian Devotion Since 1940,” 123.

she observes, have been especially significant “inside religious life, within parish groups that continue their special devotions to the Rosary and scapulars, at retreat centers, wherever women are in leadership roles in the Church, and even in other locations not easily accessible to a national public or the media.”⁵⁰⁰

A defining feature of U.S Catholic history is that it can only be accessed through the diverse and distinctive ways of being Catholic that faith, culture, and circumstance have shaped. A wide range of Catholics, both historically and today, have creatively constructed media icons of the Virgin Mary, adapted to their religious, political, and historical contexts, for the purpose of transforming their most deeply held beliefs into meaningful actions.

⁵⁰⁰ Kane, “Marian Devotion Since 1940,” 125.

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