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IMAGES OF MARY IN AMERICAN POPULAR PERIODICALS, 1900–1960

*Una M. Cadegan, Ph.D.**

The first half of the twentieth century was the heyday of the magazine. Magazines existed long before the year 1900, of course, but a variety of developments in printing, paper manufacturing, and distribution capabilities, among other factors, led to an enormous explosion in circulation among existing magazines as well as to a tremendous increase in the number of different magazine published.¹

Magazines were the first truly mass medium. They had the frequency and regularity of appearance, and hence the immediacy, that books lacked. They had, further, a national circulation, and a kind of permanency and respectability for which most newspapers could not hope. As such, they provide a unique resource for information on a variety of aspects of American culture.

For some time, I have been interested in examining and finding evidence for how Catholics have been perceived by American culture. The invitation to make a presentation to the Mariological Society provided an opportunity to look at the focused, though amply roomy, subject of Mary and culture, to see how this vital and distinctive aspect of Catholic tradition was perceived by the largely secular—but audience-driven—medium of magazines. I looked at articles from a total

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¹See Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines* (Cambridge University Press, 1939–68); Theodore Peterson, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana IL: University of Illinois Press, 1964); and John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman, *The Magazine in America: 1741–1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

of thirty-one different publications, over a span of time (arbitrarily chosen) ranging from 1900 to 1960. The articles were drawn from periodical indexes rather than by sampling or other more random methodologies. They represent a wide range of subject matter and intended audience.

The focus here is on secular publications, for a particular reason and with two important exceptions. In previous research I have investigated how American Catholics perceived their place in American culture, and have attempted to articulate the terms in which they described and defended themselves, especially in the area of literature and literary evaluation.² Much of what American Catholics said about themselves was based on what the culture was saying about them. Since I have spent much less time examining what the culture actually did say about them, I welcomed the opportunity to look at that question a little more closely. So, for the most part, this essay will not address articles about Mary that appeared in *Catholic World*, *Commonweal*, *Ave Maria* or any other of the myriad Catholic publications (for Catholics participated in—and helped cause—the magazine boom of the early part of this century). One exception to this general focus on secular periodicals, however, is an occasional use of what was published in the Catholic press to highlight how secular publications differed. The second exception is similar. For the most part I also have not drawn from explicitly Protestant periodicals (that is, those with a theological or doctrinal focus), except where looking at them is useful in highlighting how a self-consciously religious perspective—whether Catholic or Protestant—differs from the more secular.

Features and news stories connected in some way with Mary appeared over the course of time investigated in a surprising number and variety. They seem to fall into four distinguishable (though overlapping) categories: articles

²See Una M. Cadegan, "All Good Books Are Catholic Books: Censorship, Literary Evaluation and the Americanization of Catholics, 1920-1960," unpublished dissertation (University of Pennsylvania, 1987), and "How Realistic Can A Catholic Writer Be? Richard Sullivan and American Catholic Literature," *Religion and American Culture* 6 (Winter 1996): 35-61.

that debate points of Marian doctrine; news stories having to do with Mary; reports—both news stories and features—on Marian apparitions; and art features that highlight Marian art as part of the history of Western culture. Each of these categories will be discussed in turn, while an overall argument about the connections between the images they contain and the broader history of twentieth-century U.S. Catholicism is developed.

Doctrine and Public Debate

Especially in the early years of the century, much of the periodical material about Mary has to do with the Marian doctrines. Discussion of doctrine in a public forum such as a magazine reveals not only the history of theological controversy but also certain presuppositions about the relationship between religion and culture, as two specific examples will help demonstrate.

Early in the century, the doctrine that received the most discussion in periodicals was the virgin birth. The discussions were usually written by Protestants with an assumed audience, apparently, of other Protestants. Always in the background, however, is the figure of Rome, against which these Protestant discussions are framed. For example, in the *North American Review* for June of 1906, Charles Augustus Briggs wrote on "Criticism and Dogma," using the virgin birth as an extended example of the appropriate relationship between the two.³ Briggs finds that both the "Lower" and the "Higher" Criticism of scripture confirm the virgin birth, and then turns to what he sees as the more challenging task of asking whether "General Historical Criticism," "Scientific Criticism" and "Philosophical Criticism" disprove the dogma. After disposing of the obstacles these perspectives pose (primarily by saying that while none of them can account for the virgin birth, neither can they prove it impossible), he takes the interesting step of arguing that, while "the doctrine of the Virgin Birth is essential . . . to the system of doctrine and the Faith of the Christian

³Charles Augustus Briggs, "Criticism and Dogma," *North American Review* 182 (June 1906): 861-74; page citations for quotations in text.

Church, . . . It is not, however, essential to the faith or Christian life of individuals" (873).

Christian dogma, as well as science and philosophy, Briggs argues, is in a period of reconstruction and development. "Confusion of thought is inevitable under these circumstances. The Church, the most stable of all human institutions, can afford to be patient and charitable, and to wait until its scholars have removed the difficulties that in this age envelop Christian dogma" (874). Briggs's notion of how this process of removing difficulties should proceed is coded in terms of Protestant/Catholic difference—the Catholic approach appears in the form of a less satisfactory alternative that Briggs would like to see the Protestant churches avoid. "These [difficulties] can only be overcome," he argues, "in the arena of chivalric scholarship, not in ecclesiastical courts ruled by ecclesiastics, who are usually more concerned about the forms of things than about their reality" (874).

A similar dynamic appears some years later, when the *Literary Digest* for December 22, 1923, reports on a debate within the Episcopal Church over the virgin birth.⁴ The Episcopal bishops had issued a statement affirming the virgin birth, which some other Episcopal clergy had suggested be disregarded: "In some quarters this is taken to indicate the imminence of a split. On the other hand, it is felt that a church that has so long harbored minds of such diverse beliefs as may be found within the Episcopal fold is likely to continue its tolerance" (30). The *Literary Digest* article consists largely of reports on reactions to the bishops' statement in the Protestant press, and refrains from taking sides on the issue, but it may be significant that it finishes with a quote from the *Freeman*, which sees "no particular reason why the Protestant Episcopal Church, or at least so much of it as is disposed to follow its bishops, should not go over to Rome and be done with it. After all, there are advantages in being logical, even in religion; and where there appears to be essential unity of belief, there might as well be unity of organization" (31).

⁴"Is Belief in the Virgin Birth Necessary?" *Literary Digest* 79 (22 Dec. 1923): 30-31.

The persistent sense of Roman Catholicism as the alternative against which Protestant debates are framed seems to confirm and extend the assertion made by R. Laurence Moore in *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans*, that "[N]ineteenth-century American culture was not a monolith that required Catholics to react to the actions of other Americans. That culture, scarcely a monolith, was just as much an arena in which other Americans had to respond to the actions of Catholics."⁵ If anything, the first decades of the twentieth century served only to heighten this impression. As a number of historians have argued, the early years of this century saw the decline of Protestant cultural hegemony, which was replaced by what has been variously described as "consumer culture," the "culture of personality," and the "triumph of the therapeutic."⁶ While this newly emergent culture provided serious challenges to religious perspectives of all sorts, ironically it also to some extent leveled the playing field; that is, it opened previously closed avenues of cultural expression to other groups, among them American Catholics. It is no accident that in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s American Catholic cultural influence was felt in newly powerful ways, through phenomena as varied as the 1926 Eucharistic Congress, Al Smith's failed (but credible) Presidential campaign, the popularity and notoriety of Father Coughlin, the growth of labor unions, and the tremendous impact of the Legion of Decency and the Motion Picture Production Code.

Debates over theology and doctrine, to the extent that they take place in the mass media, always have multiple audiences and seldom are shaped solely by theological and doctrinal concerns. In articulating their own views, Catholics are usually

⁵R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 71.

⁶See, among many others, T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), and Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon, 1984). How this shift in cultural authority affects debates over popular media is a theme throughout a special issue of the *American Quarterly*, "Hollywood, Censorship and American Culture," 44 (December 1992).

attempting to refute objections to them; and Protestants, similarly, these articles suggest, always have in mind how they stand in relation to Catholicism, both doctrinally and culturally. This point will be developed and clarified as I move to my second category of depictions of Mary.

Mary as News

If Catholic doctrine and American Catholics are a shadowy presence behind Protestant debates over the virgin birth, they emerge clearly into the foreground in depictions of the other major Marian doctrine that appears in the pages of these magazines—the Assumption. Compared to the articles on the virgin birth, those on the Assumption of Mary reveal shifts in the history of popular magazines as well as in the relationship of Catholicism to American culture.

As early as 1934, *Newsweek* carried a report entitled "Virgin's Assumption Sought as Article of Faith."⁷ This article is actually a report on another article that appeared in *America*, written by *America's* editor, Wilfrid Parsons, S.J. The *Newsweek* article notes the long-term dedication of the Jesuits to Mary, their advocacy of the doctrine of the Assumption, and the two means by which, they say, such a doctrine might be promulgated—papal bull or ecumenical council.

Not surprisingly, little other discussion of the Assumption occurs until the late 1940s, when hints that the doctrine would be promulgated begin to fill the air.⁸ These reports in secular magazines emphasize that belief in the Assumption was ancient,

⁷"Virgin's Assumption Sought as Article of Faith," *Newsweek* 4 (25 Aug. 1934): 25-26.

⁸ See, e.g. (in chronological order): "Assumption of Mary," *Time* 52 (29 Nov. 1948): 81; Georges A. Barrois, "If the Pope Defines the Assumption," *Christian Century* 66 (3 Aug. 1949): 912-14; "The Assumption of Mary," *Newsweek* 36 (28 Aug. 1950): 70; "Dogma in Dispute: Mary's Assumption," *Time* 56 (28 Aug. 1950): 48; "Assumption Dogma to Be Announced," *Christian Century* 67 (30 Aug. 1950): 1012; John Frederick Olson, "A Protestant Views the Assumption," *Christian Century* 67 (4 Oct. 1950): 1161-62; "New Dogma," *Time* 56 (6 Nov. 1950): 48-50; "A Dogma Is Proclaimed: Pope Affirms Assumption of Mary as Binding Faith," *Life* 29 (13 Nov. 1950): 128-29; "Dogma of the Assumption," *Newsweek* 36 (13 Nov. 1950): 82; "Queenship of Mary," *Time* 64 (8 Nov. 1954): 92.

though not scriptural. They also generally mention that defining the Assumption as a dogma posed potential problems, both for Catholics (who would now "incur the stigma of heresy"⁹) should they reject what had previously been a "pious belief") and for Christianity as a whole (because proclaiming the dogma would "deepen the breach" between Roman Catholicism and other branches of Christianity). These warnings were most dire, not surprisingly, in the *Christian Century*, which asserted that proclaiming the dogma would "provide new ammunition for those, in the Kremlin and outside, who attack religion as the last citadel and source of superstition."¹⁰

No less a respondent than Graham Greene, writing in *Life* magazine, explained the opposition to the Assumption as a "distrust of the concrete."¹¹ "[T]he statement that Mary is the Mother of God remains something shocking, paradoxical, physical. . . . The Resurrection of Christ can be regarded as the Resurrection of a God, but the Resurrection of Mary foreshadows the Resurrection of each one of us."¹² Greene's observation is perhaps validated by the coverage of the actual ceremony proclaiming the dogma, which took place on November 1, 1950. These reports emphasized what might be called the Catholic set decoration of the event. *Life* published a photo of the "resplendent gathering" of bishops; *Newsweek* described the Pope as "clad in white wool and damask worked with gold," and added the interesting detail that the document containing the new dogma "runs to 26 pages of parchment—made from the whole skins of six sheep."¹³

The Assumption is only one of a variety of Marian news stories that make the 1950s very much the decade of Mary, as far as her prominence in popular periodicals is concerned. Its proclamation in 1950 was followed by the declaring of the Marian year in 1954, which culminated in the establishment of the

⁹"A Dogma Is Proclaimed," *Life* 29, 129.

¹⁰"Assumption Dogma to Be Announced," *Christian Century* 17, 1012.

¹¹Graham Greene, "The Catholic Church's New Dogma: The Assumption of Mary," *Life* 29 (30 Oct. 1950): 50-58. (Hereafter cited as: Greene, "Assumption of Mary.")

¹²Greene, "Assumption of Mary," 51, 58.

¹³"Dogma of the Assumption," *Newsweek* 36, 82.

feast of the Queenship of Mary. These signs of increased prominence given to Mary were covered with some alarm, once again, in the Protestant press; popular press stories about them were generally reports on reports. For example, *Newsweek* carried a two-paragraph report in its Religion section for December 20, 1954, entitled "Mary to Protestants," composed of brief excerpts from a longer article in the December 15 *Christian Century* by Thomas Boslooper, entitled "At the End of the Marian Year," in which the author argues that the increased attentions to Mary, both official and popular, "point prophetically to the day, should this trend continue, when Protestantism may be the sole heir to the faith once delivered to the saints" (1514). Boslooper explains the rise of Marian devotion within Catholic tradition as something like a "marketing strategy" (my term): "Because Mary has appeal, Roman Catholic authorities are inundating the world with a flood of sentimentalism designed to 'touch' many hearts" (1515). His primary objection is the implication he sees in increased Marian devotion that Christ is not sufficient for redemption. The *Christian Century* took an editorial position very similar to Boslooper's. "[T]he popularity of the Marian cult suggests a real danger lest the devotion of multitudes become sentimentalized adoration of a concept of religion that is almost denuded of ethical content. . . . The Christian faith needed to confront and confound the challenges characteristic of these times is not likely to grow out of the shallow soil of pious sentimentalism."¹⁴

"The devotion of multitudes," of course, was the other great Marian news story of the 1950s. The centenary in 1958 of Bernadette Soubirous' visions at Lourdes combined with the explosion in popularity of the Fatima devotion to make apparitions the most prominent feature of popular magazine coverage of Mary. The coverage of Lourdes and Fatima was certainly most prominent, but they created a context in which other, more contemporary reports of apparitions could also attract attention, such as the reported appearance of the Blessed Mother in a tree in Philadelphia's Fairmount Park.¹⁵

¹⁴"Roman Church Opens Marian Year," *Christian Century* 70 (23 Dec. 1953): 1492.

¹⁵"Some Schoolgirls and a Vision in Philadelphia," *Life* 35 (16 Nov. 1953): 71-72.

Most of these articles on the Assumption exhibit an important shift in rhetorical stance on the part of the magazines involved. The reports on the Assumption are just that—reports. They recount the controversy over the doctrine of the Assumption, but they do not engage in it. In this, they contrast markedly with the *Christian Century*, for example, which published at least three articles between August of 1949 and August of 1950, warning of the negative consequences that would follow on the dogma's proclamation. Mainstream periodicals, by the late 1930s, were no longer for the most part a venue for theological debate *per se*, mainly because fewer such periodicals were published by Protestant clergy. This is but one example of the shifting of control over popular media out of the hands of a liberal Protestant middle class. These guardians of culture and morality were replaced by secular owners, in the case of mass market magazines; this movement towards market segmentation meant that their explicitly Protestant theological interests were relegated to explicitly Protestant periodicals such as the *Christian Century*.¹⁶

The shift in ownership of popular media coincides, as I noted above, with a coming to awareness on the part of American Catholics of the legitimacy and solidity of their place in American culture. The confidence generated by Catholic Action in the 1930s, that Catholicism was meant to permeate and transform the social order, was strengthened by the unifying experience of the Second World War and by Catholic participation in the general postwar prosperity. This confidence, however, existed side-by-side with a persistent sense that Catholics were in significant ways different from other Americans. The images of Mary in popular periodicals reflect this contradictory impulse, nowhere more strikingly than in discussions of apparitions.

¹⁶See R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (New York: Oxford, 1994), Chap. 9.

Apparitions

Apparitions occupy more space than any other topic in popular periodical coverage of Marian matters. As one might expect, most attention was given to the apparitions and shrines at Lourdes and Fatima. Based on events that occurred in 1858, Lourdes was already a well-established devotion by the beginning of the period here examined, and it attracted attention in an intriguing variety of magazines. In the 1950s, for example, *Reader's Digest* featured in its "Condensed Book" section not one but two different memoirs of trips to Lourdes by disinterested observers who left, if not exactly believers, at least convinced that something was going on that they could not explain—but something other than hysteria, or mass delusion, or a hoax.¹⁷ I will note some of the common features of these accounts of Lourdes (as well as some of the significant exceptions), then describe the coverage of the centenary year before turning to depictions of Fatima, which differ in interesting ways from the accounts of Lourdes.

The most typical kind of article on Lourdes, especially before 1950, is a first-person account of a journey there. Accounts of Lourdes in popular periodicals tend, not surprisingly, to be written by non-Catholics. There are some interesting exceptions, however, such as the extended and glowing description in *Vogue*, in 1958, written by Kathryn Hulme, well-known at the time as author of *The Nun's Story*.¹⁸ These accounts, even when written by non-Catholics, however, are not necessarily therefore unsympathetic or even skeptical. Most such accounts do not even approach the sneering cynicism of Paul Blanshard, who in his well-known series of articles in the *Nation* (later published as *American Freedom and Catholic Power*), describes the shrines at Lourdes and Fatima as "enormously profitable financially and spiritually" (574), and says that "the anti-science of the priests is as anomalous in the American environment as the thumbscrew and the rack"

¹⁷Alexis Carrel, "The Voyage to Lourdes," *Readers' Digest* 57 (Sept. 1950): 147-62; and Ruth Cranston, "The Miracle of Lourdes," *Reader's Digest* 67 (Dec. 1955): 173-84+.

¹⁸Kathryn Hulme, "River of Light, Lourdes," *Vogue* 131 (1 Jan. 1958): 96-97.

(576).¹⁹ What Blanshard's characterization does suggest is that depictions of Marian apparitions are almost always tied up with broader issues of what is and is not American, and what is and is not modern.

In 1900, for example, the *Outlook* (a non-denominational Protestant publication edited by Lyman Abbott) published "A Town of Modern Miracles," an article that emphasized (casually and not unsympathetically) the distance between the modern America of the author and the pre-modern peasants of Lourdes (the Lourdes of 1900 as much as that of 1858).²⁰ The author, Clifton Johnson, describes the inhabitants of Lourdes at various times as "ignorant," "unenterprising," "backward," "simple-minded" and "superstitious." He depicts women carrying baskets of washing on their heads and farm workers cutting grass with scythes—typically picturesque motifs in the genre of travel writing, it is true, but also a way of locating the story and devotion of Lourdes in a realm clearly outside modernity. This may explain a somewhat jarring contrast at the article's end. Johnson's account of Bernadette's visions and the subsequent history of the devotion is dispassionate, even sympathetic. He ends the article, however, with a description of standing at the Lourdes grotto and watching a young couple with a toddler. The toddler falls, banging her head quite hard, and the crowd around watches with interest and sympathy as her parents try to comfort her. "At once humanity was full of compassion and every heart was stirred"; Johnson writes,

but the white figure and the grotto, with all their supernatural powers of healing, were untouched and gave no sign. . . . A human atom had been hurt, but there was no visible indication that it made a particle of difference to either deity or nature.

That marvelous cures are made at Lourdes is beyond question, but that these are due to the miraculous power of the place and not primarily to some wholly natural mental or physical change in the persons cured is not so clear. (570)

¹⁹Paul Blanshard, "Roman Catholic Science," *Nation* 168 (22 May 1948): 574-76.

²⁰Clifton Johnson, "A Town of Modern Miracles," *Outlook* 65 (7 July 1900): 561-70 (page numbers for citations in text).

Many of the features of Johnson's account are common to other descriptions of journeys to Lourdes—a retelling of the story of the apparitions and of Bernadette's subsequent history, a description of the town, the landscape, and the area around the Grotto and Basilica. Such retellings tend to highlight Bernadette's lowly origins and the opposition to the devotion on the part of church and civil authorities. They also contrast the peace and order of the Basilica enclosure, and the pathos and devotion of the sick who come in the hope of being cured, with the blatant commercialism of the town, with its religious "bric-a-brac" dealers right up to the gates of the Basilica. In two different 1958 articles, *Time* magazine listed the wares for sale in the streets of Lourdes: "alarm clocks that tinkle *Ave Maria*, cellophane bags of throat lozenges made from 'Genuine Lourdes Water,'" neckties, corkscrews, fountain pens and egg-timers.²¹

In addition, such accounts tend to downplay the miraculous as the most important or striking thing about Lourdes; they do not scoff, but they do suggest that the extraordinary thing about Lourdes is not the number of documented cures but rather its whole atmosphere, how the people treat each other, and the effect of these things on the sick who come—peace of mind, serenity, acceptance. So, for example, writing in *Commonweal* as "A Protestant Looks at Lourdes," Margaret Gray Blanton argues at the very end of her article that

these cures make of Lourdes such a storm center of argument! It is unfortunate that they take so much attention from something just as valuable: a recrudescence of faith and valor, a relighting of the flame of courage which, sick or well, is needed by us all. (180)²²

Similarly, H. Flanders Dunbar, a physician prominent for her work in the psychosomatic origins of disease, writing in the

²¹"Hospital for Souls," *Time* 71 (24 Feb. 1958): 43; and "Piracy in Piety," *Time* 72 (21 Jul. 1958): 49.

²²Margaret Gray Blanton, "A Protestant Looks at Lourdes," *Commonweal* 31 (15 Dec. 1939): 178-80.

Forum in 1934, answers the question "What Happens at Lourdes?" thus:

Things happen at Lourdes which we cannot explain on the basis of our present knowledge of medicine or of spiritual resources. The important thing is that psychic forces without the help of scientific method and many of the tools of healing that science has given us, and indeed in disobedience of many of the principles science has taught us, are making people happier and freer to act. (230)

She sees Lourdes as an outstanding example of a hopeful trend:

One may venture to say that in all the history of the development of mankind, nothing more important has happened than the present application of the scientific method to the study, not merely of human behavior, but especially of emotions from the point of view of their physiological significance on the one hand and their social significance on the other. (231)

In other words, even if the healing at Lourdes *is* psychosomatic, this not so much demystifies the healing as clarifies the power of human emotions and the connection between mind and body—a very positive, if not entirely orthodox, reading of the devotion. Thus, in deflecting attention away from the cures at Lourdes, curious, disinterested observers are not, in many cases, trying to debunk it so much as to explain its appeal without recourse to the supernatural, a difficult task, but one they undertake with more good will than might have been anticipated.

The writers of these accounts remain observers in more ways than one—they not only for the most part are not Catholic, but most of them are American. As I mentioned before, they see and highlight a stark contrast between their own society—efficient, sanitary, modern, and at least by implication "scientific" if not outright skeptical—with the earnest, honest simplicity and piety of the European devotees at Lourdes and at Fatima. Marguerite Steele, for example, writing in *Catholic World* in 1937, describes the predicament of the American visitor to Fatima, not content with a campsite or with sleeping in their cars: "it is for the pampered ones—such

as the 'tenderfoot' Americans are reputed to be—who cling to such fleshpots as a bed to rest on, plentiful ablutions and a cup of hot coffee, that the situation becomes acute" (169).²³ In the end, she and her companions do acquire suitable lodging through the influence of the owner of a Catholic bookstore in Lisbon. This type of tongue-in-cheek but not entirely humorous observation is so common in these reports on journeys to Lourdes and Fatima—few can resist commenting, for example, that the water in the baths at Lourdes was changed only once (or twice—accounts differ) a day—that it becomes an implicit commentary on what constitutes the modern, with a distinctively American orientation toward progress, sanitation and hygiene. But it also implies an association between the modern, the scientific and the secular, in contrast to Lourdes' and Fatima's inefficiency, grime, pre-industrial technology—and devout religious belief.

This emphasis shifts subtly in later features on Lourdes and Fatima, partly, presumably, because facilities at both places continue to modernize. A *Newsweek* article describing preparations for the Lourdes centenary lists the appropriations the town had made in anticipation of the event—\$1 million for enlarging the water system, \$500,000 for new sewers, \$225,000 for new street lights, \$2 million on road improvements and 25,000 parking spaces.²⁴

Most of the things I have said so far about the apparitions and shrine at Lourdes apply also to magazine accounts of Fatima. Fatima is also depicted in first-person accounts wherein the author acknowledges the power of the story and of the place while still retaining an observer's distance on the question of cures and miracles. What is distinctive, however, about the Fatima devotion and hence about its periodical coverage, is its political dimension. While Lourdes is primarily about healing, Fatima is devoted to prayer for world peace, and, most specifically, to the conversion of Russia. While this will certainly not come as a surprise to anyone able to remember the

²³Marguerite Steele, "Fatima, the Lourdes of Portugal," *Catholic World* 145 (May 1937): 164-73.

²⁴"Procession to a Shrine," *Newsweek* 51 (24 Feb. 1958): 64+.

1950s, two things about the magazine depictions of Fatima were surprising. First, there was no reference at all to Fatima in any indexed periodical, Catholic or secular, before the 1937 *Catholic World* article quoted above. As late as 1942, as prominent and central a voice in American Catholicism as *Commonweal* editor Michael Williams knew so little about Fatima that he had to ask his readers for information.²⁵ So, twenty-five years after the apparition, it appears that the devotion had relatively little mainstream following, at least in the United States.

Second, there is no mention of the conversion of Russia in any of these sources before the Second World War; afterwards, this focus is central and pervasive. In the U.S. mainstream media, then, the Fatima devotion is a Cold War phenomenon—it becomes popular when the Cold War's distinctive stand-off between the good of capitalist democracy and the evil of socialist communism comes to dominate the international scene and the domestic psyche.

The Cold-War prominence of the Fatima devotion typifies in many ways the complicated cultural position of postwar American Catholicism. On the one hand, well into the 1950s, Catholics were still seen as "the others"—exotic and interesting, but slightly foreign and potentially threatening to American unity and consensus. The emphasis in the photo and news magazines on some of the more arcane elements of Catholic devotion seems to reinforce this notion, as in *Life's* account of two Philadelphia schoolgirls seeing a vision of the Blessed Mother in a tree in Fairmount Park, or the emphasis in the Fatima devotion on the "secrets." The sense that Catholics were different from other Americans was in some ways benign—they enhanced the diversity which Americans have long believed central to their identity and vitality as a country. Thus, for example, the candlelight procession at Lourdes and other examples of what we might call "religion as spectacle" were exotic but dramatic, beyond the ken of "typical" Americans, perhaps, but somehow still part of the cultural mix, of the melting pot. In extreme form, however,

²⁵Michael Williams, "Views and Reviews: Apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Fatima," *Commonweal* 37 (18 Dec. 1942): 227-28.

the belief that Catholicism lay outside the American mainstream could lead to apprehension about the threat it thereby posed to the American system. This apprehension manifested itself in a number of ways in the postwar years, including the formation of Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, and the tremendous popularity of Paul Blanshard's books. One of Blanshard's main contentions was the similarity between the Vatican and the Kremlin—both centralized seats of power contending for the allegiance of the America populace. His book *Communism, Democracy and Catholic Power* includes alternating chapters on "The Kremlin Structure of Power" and "The Vatican Structure of Power," "The Kremlin and Thought Control" and "The Vatican and Thought Control," "The Management of Truth: The Kremlin" and "The Management of Truth: The Vatican," and "The Strategy of Penetration: The Kremlin" and "The Strategy of Penetration: The Vatican." He finishes off, then, with a final chapter entitled, "The American Answer."

The irony here, of course, is that suspicion of Catholic Communist tendencies was contemporaneous with intense Catholic anticommunism. And while it is certainly true that American Catholics were opposed to Communism largely on principle, on ideological grounds, it is also true that vocal anticommunism was, in the 1950s, a very effective way of unequivocally claiming identity as Americans. American Catholics did this in a number of ways, including strong support for Joe McCarthy. What the Fatima devotion did was to bring anticommunism into a distinctively Catholic devotional context, to assert an intense and earnest belief that the future of the world depended on Catholics—not just on politics or on the bomb, but on the power of prayer. It was, among other things, a counter-cultural way to be directly in the cultural mainstream.

This ability to live in two worlds—to be distinctively Catholic while decisively American—is a point to which we will return in the conclusion. To take us there, I would like to consider the fourth and final category of Marian images I found in American periodicals—Marian art as part of the heritage of the West.

Marian Art and Western Culture

Second only to features on apparitions and shrines, Marian images in American popular periodicals occur primarily in features on Marian art. Not surprisingly, these features occur most frequently in the December issues of a variety of periodicals.²⁶ Sometimes the location was somewhat unpredictable—*Fortune* magazine, for example, ran an extended feature in December 1936, entitled, "The Virgin Mary: A Portfolio of Paintings Which Reveal Her Place in Religious Art." The feature included ten color reproductions of famous paintings, beginning with Aelbrecht Bouts' *Annunciation*, continuing with two *Adoration[s] of the Magi*, including Titian's, several depictions of the Holy Family, including El Greco's, and finishing with Rogier Van der Weyden's *Pieta*, an Assumption and a Coronation. Similarly, *House and Garden* reproduced in its December 1948 issue a Madonna and Child by Salvador Dali, and the *Ladies Home Journal* feature, "Mothers of the Bible," finished in January 1903 with "Mary" by H. O. Tanner.

This all seems predictable enough—but, could there be anything more going on here than simply the rote presentation of a suitable Christmas feature? Three things that will lead to my conclusion deserve to be highlighted; they represent some tentative observations about the place of twentieth-century American Catholicism.

²⁶J. C. Van Dyke, "Story of the Sistine Madonna," *Ladies Home Journal* 20 (Jan. 1903): 6; "Mothers of the Bible," *Ladies Home Journal* 20 (Jan. 1903): 13; J. C. Van Dyke, "Madonnas in Italian Art," *Ladies Home Journal* 21 (Dec. 1903): 32-33; J. LaFarge, "Annunciation in Art," *McClure* 30 (Jan. 1908): 339-45; "Madonna in Art: Eight Old Masters," *Woman's Home Companion* 53 (Dec. 1926): 133-40; "Account of Her Supreme Influence Over Catholic Mankind," *Fortune* 14 (Dec. 1936): 113+; "Portfolio of Paintings Which Reveal Her Place in Religious Art," *Fortune* 14 (Dec. 1936): 114-19; "World's Greatest Story Has Inspired the World's Greatest Art," *Life* 13 (28 Dec. 1942): 42-47; "Cult of Mary: Excerpts from 'Our Lady's Juggler,' by Anatole France," *Life* 22 (7 April 1947): 83; "Gifts for God," *Time* 50 (29 Dec. 1947): 42-45; "Madonna and Child by Salvador Dali," *House and Garden* 4 (Dec. 1948): 103; "Story of Christ: Reproduction of Arena Chapel Murals by Giotto," *Life* 25 (Dec. 1948): 37-57; "Old Madonna Grows Older," *Life* 38 (2 May 1955): 94+; "Oldest Madonna," *Time* 65 (16 May 1955): 88-89; "Mother and Child," *Ladies Home Journal* 74 (Dec. 1957): 46-47; "Madonna and Child," *Life* 43 (16 Dec. 1957): 58-69; "River's Madonna at Portage des Sioux, MO," *Life* 44 (10 Feb. 1958): 63.

First, these art features have a discernible dimension of American self-consciousness. They are in many instances as concerned with the price and acquisition of the works of art as with their subject or creator. Thus, the caption under a Lippi *Madonna and Child* notes that Samuel Kress bought it from Germany in 1937, when Hitler was attempting to acquire foreign exchange, "thus bringing to America one of the world's great masterpieces." Another caption in the same feature records the price Andrew Mellon paid for Van Eyck's *Annunciation*—\$503,000. Many of the captions note which "old masters" are owned by Americans—a measure, presumably, of how closely Americans are approaching the high level of European culture.

These features are also about art history—that is, they are aimed at educating readers about the importance of provenance and technique, period and patronage. Some particularly highlight the fascination of restoration. Both *Time* and *Newsweek* covered, in 1955, the discovery of a fifth-century Madonna underneath a thirteenth-century repainting. *Life*, in 1948, carried an extended feature on the restoration of the Arena chapel murals by Giotto, including a number of panels from the life of Mary—among them her birth and presentation, as well as the wedding feast at Cana and the Pieta. Feature articles on Marian art highlight as well the work of contemporary artists such as Henry Moore and Jacob Epstein—along with the photographers, such as *Life*'s Alfred Eisenstadt, that helped make the photomagazines that arose in the 1930s one of the most successful media innovations in American history.

These features are not, however, simply a sentimentally appropriate commemoration of Christmas, nor a nationalistic celebration of the power of American acquisition. They fall in a somewhat broader context into the mid-century flourishing of what historians call "middlebrow" culture, the multifaceted emergence of media (such as the Book-of-the-Month Club) aimed at bringing culture to the masses. Just as cultural institutions such as the BOMC and radio programs like "Talk of the Town" attempted to make "culture" accessible beyond its customarily upper-class audience, so magazines such as *Life* attempted to inform and to cultivate.²⁷

²⁷Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

What is significant in this context about the depiction of Mary is the matter-of-fact centrality accorded to her in the history of Western culture. "The Middle Ages"—part of *Life's* 1947 series on the history of Western culture—along with Chartres and Abelard and Bacon, features "The Cult of Mary" and a retelling of the story of "Our Lady's Juggler" (also retold in *Reader's Digest* in 1941). These works are central to the heritage of the West because they were created by the great masters, but the great masters painted and sculpted and wrote about these subjects because the story and institutions of Christianity were themselves central to the creation of Western culture. As a central actor in that story, Mary is thus a symbol of cultural unity and consensus and continuity—not, as in some of the stories on dogmatic definitions, of exoticism and potential division.

Historians of American Catholicism are accustomed to describing the situation of American Catholics in the mid-twentieth century as a "ghetto"—a homogeneous, self-contained enclave that defined cultural reality for most of its members. While it is true that Catholics have been highly self-conscious about their identity throughout the twentieth century, the metaphor of the ghetto is only useful (it seems to me) if we conceive of it as having extremely permeable boundaries. This is implicit in much of what I have been saying about the depictions of Mary in American secular-popular periodicals. The public image of American Catholics was shaped by these depictions, but American Catholics also helped to shape them. (One of many subjects worth further examination is the role Catholic convert Clare Booth Luce played, if any, in the depiction of Catholicism in *Life*, one of the most influential organs of American cultural self-consciousness in the mid-twentieth century.) As seen by this varied community, then, Mary is an image of both unity and division, of both Catholic confidence and Catholic defensiveness, of American identity and cosmopolitan culture—escaping, ultimately, beyond the confines of the categories of cultural analysis and remaining in the realm of mystery.