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# Maria

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**Review article:**

**Peter Jan Margry (ed.),** *Cold War Mary: Ideologies, Politics, Marian Devotional Culture*, Leuven University Press, 2020. ISBN: 9789462702516 (pkb); 9789461663566 (e-bk). Pp 1-400.

Peter Jan Margry has written and edited previous books and articles on pilgrimage and Marian apparitional movements, and in this volume he has brought together a strong group of academics in order to explore how Marian devotion played its part in the Cold War period. The book is a contribution to Cold War studies as well as to Catholic social history and the literature on Marian apparitions and movements.

The book can be commended for its avoidance of three temptations with this kind of material. First, it never falls into the trap of making a vague general statement that the Catholic Church colluded with popular religion in creating ideological propaganda based around the figure of the Virgin Mary. Throughout the authors show how the Catholic response to the Cold War was multifaceted and never co-ordinated, sometimes creating controversy and disagreement within Catholicism. The Church was almost always suspicious of the new apparition cults that emerged after 1945, despite accepting the anti-communist message developed through the cult of Fátima. Neither did it support explicitly all of the organisations developed across the Catholic world in response to the Cold War, but preferred a diplomatic approach to international relations with the Soviet Union and ecumenical sensitivity in Protestant majority countries.

Second, the book does not concentrate on social organisations and political movements at the expense of people and personalities. There are some interesting cameos of individuals who gave their lives to Marian causes during this period. However much one disagrees with a person politically and theologically, hearing a life story can yet engender a feeling of understanding and respect for them and what they were trying to achieve. The stories of characters such as Fr Nicholas Gruner, the Canadian founder of the 'Fatima Center', and Fr Lambert Terstroet, the Montfortian who created the 'Pentagon of the Empire of Mary' in the Netherlands, make interesting reading. Both suffered the disapproval of the Church episcopate but, while Gruner continued to agitate for his view that Russia had not been properly consecrated to the Immaculate Heart, and was thus suspended from his priesthood, Terstroet accepted the Church's suppression of his initiative and so allowed it to disappear into the archives. There is also plenty of reference in the book to correspondence, diocesan archives, and media articles, all which bring a human dimension to the subject.



Third, the authors refrain from labelling the devotees of the movements in any pejorative way. The book is objective in that it neither promotes the organisations and initiatives mentioned nor does it denigrate them as fanatics. One feels for the ten-year-old visionary of Cuevas de Vinromá in Spain in 1947, who wanted to convert her Republican father but whose family had to leave the area because the promised miracle, which attracted thousands, did not occur. We also read the descriptions and reflections of the pilgrims who swarmed to the place, illustrated with some compelling photos. The book is, as contributor Robert Ventresca suggests, an example of a 'sympathetic' approach, yet one which remains academically rigorous.

The different chapters take us across several countries, and so the Marian movements' response to the Cold War is localized, contextualized, and rich in diversity. We range across Europe: Italy with Robert Ventresca, Brittany with Sandra Zimdars-Swartz, Belgium with Tine van Osselaer, Spain with Willian Christian Jr and Marina Sanahuja Beltram, Poland with Agnieszka Halemba and Konrad Siekierski, West Germany with Monique Scheer, and the Netherlands with Peter Jan Margry. Then to other continents: Thomas Kselman on Necedah and Daniel Wojcik on Bayside cover the two main apparitions of the post-war United States, Katharine Massam tells us about Australia, and Deirdre de la Cruz contributes a chapter on the Philippines. Added to these are David Morgan's chapter on the travelling Fátima statues, and Michael Agnew on the Fatima Center. Anyone who has done any research or reading in this field knows that this is a really strong line-up.

I will pick out a few highlights. For me, Halemba and Siekierski's chapter on Poland was of particular interest because, as the authors affirm, there is so little literature on the apparition movements in Eastern Europe except for occasional studies in the native languages. Here again the message is clear: the Marian movement in Poland was not a monolith. The chapter is unique in that it deals with a country that was under communist rule until 1989, and the authors conclude that the anti-communist emphasis of Polish apparitions was not fully articulated until after 1989. Before then, they were understood mainly as miracles that helped people get by in difficult circumstances. The Polish Church, as was

common elsewhere after 1945, discouraged apparition movements just as the State did, except for the weeping Madonna of Lublin in 1949 which occurred in a cathedral.

I enjoyed the moving descriptions of the missions and processions using Fátima statues in Adelaide and Cologne/Köln during the early 1950s. These missions happened in many countries worldwide, but it always interesting to read about particular places as examples of international trends and movements, and to pick up the unique detail that pertains to a locality. Adelaide's processions were surprisingly successful as a communal expression of faith despite the city being majority Protestant. Here and there in this volume, we read how the Marian Catholic world and in the Protestant churches came into some convergence on the twin challenges, as they perceived it, of communism and liberalism. This alliance continues today, particularly in the United States.

The processions that took place in the West German diocese of Cologne in 1954 were not warmly welcomed by the German episcopate, clergy, or laity; in this case, awareness of the Protestant population seems to have been a constraining factor. The propagator, Cardinal Archbishop Josef Frings of Cologne, was also chair of the national bishops' conference, yet he failed to establish support for the 'peregrination' of the Fátima statue in other dioceses, except for West Berlin and Münster. The statue came from the same firm in Portugal that had sculpted the original Fátima statue, and it found a resting place in a small town called Alzen in an area of natural beauty, in a new church dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. It was processed with the present archbishop of Cologne in attendance on the centenary of the Fátima apparitions in 2017. I am keen to visit!

Altogether, this is a really interesting and well written book by accomplished scholars in the field. Students of Catholic or Cold War history should certainly look it up. My criticisms are few. If I had been the peer reviewer, I would have questioned the division of the book into sections entitled 'Church and Ideologies', 'Politico-Devotional Realms', and 'Armies and Crusades'. It seems to me that these sub-titles relate to all chapters across the book. And I might have suggested a preliminary chapter on Fátima so that individual contributors did not feel the need to repeat descriptive material about this apparition and the evolution of its cult. But these are minor quibbles. The book succeeds diachronically – analysing how cults and



organisations shift and evolve – and synchronically – investigating particular events in their historical detail. It reads as an integrated whole with thirteen contributors working well together, and I am glad to have it on my bookshelf.

Chris Maunder