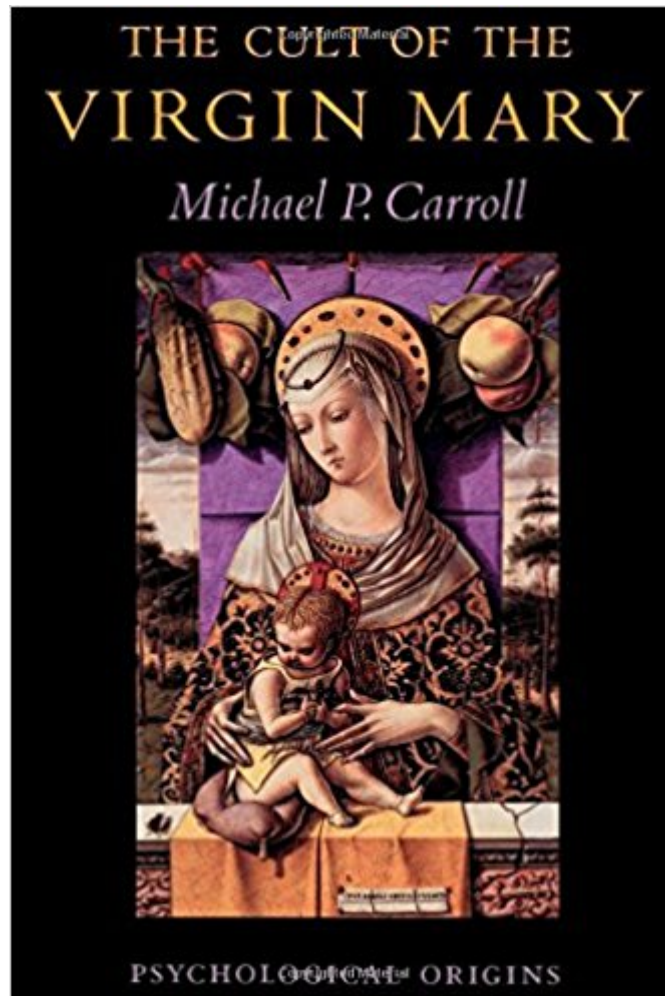




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The Cult Of The Virgin Mary



Synopsis

Tracing devotion to Mary to psychological and historical processes that began in the fifth century, Michael Carroll answers intriguing questions: What explains the many reports of Marian apparitions over the centuries? Why is Mary both "Virgin" and "Mother" simultaneously? Why has the Marian cult always been stronger in certain geographical areas than in others? The first half of the book presents a psychoanalytic explanation for the most salient facts about the Marian cult and the second addresses the question of Marian apparitions.

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Customer Reviews

"The contention is made that at the root of the Marian cult is the poverty-created father-ineffective family, a family structure in which Oedipal desires in both sons and daughters are intensified. . . . [A] fascinating and provocative read."--Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Journal of Church and State* "[Recommended] not only for the wealth of information and the carefully wrought argument that it presents, but also for its potential utility in destroying or at least casting doubt on the idols that prevent us from seeing more clearly and more insightfully the bases of faith and theological conviction."--W. W. Meissner, S.J., M.D., *Theological Studies*

A Bible-based review by Don the Baptist of the text *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins* by Michael P. Carroll. I read the text in its entirety. [Note: THIS TEXT IS NOT AN EVANGELICAL WORK designed to aid Catholics in understanding

particular errors in their belief system.]Now then, having cleared up that misconception, most of my complaints in reference to this text are based upon having purchased the text without being aware of the subtitle, *Psychological Origins*. While I do have a PhD. in Christian Psychology, I have little interest in the opinions of psychologists or psychiatrists who address Christianity as "the Christ cult." (page 221) Further, while I am by no means Catholic, I would not address a Catholic as a cultist nor would I refer to the followers of Mary as Marian cultists. Nothing is to be gained by such comments. Much, however, is to be gained by comparing Catholicism with the Final Authority *God's words* as found in the English Bible (King James Version 1611). In fact, almost equal gains are to be accomplished by comparing Catholicism with the Catholic Bible and focusing on the differences in that which is written by the Catholic hierarchy and that which is taught and believed by the simpler Catholic follower. In general, then, the text is handily divided into two parts. Part One deals with Freudian and Jungian theories and hypotheses as well as the opinions of Carroll himself. If one is a supporter or believer in such viewpoints, then the reader will likely be satisfied with his prospective purchase. If not, the reader will likely be disappointed. Part Two, in my opinion, is a far more practical use of paper and ink. A variety of visions of "Mary" are reviewed, and more realistic explanations are offered for the events described. Unfortunately, the "seers" of these events are rarely, if ever, satisfied with a practical explanation from the tangible world. Nonetheless, Part Two is far more interesting than Part One. This text is unique in that it refers to Christianity and Catholicism as cults, but no viewpoint is established on behalf of the author as to what a proper system of beliefs might entail. Nonetheless, as Carroll is an adherent to Freud and Jung ideologies, it seems safe to accept that Carroll is a member of the evolution cult. Likewise, unconscious mud-slinging is another characteristic of evolutionism, i.e. say anything but offer no defense of your own beliefs. [Note: No contradiction is evidenced by referring to evolutionists as "cultists". The very heart of evolution is the faith-based belief in an event which *God* for them occurred twenty odd billion years ago (This figure changes daily, and no one seems to notice. This is another characteristic of a cult.). As this is believed by faith (a religious belief witnessed by no one nor, in this case, verified by science), the honest evolutionist finds himself in the dubious position of believing by faith, yet he critiques others who likewise believe by faith.][Note: I believe every word of the English Bible (KJV, KJB, AV1611, etc.). Those events that I witness do not require faith. Those events that I do not witness yet are discussed in the Bible, I

believe by faith. Having faith is not a bad thing.][Note: If there is one commonality amongst the religions of the world, it is that one man's religion is another man's cult or sect. No one truly believes that they have been deceived and are, in fact, in a cult. Evolution is NOT an exception to this rule.]Returning to Part Two of the text, I note that those who have witnessed a particular Marian phenomenon are not as a rule bad people nor is it their intention typically to deceive. Rather, it is far more likely that the "seers" actually witnessed some unique event, but said event is simply beyond their intellectual capacities of explanation. Hence, with very few exceptions, all such visions occur in under-developed parts of the world where superstitions abound. Carroll holds a similar viewpoint. Page 217, for me at least, was particularly interesting. An account of a Marian image occurring in San Antonio, Texas my home town is discussed. In 1983, an image appeared on the side of a San Antonio home, which to some appeared to be Mary. The image itself was traced to a reflection of a street light off of a car bumper. Living in SA at the time, I noted that this event was very exciting for more than a few faithful catholics. On the other hand, it was not quite so thrilling for the neighboring homes. A particular neighbor, tired of having his lawn trampled at all hours of the night, installed a floodlight on the affected side of his home. The vision disappeared, it was forgotten, and the neighborhood quickly returned to normal. (A portion of this paragraph is not based on Carroll's text; rather, the events were discussed in the news media of the day. Although living in San Antonio at the time, I did not visit the site.)In short, people see what they want to see; people believe what they want to believe. I find it absurd in the extreme, however, that Carroll is a member of the most dubious religious cult on the planet who would critique another man's religion.

Carroll's book is a look at the role of Mary and of the apparitions of Mary from a more psychological perspective. The book is itself kind of a mixed bag. While it speaks of the cult, I do not think it means this in a derogative fashion but in the sense of the religious practices of a movement. Today, I could speak about the cultic functions of the Mosaic Law without saying the Jews are a cult in the same way groups like Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are defined as cults. The start does have some interesting history on Mary and the Roman Empire and how they were viewed in early Christianity. Carroll is kind in his words many times and you don't see disparaging talk of Christianity. He also doesn't seem to take seriously the idea that Mary is a copy of many cultic

groups of the time save for perhaps Cybele. Still, if so, that would only be one aspect and it does not mean that all of Christianity is a copy. Am I convinced by that? No, but at least he doesn't say everything is a copy and argues against that. Too much of the first session is also dependent on Freudian thinking. The great assumption is that the thinking of the people would be like ours today and that would include thinking sexually in the way Freud said children do. I found myself quite skeptical in this section. By far, the most interesting part to me was the part about the Marian apparitions. Carroll does interact with the writings on these appearances and looks at many of the major ones. If Carroll's even descriptions of these are accurate, they are really nothing like the appearances of Jesus to His disciples. Many times you would have people, notably children, who saw something and no one else did. They also did not know what they saw often until someone else suggested that it was the Virgin Mary and lo and behold, that's what it became. Carroll looks at the information in the devotional literature on the seers who saw the image and gives explanations that can easily justify the appearances as hallucinations or illusions. More study will have to be done on this, but for those who are suspicious, these are interesting ideas to consider. The Catholic Church itself has recommended caution in many cases of apparitions, and I believe rightly so. In all of this, nothing is said to make one think that the people experiencing these apparitions are crazy or anything of the sort. There is no indication that these people were living with a long-term mental illness or something of the kind. Many people within their lifetime who are otherwise normal and healthy will have hallucinatory experiences and it means nothing negative about their mental state. While I have other reading going on now on the apparitions, for those who are interested, this could be a good book worth checking out though I would say it would be for the section on the appearances. The first section has some interesting ideas, but the dependence on Freud is quite a negative to me. Still, with the possibility that these are hallucinations, having a psychological look is quite helpful. In Christ, Nick Peters

Deeper Waters Apologetics

This book will be a hard read for the Catholic Marian faithful, and I wouldn't be surprised if it gets Mr. Carroll on quite a few lists of books to avoid. However, I would like to speak in his defense. First of all this is a book written by a social scientist for social science. It is full of terms that are well understood in the disciplines but that are negatively loaded (One might even say explosive) when read from the standpoint of Catholic Devotional literature. For instance Mr. Carroll describes St. Bernadette Soubirous' Marian apparition, as a hallucination. Within the context of his analysis, this is an appropriate psychological term, as nobody else could see the apparition. However to the religious this term invalidates the experience, it makes it unreal. This was clearly not the intention of Mr.

Carroll. His research is well documented and his theories well supported. His analysis and arguments are complete. They are thoroughly presented, almost to the point of redundancy. And the fact of the matter is that it works. When we are through with the book we have a deeper understanding of the forces that shape Catholic worship and Marian devotion. I like this book. I have passed it along to friends and family and it has stimulated hours of discussion, debate and even red-faced argument. This book should be read by serious Marian scholars.

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