Our Lady of Emmitsburg, Visionary Culture, and Catholic Identity: Seeing and Believing

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Our Lady of Emmitsburg, Visionary Culture, and Catholic Identity: Seeing and Believing Jill Krebs This ethnography explores the community of believers in a series of Marian apparitions in rural Emmitsburg, Maryland, asking what it means to call oneself a Catholic and child of Our Lady in this context, what it means to believe in an apparition, and what it means to communicate with divine presence on earth. Believers fashion themselves as devotees of Our Lady in several ways. Through autobiography, they look backward in time to see their lives as leading up to their participation in the prayer group or in some cases moving to Emmitsburg. By observing and telling miracle stories, they adopt an enchanted worldview in which the miraculous becomes everyday. Through relationships with Our Lady, their lives are enriched and even transformed. When they negotiate institutional loyalty and individual autonomy, they affirm their own authority *and* Catholic identity. Finally, through social media, they expand their devotional networks in ways that shift authority structures and empower individuals. Individuals engage beliefs, practices, and attitudes both arising from and resisting elements of modernity, religious pluralism and religious decline, empowerment and perceived disempowerment, tradition and innovation, and institutional loyalty and perceived disloyalty to reveal one way of understanding Catholic identity amidst the shifts and flows of modern change.

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