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Hollywood and Catholic Women: Virgins, Whores, Mothers, and Other Images

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The Madonna-Whore Complex has been explored in countless scholarly works, each with its own take on the underlying cause, as well as the social impact of this male disorder. Kathryn Schleich's contribution to the growing body of research on the topic is a compilation of thought-provoking commentary that shines a bright light on information already under a microscope.

Backed by a substantial bibliography, Hollywood and Catholic Women, now in its second edition, presents an orderly arrangement of theatrical films and television shows, from the classics of decades past to the box office lures of today. A significant amount of the book is composed of synopsis, as opposed to analysis, bogging down the text in retelling quicksand. The goal is to enlighten the reader; unfortunately, section after section is delivered like an elaborate series of screenplay treatments, albeit with an academic slant.

Despite the book's flaws, Schleich offers worthwhile insight on issues that have been subjected to over-evaluation by her peers; the primary problem is that her examination of the issues is outweighed by all-too-frequent passages about characters and plots. More than fifty percent of the book, which is divided into six chapters and includes an excellent appendix, relies on rehash rather than criticism.

The foundation for the author's research is based on the following statement: "The Catholic Church has a long history of oppressing and alienating women, and much of this hostility stems from a deeply ingrained fear of women within the Church hierarchy."

According to Schleich, Hollywood is another patriarchal environment, and she puts forth an effective case for her thesis. She believes that Western society, in general, has supported "a long tradition of debasement and repression aimed at women." Women may have greater influence within the Church today, but this has been "under the constant threat of degradation, hostility, and oppression." Progress, she notes, has been slow.

A feminist scholar, Kathryn Schleich is a freelance writer living in Minnesota. She holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from Iowa State University and a master's degree in mass communication from California State University, Fresno.

Schleich's second edition of her informative book is a useful tool for students pursuing women's studies or film at the graduate level. Ironically, this reference title may also facilitate theological studies.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (June 11, 2012)

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