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Envisioning St. Bernadette: Faith, Healing, Virgins, and a Village in France

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Abstract

Over the more than sixteen decades since fourteen-year-old Bernadette Soubirous first saw, in February 1858, an apparition later identified as the Virgin Mary in a grotto outside her small village of Lourdes in the Pyrenees mountains of France, she and Lourdes have become global phenomena. However, while the girl and the village have become inextricably intertwined in the popular imagination, the roots of their appeal are subtly different. Each year some six million visitors flock to Lourdes, many of them hoping for one of the miraculous cures associated with a grotto spring pointed out by St. Bernadette (as she has been known since 1933). The pilgrimages attract communicants of all religions as well as the simply curious, but for whatever reasons people choose to come, the Roman Catholic Church has carefully framed the Lourdes phenomenon as a function of religious faith as traditionally understood. The appeal of Bernadette, though, has been broader, touching even anti-religious apostles of science like Émile Zola as well as Jewish artistic types including the novelist Franz Werfel and the poet Leonard Cohen. The attraction has been highly personal, deriving from her embodiment of adolescent commitment and common sense – a passionate virgin compared by many to Joan of Arc. Beyond that Bernadette has evolved as a symbol of healing reaching beyond the bodily ills sometimes healed at Lourdes to connect with grieving and despondent spirits. She has become a source of comfort rather than of cure.

Keywords: *St. Bernadette, Lourdes, faith healing, Roman Catholicism, Joan of Arc*

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세인트 버나데트 구상 : 믿음, 치유, 처녀, 프랑스의 마을

Donald C. Bellomy

국문요약

1858 년 2 월 14 세의 Bernadette Soubirous 가 프랑스 피레네 산맥의 루르드 (Lourdes) 작은 마을 외곽 동굴에서 이후에 동정녀 마리아로 판명된 환영을 본 이래로 160 년이상 그녀와 마을은 세계적인 현상이 되었다. 그러나 소녀와 마을은 대중의 상상력과 불가분의 관계가 있지만, 그들의 매력의 뿌리는 미묘하게 다르다. 매년 약 600 만 명의 방문객이 루르드로 몰려가고 있으며, 그중 많은 사람들이 세인트 버나데트(St. Bernadette, 그녀는 1933 년이래로 알려져 있다)가 지적한 그 샘과 관련된 기적적인 치료법 중 하나를 바라고 있다. 순례 여행은 모든 종교의 의사 소통자들을 끌어모을 뿐만 아니라 단순한 호기심을 불러 일으킨다. 그러나 사람들이 어떤 이유로든 전통적으로 이해되는 것처럼 로마 카톨릭 교회는 종교적 신앙의 기능으로 루르드 현상을 조심스럽게 틀어 놓았다. 그러나 버나데트의 매력은 에밀 졸라와 소설가 프란츠 베르 펠, 시인 레너드 코헨을 포함한 유대인 예술 유형과 같은 반 종교적 과학 사도들에게도 영향을 미쳤다. 그 매력은 매우 개인적인 것으로 사춘기의 헌신과 상식에 대한 그녀의 구체화에서 비롯되었다. 잔다르크와 많은 것이 비교되며 열정적인 처녀이다. 그외에도 Bernadette 는 때때로 루르드에서 치료받은 육체적 병을 넘어서 치유의 상징으로 발전하여 슬픔과 낙담한 영과 연결되었다. 그녀는 치료보다는 평온의 근원이 되었다.

주제어 : *세인트 Bernadette, 루르드, 믿음 치유, 로마 카톨릭교, 잔다르크*

I. One Hundred Sixty Years of Pilgrimage

After Émile Zola completed his mammoth series of twenty Rougon-Macquart novels depicting the forces shaping France in the second half of the nineteenth century, he turned to the contenders to lead his country's future that he saw in conflict in the 1890s. This time there would be only three novels linked not by a huge cast of members of two intertwined families but rather by a single protagonist, a young priest who has lost his faith. The other major difference was that Zola moved beyond a focus on France during the Second Empire to place the action for the three new novels in three separate European cities symbolizing contrasting visions of the future. His choices for the locales and names of the trilogy's second and third novels would not have surprised contemporary readers who followed the headlines and the preoccupations of the author's previous works – the *Rome* of the outwardly conciliatory Pope Leo XIII (Zola 1993 [1896]), and the *Paris* of financial scandals and anarchist bombs (Zola 1993 [1898]). But Zola's choice for the first of his "Three Cities" in 1894 had been *Lourdes*, a village in the Pyrenees mountains in the country's remote southwest not far above the Spanish border that housed barely four thousand inhabitants only one third of a century earlier.

The incongruity, though, was Zola's point, for he saw Lourdes as a mirage offering the illusion of a future continuous with centuries of the past of a people united in religious belief and practices that modern secularists, including Zola, considered superstitious. The trains bearing thousands of pilgrims afflicted in body or soul to be healed by drinking or bathing in water from the spring in the Massabielle grotto to which a teenage girl had been guided by a vision used modern technology to recapture for the visitors a lost past. A village with "narrow pebble-paved streets, black houses with marble dressings, and an antique, semi-Spanish church" (Zola 1993 [1894], 412) could, at least in their imaginations, offer a future as valid as major modern metropolises. "The spirit of the century had not breathed on those peaceful roofs sheltering a belated population which had remained childish, enclosed within the narrow limits of strict religious discipline" (413). Yet Zola counseled that, while some of the cures effected in Lourdes might last a lifetime, the hopes invested in its meaning would prove ephemeral. As a carriage driver taking the novel's protagonist around the town opines, "'Lourdes has caught on well, but the question is whether it will all last long.' That, in fact, was the question" (411) that the protagonist was also asking, the answer to which Zola believed he knew.

Ironically, Zola inadvertently helped insure the long-term success of the pilgrimage site, for, not only was *Lourdes* the author's "most successful novel" during his lifetime, outselling higher artistic achievements like *L'Assommoir*, *Nana*, and *Germinal*, but "it did more than any other publication to bring the sanctuary… and the debate over the nature of healing to the wider public" (Harris 2000 [1999], 331). The appeal of Lourdes as a destination for pilgrims barely flagged through two world wars, and received additional global publicity on December 8, 1933, when Pope Pius XI declared that, on the basis of evidence that Bernadette Soubirous had achieved miracles of healing on her own without the assistance of the water in her grotto, she merited elevation to sainthood (Trochu 2012 [1957], 373-384).

For many non-Catholics, an even more important boost to her global renown was the publication in 1941 of Franz Werfel's *Das Lied von Bernadette*, which rose to bestseller status after its translation into English the following year. The author was a German-speaking Jew

from what is now the Czech Republic who was fleeing the Germans after the fall of France in 1940. Unable to get visas to cross into Spain, Werfel and his wife Alma found sanctuary on the French side of the Pyrenees in Lourdes. "One day in my great distress I… vowed that if I escaped from this desperate situation and reached the saving shores of America, I would put off all other tasks and sing, as best I could, the song of Bernadette" (Werfel 2006 [1941], xiv). He described the book that he wrote in fulfillment of his promise in terms that prefigured the experiments of Truman Capote and Norman Mailer in the 1960s and 1970s, for to Werfel "*The Song of Bernadette* is a novel but not a fictive work" (xiv). Drawing on published sources with a few interpolated characters (mainly to satirize unbelieving secular intellectuals) and readjustments of events for dramatic purposes (Bernadette's priest from Lourdes is brought to the convent as she dies, even though Abbé Marie-Dominique Peyramale had predeceased her by three years), Werfel intended his work to "magnify the divine mystery and the holiness of man" (xv) at a time when despair might have seemed a more appropriate response. Yet, he asked at the novel's conclusion, "What is any ruler or head of state or dictator in comparison" with the former shepherdess whose song he sang? "They're washed up on time's shore and disappear in a hole in the earth" (573). Werfel's enthusiasm for his subject would reach even wider audiences in 1943 when Hollywood released its film of *The Song of Bernadette*, starring a radiant Jennifer Jones in the lead role (King 1943).

The global fame of Bernadette and Lourdes reinvigorated by a novel by a Jewish refugee and a Hollywood movie fit with efforts after World War II to create a "tri-faith" America encompassing Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism (Schultz 2011). It probably helped that by then Lourdes seemed more chaste and middle-class an experience than American-style faith healing in the 1950s, more irenically ecumenical than boisterously fundamentalist, more Billy Graham than Oral Roberts (Harrell 1978 [1975]; Wacker 2014). In the early 1950s Ruth Cranston, a leader in the ecumenical movement who was the daughter of a Methodist bishop, would go to France on a three-year mission to research the records at Lourdes and interview pilgrims who claimed to have been healed. In 1955 she published the results in *The Mystery of Lourdes*, which in synopsized form became the source of articles in *McCall's* and *Reader's Digest*, the latter with the telling title "A Protestant Looks at Lourdes" (Glynn 2003, Locations 1612-1631; Cranston 1955). She summarized what she saw in the book's conclusion: "The road to Lourdes is the road Back Home… Home to all homesick hearts… the Father's house, the beloved community: the end of the road when we pilgrims of all faiths and races come Home" (Glynn 2003, Locations 1635-1640). On a personal ecumenical note, I first heard of Bernadette and Lourdes in 1959 as the twelve-year-old son of a Sunday School teacher at the local Disciples of Christ church when Andy Williams, who had launched his career as part of the all-Williams family choir at his local Presbyterian church back in Iowa, had a hit record with "The Village of St. Bernadette," where "like a dream, this wonderful night / I gazed at the grotto aglow in the light. / A feeling divine swept over me there / I fell to my knees as I whispered the prayer / Ave, ave, ave Maria…" (Williams 2009, Locations 179-220; "Village of St. Bernadette" [song] 2018).

The status of Lourdes and St. Bernadette only grew more secure over the next six decades. They would surface in novels, including a potboiler by Irving Wallace predicated on the supposed discovery of Bernadette's diary including the Virgin's promise to return to Lourdes in the 1980s to initiate a miraculous healing (Wallace 2012 [1984]). They would keep reappearing

in films, including biographical pictures about Bernadette (e.g., Delannoy 1988 and Delannoy 1990) and a contemplation on the meaning of faith, healing, and miracles filmed in Lourdes (Hausner 2011). They would inspire songs, most notably "The Song of Bernadette," a 1986 collaboration by Jennifer Warnes and Leonard Cohen, which recalled that "No one believed what she had seen / No one believed what she heard / But there were sorrows to be healed / And mercy, mercy to the world" ("Song of Bernadette" [song] 2018). And pilgrims and spiritual tourists have continued to flock to Lourdes, about six million per year, making the town the second most popular tourist site in France, with only Paris welcoming more visitors and offering more hotel rooms (Lourdes 2019).

II. The Virgin in the Grotto

The Lourdes phenomenon began on February 11, 1858, which that year fell on the Thursday before Ash Wednesday and the start of Lent. Bernadette Soubirous, a sickly, barely literate fourteen-year-old girl from an impoverished family, was collecting firewood with her younger sister and a friend who had crossed an icy cold stream in search of branches around a little-visited grotto. Her parents' warnings to be careful not to get a chill led her to balk at joining them, but in response to their teasing taunts Bernadette began removing her thick socks, a luxury that the family permitted only because of their concern for her health. But before she could finish she felt a strong wind and suddenly saw, for the first of what would become eighteen separate occasions through July, a white light from which arose an apparition visible only to her. In some ways the vision seemed to represent an idealized version of herself, a stunningly beautiful girl of her own age dressed not in peasant garb but rather, as Bernadette described her at the time, "in a white gown with a blue sash, a white veil and a golden rose on each [bare] foot" (McEachern 2005, 20). At the same time the figure had a maternal aspect that may have been missing in the girl's own life at the time (Carroll 1985), and a respect for the oldest Soubirous child lacking in her other relationships. When it finally spoke to her for the first time on its third appearance at the grotto, it addressed her in the local dialect with the formal "vous," the first time in her short life that Bernadette had been not been called by the familiar "tu" (Estrade 1912, 236; McEachern 2005, 23n).

For six weeks Bernadette did not identify the apparition more precisely. At first she called it only the "tiny maiden" or a local dialect locution roughly translatable as "that one." Only later did she refer to it as "a Lady" (McEachern 2005, 20n). Her friends, family, and neighbors suggested various possibilities as to its identity, but a local consensus quickly took shape that it had to be the Virgin Mary, who had a long record of appearances in the Pyrenees dating back five hundred years (Harris 2000 [1999], 36). She had been showing herself, usually to young people like Bernadette, over the past few decades throughout rural France, most notably to two children at La Salette in the country's equally mountainous southeast twelve years earlier (Carroll 1985). After Bernadette acquiesced to prodding from the town's head priest and others to ask the apparition to identify herself, the "Lady" at first only smiled, but finally during her sixteenth appearance on March 25 announced, "I am the Immaculate Conception," referring to the belief that as the future mother of Jesus Mary had been granted the unique gift of a conception untouched by original sin. Although the idea had a long history prior to March 25, 1858, it had only become official church doctrine three years earlier, and Bernadette could not define the term, or even pronounce it properly – it came out "Immaculate Coun-chel-sion"

(Estrade 1912, 125). But from this point forward Bernadette had no doubt as to the apparition's identity. She was no longer just "a Lady"; she was now "our Lady."

The subtle shifts in Bernadette's account of her apparition are important for what they reveal about the culture of Lourdes and the sources of its appeal, for, as Ruth Harris has noted (2000 [1999], 33), "the people of the region held on to a magical and religious outlook in defiance of official teaching and, in a world of mountain villages and harsh climatic conditions, sacralized the landscape in ways that combined older beliefs with Christian worship." Over the course of weeks of intense discussion throughout the village, Bernadette seems to have accepted the orthodox interpretation of what might otherwise have been interpreted as a fairy, or perhaps fairy godmother, if not one of those secret invisible comrades with whom many children like to associate. Nevertheless, "that one" always retained elements of the pre-Christian (Harris 2000 [1999], 72-82), just as the small cave in which it had appeared represented one of those sacralized landscapes noted by Harris. Long after Bernadette had given up any expectation that she might receive another visit by "our Lady," she continued to visit the Grotto regularly during the eight years between the visitations and her departure from Lourdes. As she wrote from her new home at the convent of Saint-Gildard in Nevers to the nuns at the hospital in Lourdes in which she had lived for several years before beginning her postulancy, "please pray… for me, especially when you go to the Grotto. That is where you will find me in spirit, clinging to the foot of the rock that I love so much" (McEachern 2005, 98).

Moreover, Bernadette would forever be associated with the kind of natural site that had drawn worshippers for millennia: a miraculous spring from which flowed divinely blessed water. During the ninth apparition on February 25, observers jeered when Bernadette began scratching the earth and trying to sip the muddy water that oozed to the surface, then picked a plant from the rocks and ate the leaves. She later explained that in both cases she was operating under direct or implicit instructions from the Lady. Eating the plant still mystifies students of Bernadette. She explained only that "The Lady urged me to it by an interior impulse," which may mean that the girl could have been trying to cleanse her mouth after swallowing mud. But it was the attempt to drink the mud that would have startling consequences. The Lady had asked her to wash herself and drink from "the spring," but Bernadette could not see a spring. She had begun to walk over to the river, only to be turned back by an admonition from the Lady. She was scratching where the Lady had pointed. The water that dirtied her face would turn out to be the source of the water from which miracles of healing would come to be expected when it was tapped and directed through pipes. One of her strongest supporters acknowledged that a few local people, mostly shepherds, were aware of a spring that occasionally appeared in the Grotto (Estrade 1912, 86-87, 222, 266-270), while others continue to view its emergence during the ninth apparition as a miracle (e.g., Trochu 2012 [1957], 388-390). In either case, its maintenance in perpetuity and unique role in the Lourdes healing culture were due solely to its association with "our Lady" and the teenage girl who braved the laughter of her neighbors to try to drink it.

The primitivist spirituality that seemed to surround Bernadette helps explain her appeal as a symbol of the natural religious feelings of a French peasant. It explains why so many of the photographers for whom she sat in the 1860s (the photographs of Bernadette Soubirous were the first ever of someone who would become a saint) required her to wear Pyrenean peasant

garb, topped by the long white headdress that she would have been wearing when the apparitions began (Harris 2000 [1999], 145-150). Her innate spirituality interlocked with key aspects of Bernadette's personality, her independent spirit, quick wit, and common sense, all equally considered the birthright of the common people. Central to the myth of Bernadette was her perseverance under pressure from the head of the Lourdes police, particularly when he tried to trick her into contradicting herself. In a similar vein, many have been amused by her response when the president of the commission appointed by the bishop of the diocese to determine the veracity of her visions and the reality of the cures associated with the spring asked her about eating the plant, which had been interpreted as eating grass. After repeating that she had done so because she believed that the Lady wanted her to, he intoned, "But, my child, only the animals eat raw grass." She retorted, "Oh, monsieur l'Abbé, you are mistaken; we eat salad raw." She did concede with a smile, "Certainly we do add a little vinegar and oil" (Estrade 1912, 237).

This combination of spirituality and realism seems to have reminded many at the time and later of another French peasant girl who had begun to have visions in her early teens – Joan of Arc, who would be canonized only thirteen years before Bernadette. They shared the same conduit to visionary ladies, were both credited during their lifetimes with miraculous healing (cf. Warner 1981, 90-91), and displayed a comparable ability to deal with doubtful authority figures. Intriguingly, one representative of authority that Bernadette could not sway was Marie-Thérèse Vauzou, the Mistress of Novices and later Mother Superior at Saint-Gildard, but a priest who knew both women later explained that "all I saw… was a difference in education between her and her novice. In my opinion the Mother attached too much importance to mere conventions. In my own mind I compare Bernadette to Joan of Arc, and I believe Mother Marie Thérèse Vauzou would have found Joan of Arc ill-bred" (Trochu 2012 [1957], 275).

This association of Bernadette with Joan coalesced in the last decade of the nineteenth century, a time when Joan's popularity was cresting in French culture (Datta 2011, 142-178) and when the association of Joan's visions with pre-Christian "fairies" (Warner 1981, 247-249; cf. Twain 1994 [1896]) was no more off-putting than Bernadette's initial descriptions of her apparitions. In the 1890s Zola, who throughout *Lourdes* plays with the mystical aura around young virgins (Comfort 2002), has its protagonist assert his confidence that Bernadette "had not lied; she had indeed beheld a vision and heard voices, like Joan of Arc; and like Joan of Arc also, she was now, in the opinion of the devout, accomplishing the deliverance of France – from sin if not from invaders" (Zola 1993 [1894], 82-83).

The interconnection of the two would persist in the new century. Early in *The Song of Bernadette* Werfel would establish, slightly inaccurately, that Bernadette and Joan were born on the same day, January 7, four hundred thirty two years apart – in Joan's case, he was, if the single contemporary source offering a date of birth is to be believed, a day late (Werfel 2006 [1941], 22-23; Joan of Arc 2019). Even Jennifer Warnes and Leonard Cohen apparently made the connection, for their only duet (rather than Warnes singing backup behind Cohen) occurred on her *Famous Blue Raincoat* album that included, besides the first recording of their "Song of Bernadette" collaboration, the two of them trading verses of Cohen's 1971 song "Joan of Arc" (*Famous Blue Raincoat* 2018).

III. Healing Afflicted Individuals

Just as Bernadette initially contributed little to the growing feeling in the Lourdes community that her visionary visitor was no lesser figure than the Virgin Mary, she was not responsible for the association of the spring to which she had been guided by the apparition with the unique healing properties that would be attributed to it. Again the process was almost automatic. Divine healing had been a recurrent theme in Christianity, and pilgrimages to sites sanctified by the earthly remains of saints had always included a hope for new miracles that might restore health and other desiderata to devout visitors (Porterfield 2005; Scott 2010). The anti-miraculous theology of the early Protestant reformers and the higher standards on miracles imposed in response by the Counter-Reformation derailed these assumptions for several centuries (Mullin 1996), but signals like the sudden resurgence in Marian sightings were emerging that the cultural climate of the nineteenth century would be more receptive to healing. It also mattered in a Catholic country like France that the Church was trying, out of political calculation, to channel popular sentiment and, for theological reasons, to transform its underlying theology from its predication on fear to an infusion of love (Gibson 1989).

It would therefore have surprised only the handful of scoffing secularists in town that within days of the news about Bernadette's spring in the grotto locals had begun to wash afflicted body parts with its apparently divinely blessed water. Moreover, a few of them would report sudden cures, seven of which were deemed to meet the criteria of sudden, unexpected transformations laid out by the Church and were officially recognized in 1862 by the bishop's commission that also attested to the veracity of Bernadette's visions. Eventually Bernadette also came to expect miracles to occur from the water in her spring. In 1859 she went at least once to the Grotto to drink and bathe her eyes at the spring in hope of a miracle – not, to be sure, a cure for any physical problem with her sight but rather, as she explained to the young woman who had accompanied her to Massabielle, divine intervention to help her overcome the difficulties she was having learning to read (Trochu 2012 [1957], 210). A few years later, however, while she was staying at the convent hospice in Lourdes in 1862 she did cry out for "Some water from the grotto!" when pneumonia threatened to cut her life even shorter than the thirty-five years she would be allotted. It seemed to work; "I felt as if a mountain had been lifted off my chest" (Trochu 2012 [1957], 229).

Bernadette's experience seems to have been one of the few missed by Henri Lasserre, whose *Our Lady of Lourdes* collected all the stories he could find of instances of healing, including a problem with his own eyesight in 1862, over the first ten years since the "discovery" of the spring (Lasserre 1906). The book's initial publication in 1869 marked a crucial turning point for Lourdes, for, as Ruth Harris has argued (2000 [1999], 180), "Lasserre's history was probably the greatest bestseller of the nineteenth century, going into 142 French editions in its first seven years, translated into at least eighty languages by 1900 and apparently selling over a million copies." It helped channel efforts by the Church to develop the area around the Grotto into a shrine devoted to healing, an effort facilitated by the extension of the French railway system to Lourdes in 1866. The importance of the new railway line would become obvious in 1872 when the Augustinian Fathers of the Assumption organized a national pilgrimage to La Salette that failed in part because the site of the earlier Marian apparitions high in the Alps lacked any rail connections. They therefore shifted to Lourdes the next year for what would become an annual

pilgrimage. They had even more success in 1874 after advertising for sick pilgrims to partake of the healing water.

By the mid-1880s the pilgrimages were drawing around twenty thousand participants; twenty years later, despite – or even because of – the publication of Zola's *Lourdes* in 1894, the numbers would swell tenfold, to two hundred thousand. The special celebration of the fifty-year anniversary of Bernadette's apparitions and the first Lourdes healings would bring more than one million visitors to the town, including many of the *miraculés* – the miraculously cured. By then the Church, in collaboration with local authorities, had transformed the town and the healing process in ways that catered to popular taste, essentially turning Lourdes during large pilgrimages into a religious theme park, at the same time that they corralled the healing process behind orthodox fences. In this process the most significant innovation was the Procession of the Blessed Sacrament that became the highlight of the annual pilgrimages starting in 1888. Although it took place near the Grotto, water from the spring had nothing to do with it; instead the sick were lined up in hope of a cure from the presence of the holy Sacrament. Between 1888 and 1894 the proportion of "verified" cures associated with the Procession rather than drinking or bathing in the water rose from 14 percent to more than half (Kaufman 2005, 19-94, 106-108).

As the Church redefined the meaning of Lourdes, it inevitably introduced differences from faith healing as it was developing in predominantly Protestant countries that later ecumenical commentators like Ruth Cranston would tend to elide. For example, there was little impact in Lourdes during its formative decades of the perfectionism that shaped faith healing in America and elsewhere, particularly among Methodists who believed that the physical perfection of healthy bodies might accompany the sanctification of perfect sinlessness (cf. Cunningham 1974). Lourdes also continued to celebrate the moral significance of suffering in ways that were becoming outmoded in America in the second half of the nineteenth century (Curtis 2007). Finally, the Church had generally allowed little leeway for the individual healers whose words and touch could uniquely direct God's healing power to the afflicted. Whether it was the water from the spring or the Eucharist carried to sick pilgrims, Lourdes retained very traditional doctrines about healing that maintained the means of healing within institutions, not individuals.

Just as importantly, in the context of French culture the pilgrimages to Lourdes had political connotations of penitence to heal *societal* sicknesses associated with secularism and disestablishment that would have had fewer correlations in Protestant countries. In the heated debates of fin-de-siècle France, especially after the cultural war set off by the Dreyfus Affair, the newspapers and magazine associated with Lourdes paired "illustrations of miraculous cures, gentle nuns and chivalric gentlemen" with "routine caricatures of Jews, Freemasons and republicans, all of whom were outside the spiritual circle of pilgrimage" (Harris 2000 [1999], 258-282, quotation on 276-277). As a result, critiques of the "miraculous cures" would inevitably become culturally and politically suspect. "Discussions about Lourdes resembled legal exchanges more than medical debates, as the prosecution and defense sought to sway observers (both lay and scientific) by any and all means available. In this respect, the exchanges bear more than a superficial resemblance to the contemporary press wars of the Dreyfus Affair" (Szabo 2002, 202), if only because from the perspective of the authorities in charge of the pilgrimages, the two were virtually identical.

This led to a subtle but significant difference in the attitude towards scientific explanations of healing. One the one hand, the authorities at Lourdes continued the Counter-Reformation approach to miracles by demanding proofs of the extent and speed of the cure that many individuals could not or would not supply. As a result, out of more than 7,000 instances of "unexplained cures" at Lourdes since 1858, the Church has recognized exactly 70, less than one percent of the total, as meeting the standards to count as miracles. While the most recent was attested in February 2018, seven of the miracles were the original ones accepted in 1862 (Healings and Miracles 2019). Prosper Gustave Boissarie, the lead physician at Lourdes when Zola visited, could therefore boast, in his account of the cures affected up to the turn of the twentieth century, that "We are on the ground of scientific criticism. Never has a vaster investigation been made regarding the cures which exceed the forces of the laws of nature" (Boissarie 1909, 20). But however many miracles there had been, any interpretation of the cures that left no room for the miraculous had to be vigorously, vociferously rejected.

What this meant in practice can be seen in Boissarie's unwillingness to accept the final position reached by France's most eminent psychologist of the late nineteenth century, Jean-Martin Charcot. In his 1892 article "La foi qui guérit" ("Faith That Heals") Charcot acknowledged that his previous focus only on the mental effects of hysteria and other psychological forces was proving inadequate. In many instances human desires, often bolstered by faith, could effect somatic cures in ways that psychotherapists did not yet sufficiently understand, though he was confident that over time they could be brought within the compass of scientific explanation. In his analysis Charcot seems to have had in mind the emergence of Christian Science and what would become known as New Thought in the United States; throughout his article he intriguingly referred to "la foi qui guérit" by the one English word employed in the text: "faith-healing." Boissarie for his part was willing to acknowledge that some of the individuals claiming cures were hysterics whom he hoped to continue to exclude from the register of true cures, but he refused to concede that faith-healing could succeed except for such purely "nervous" diseases. If the problem was somatic, he saw no way for the mind to influence the functioning of the body (Boissarie 1909, passim, e.g., 26). As a Catholic for whom neither spiritual salvation nor bodily health could depend on individual choice rather than institutional mediation, Boissarie required hard and fast distinctions between mind and body that religious psychologists like William James would come to deplore as contrary to experience.

IV. Sanctifying Bernadette

The decision by Bernadette's priest, reinforced by her own discomfort as the subject of constant attention from visitors to Lourdes, to remove her to a convent seven hundred kilometers away once her health permitted would forever sever her from her beloved Grotto and, except for a couple of visits from siblings, from her family as well. She would of course remain central to the mythology of Lourdes, but she gradually assumed a level of significance separate from the religious processions and healing baths that now fronted the Massabielle. Indeed, a strong case could be made that, just as Bernadette quickly joined Joan of Arc as the archetypical French peasant saints of their gender, she has more recently become the better loved half of the pair of important female saints born over the past two centuries. Saint Teresa of Calcutta, or as she remains better known outside the Catholic faith, Mother Teresa, represents care, sacrifice, and empathy for others. But in point of fact, while we readily acknowledge the claims of charity,

most of us easily find excuses not to practice it on a regular basis, and are willing to foist the duties involved on the handful of Mother Teresa figures in the world. Yet all of us at various points in our lives need solace and support. Interestingly, while Lourdes holds out the possibility, at least for the lucky few, of cure, Bernadette has come to represent, for anyone willing to invoke her, something immeasurably more important: comfort.

That at least is my own interpretation of the nature of the appeal of Bernadette in the novels, movies, and songs created to celebrate her. We can hear it, for example, in the words of the Jennifer Warnes-Leonard Cohen "Song of Bernadette": "So many hearts I find, broke like yours and mine / Torn by what we have done and can't undo / I just want to hold you, won't you let me hold you / Like Bernadette would do." A similar sentiment could be detected nine decades earlier even in Zola's novel *Lourdes*, for its author, as iconoclastic as he could be in his treatment of the ecclesiastical and political powers controlling the town, sympathized with the physical and spiritual pain of the pilgrims, and could not help falling under the spell of the girl who had started it all. For Zola, "if Lourdes had met with such rapid, such prodigious fortune, it assuredly owed it to the little sincere soul, the delightful charm of Bernadette. Here there was no deceit, no falsehood, merely the blossoming of suffering, a delicate sick child who brought to the afflicted multitude her dream of justice and equality in the miraculous. She was merely eternal hope, eternal consolation" (Zola 1993 [1894], 412).

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