



OUR LADY OF LOURDES AND SOME SPONTANEOUS HEALING: A TRANSDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the apparitions of Our Lady of Lourdes that occurred with the child Bernadette Soubirous, connecting them with similar events that took place at the Shrine of Fátima and Guadalupe, which have already been described in other articles in this Journal IFIJISR. It then highlights the various cases of spontaneous healing that have occurred at the Lourdes Shrine, notably the 70th spontaneous healing experienced by Sister Bernadette Moriau for which current medical science has no rational explanation. In this regard, a transdisciplinary approach was performed by a group of researchers who might be able to justify an integrated perspective of spontaneous healing in the realm of the sacred.

Keywords: *Bernadette Soubirous; Our Lady of Lourdes; spontaneous healing of Sister Bernadette Moriau; transdisciplinary approach of spontaneous healing;*

INTRODUCTION

The apparitions of Our Lady of Lourdes took place during the reign of Emperor Napoleon III (1852-1970) which were characterized for a growing industrialization that promote a tension between a state with a “cult of reason” and the Catholic Church’s faith [1]. In fact, there was a growing inequality between urban areas with people with a refine education and skeptic in religious matters in opposition to rural areas with people with high levels of illiteracy and a deep devotional practice to Catholic Church, like Lourdes [2].

It’s within this context that Bernadette Soubirous was born in Lourdes, in 1844, into a family of nine siblings who lived in precarious financial conditions. Thus, Bernadette’s early life was marked by a basic education (attended school irregularly), fragile health (suffered from asthma) often having to help the family as a shepherdess but with a deep devotion to the Catholic Church at the local parish [3], [4], [5], [6].

In 1858, with 14 years old, Bernadette Soubirous experienced 18 visions of Our Lady, from February until July (irregular intervals), at the Grotto of Massabielle, near the Gave de Pau river. She described Our Lady as dressed in a white robe with a blue sash and golden roses on each foot, and She revealed herself as the “Immaculate Conception” [7].

During these apparitions, Bernadette Soubirous was instructed to pray, to return to the grotto regularly, and also drink and wash in a spring located in the grotto. The water of this spring is channelled to the baths or pools near the grotto where the pilgrims have immersed themselves. Sometimes, it has been associated with reports of miraculous healing that have been investigated by the Bureau of Constations Medicales (BCM) [8]. Our Lady of Lourdes also requested her a



construction of a chapel that occurred in 1861, and it was followed by the foundation of the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception at Lourdes (the Upper Basilica), in 1871, a place dedicated to prayer.

In 1889, the sanctuary expanded itself to accommodate the increase number of pilgrims, and it was named by Rosary Basilica, located at the base of Upper Basilica, which was consecrated in 1901. It's in the Rosary Basilica that the Eucharist Procession takes place every day during the pilgrimage season [9]. Also, the Marian Procession, known as the Torchlight Procession, takes place from April to October (pilgrimage season) [10]. In 1956, it was constructed the Underground Basilica of St. Pius X, so as to mark the centenary of the apparitions at Lourdes, where liturgical celebrations take place regularly. Also, we need to mention other relevant places of the Sanctuary of Lourdes, namely the St Michael Gate as the main entrance to the Sanctuary, the Way of the Cross path near the grotto depicting the Passion of Christ, and Accueil Notre-Dame dedicated to accommodate pilgrims or sick people [11]. In this regard, we have to highlight the role of volunteers in supporting pilgrims of Lourdes, namely Hospitalité Notre-Dame of Lourdes, Order of Malta and the Handicapped Children's Pilgrimage Trust matching different pilgrims needs [12].

Meanwhile, Bernadette Soubirous completed her basic education with the Sisters of Charity, in 1860, and it was followed by the entry into Convent in Nevers, under the name of Sister Marie-Bernard. These apparitions were validated in 1862 by the Bishop of Tarbes, Bertrand-Sévère Laurance, followed by the canonization of Bernadette Soubirous by Pope Pius XI, in 1933 [13].

1. OUR LADY OF LOURDES AND SOME SPONTANEOUS HEALING

In the Lourdes sanctuary several spontaneous healings have occurred, which contributed to the establishment of the World Day of the Sick by Pope John Paul II. He connected it with the 11th February feast of Our Lady of Lourdes [14], [15]. In fact, the spontaneous healing that have been taken place over the years have been checked by the Bureau Constatations Médicales (or BCM) and Comité Médical International de Lourdes (or CMIL). They apply a scientific approach according to the seven criteria defined by Cardinal Prospero Lambertini [16], whose procedure verify if the spontaneous healing is sudden, complete (without convalescence) and lasting. After this, the Catholic Church proceeds to a theological study, so as to confirm that spontaneous healing was due to Divine intervention. Until 2025, the Catholic Church has recognized 70 miracles, including the last one spontaneous healing occurred with Sister Bernardette Moriau, which reinforced popular Marian devotion, a symbol of Christian spirituality [17].

In summary, this case report of Sister Bernardette Moriau had poor prognosis regarding her disease, designated as "cauda equine syndrome", after been declared invalid by all physicians [18]. However, after going on a pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Lourdes she experienced a spontaneous healing of her disease through the Divine Grace of Jesus [19]. Thus, a dossier on the reports of Sister Bernardette Moriau disease were written by the physicians who followed her clinical case, such as Dr. Christophe Fumery (generalist), Dr. Christophe Alliaume (rheumatologist) and Dr. Frank Becigneul (painkillers). The preliminary clinical study of this case was performed by BCM followed by CMIL that proceeded to complementary medical exams. Thus, Prof. Dr. Alessandro de Franciscis (the current president of BCM) wrote a Clinical Report validating this spontaneous healing as "unexplained according to the current medical knowledge", in 2018 [20].

After this, the Bishop of the Catholic Church, Mgr Jacques Benoit-Gonnin proceeded to an theological investigation that led to declare this occurrence as a "miracle", on 11th February, 2018 [21]. Thus, the debate between science and spirituality has arisen that has contributed to address topics at the edge of scientific knowledge. For example, the intersection of several scientific areas was performed by some researchers, and it has been suggested some "mechanisms" for the



occurrence of this “spontaneous cure”, namely, the quantum non-local intricacy between the patient and the Divine through prayer, etc [22].

In this regard, a group article on the spontaneous healing of Sister Bernardette Moriau was published through the the application of a transdisciplinary model that makes the intersection between science and spirituality [22]. This transdisciplinary approach provides an integrated perspective on spontaneous healings within the sacred realm. In this group work, the existence of several levels of reality if defended, where the subject’s consciousness is interconnected with the observed levels of reality, as defended by Basarab Nicolescu. Furthermore, between levels of consciousness there is a zone of non-resistance, corresponding to the Sacred that is not rationalizable, as defended by Edgar Morin.

In this group article, we also mentioned the four quadrant model of consciousness (AQAL) and the 9 fulcrums of self-development of consciousness by Ken Wilber. Here, it was noted that the fulcrums 7, 8 and 9 are steps of self-awareness through which the “miracles” could take place. However, conventional medicine treatments apply only to the first 5 fulcrums, and therefore not including the occurrence of a “miracle”. Thus, when discussing health and spirituality, it is more appropriate to refer to these states of self-awareness as difficult stages of patient’s life that could lead to a spiritual opening and a “miracle”.

In summary, scientific research just began to address the spiritual aspects of human beings, such as telepathy, life after death, among others, in the second half of the 20th century. Thus, crossing several fields of scientific knowledge, such as quantum physics, cognitive biology, brain sciences, transpersonal psychology and Indian philosophies, it was possible for a new research model to emerge: the transdisciplinary model [23].

CONCLUSION

These apparitions that occurred in Lourdes (France) present some characteristics similar with others that took place in other Marian sanctuaries, such as Fátima (Portugal) [24] and Guadalupe (México) [25], where the Catholic Church has been very cautious to validate them, so as to give them credibility in modern and contemporary society [26].

In Guadalupe, the apparitions to Juan Diego took place during the feast of “Immaculate Conception” with spontaneous healings occurring in a spring, while in Fatima, the shepherds Jacinta, Francisco and Lucia also lived in families of humble financial sources. Also, Lucia led a religious life until the end of her life, like Bernardette Soubirous. We need to add the similarity between the Marian events of Lourdes and the «Revelation» (from the Greek *Apokalupsis*) in the Apocalypse of St John, under the sign of the “Woman shining like the sun, She had the moon under Her feet, and a crown of twelve stars on Her head. She was pregnant, and cried out with the urge to give birth” [27]. This text alludes to the “Immaculate Conception” and the symbolism of the Age of the Holy Spirit (Age of Aquarius) by Joaquim de Fiore, with human beings more conscious, more fraternal and therefore freer to make their own life choices [28].

In this regard, the initiated Pope John XXIII, who convened the II Vatican Council stated that the enormous scientific and technological development observed in modern society has not always been accompanied by the relevance given to the spiritual dimension of human being. Thus, we briefly addressed the transdisciplinary model in the context of the debate between science and spirituality [23].



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