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The Virgin Mary at LaSalette and Lourdes: Whom Did the Children See?

MICHAEL P. CARROLL*

Despite the continuing importance of Marian apparitions within the Roman Catholic Mary Cult, few scholars have been concerned with explaining why these apparitions appear to some individuals and not to others. This article explores this question by considering in detail two particular Marian apparitions: the apparition seen by Maximin Giraud at LaSalette, France in 1846 and the apparition seen by Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes, France in 1858. What makes these two cases especially interesting is that in neither instance was the "lady" seen by the seer initially identified as the Virgin Mary. On the contrary, analysis of the early reports associated with each apparition makes it highly likely that the apparition in each case was modeled on a parental figure (though not a natural parent) in the seer's background. Furthermore, examination of the childhood experiences of each seer make it highly likely that each seer's apparition was an attempt to gratify an unconscious desire associated with that parental figure. The psychodynamic explanation developed in each case is useful because it allows us to explain a wide range of observations associated with each apparition (e.g., why the lady at LaSalette was crying, why the lady at Lourdes identified herself as the Immaculate Conception, etc.).

Visions of the Virgin Mary have been a central element in the Roman Catholic Mary Cult for at least the last one thousand years, and such apparitions continue to affect the lives of a great many Catholics. The shrines associated with some of the locations where these apparitions occurred, for instance, still attract millions of pilgrims each year. In the late 1970's and early 1980's, over a million pilgrims a year visited the shrine at Fatima in Portugal, and nearly four million a year visited the shrine at Lourdes in France (Vessels, 1980: 833; Marnham, 1981: 183). Quite apart from the Catholics who actually visit these shrines, there are millions more who work to spread the "message" associated with a particular apparition. The "Blue Army" alone, for example, an organization devoted to spreading the message of Our Lady of Fatima, claims a membership of 25 million in 110 different countries. Then, of course, there are the many millions of Catholics who each year participate in the novenas and other devotional practices associated with Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lady of Lourdes, etc.¹

Nor do the apparitions themselves show any signs of abating. Billet (1973), for instance, reports that in the period 1928-1971 there were 210 separate reports, worldwide, of a Marian apparition. The relatively large number of Marian apparitions is *not* due to the fact that such apparitions are encouraged by the Church. On the contrary, the Church

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1. Although this article is concerned only with religious belief and practice, I might note in passing that a concern with Marian apparitions is also evident in at least two recent novels, each written by a well-known author; see Moore (1983) and Herbert (1983).

is very conservative about such things, and only a relatively small number of the thousands of such apparitions that must have been reported over the centuries have ever been approved. Even then, "approval" does not mean that the Church requires a belief in such apparitions from its members. Such approval means that 1) there is nothing associated with the apparition in question that is clearly contrary to faith or morals, and 2) that there is sufficient evidence to justify human faith in the reality of the apparition (Graef, 1963: 83-84).

Still, the point is that even *unapproved* apparitions can attract quite a following. Thus, for instance, in the early 1950's hundreds of thousands of Catholics flocked to Necedah, Wisconsin to hear the messages given by the Virgin Mary to Mary Ann Van Hoof. And today large numbers are drawn to Bayside, New York to hear Veronica Lueken, who claims to have been visited by the Virgin Mary many times since the early 1970's. Likewise, the Marian apparitions at Garabandal, Spain (in 1961) and at Zeitoun, Egypt (in the late 1960's) have also attracted quite a following.² Yet none of these apparitions has ever been approved by the Church.

But despite the importance of Marian apparitions to so many Catholics, these apparitions have not attracted much attention from sociologists of religion. This neglect is mildly puzzling. It certainly cannot be attributed to the fact that visionary experiences in general hold little interest for sociologists of religion. On the contrary, one of the dominant concerns to have emerged in the sociology of religion over the past 10-15 years is a concern with mystical experiences, and scales designed to measure such experiences almost inevitably inquire about religious visions (Thomas & Cooper, 1978; Margolis, Margolis & Elifson, 1979; Holm, 1982). Nevertheless, despite this recent concern with mysticism, and despite the visibility of Marian apparitions and their importance within the Roman Catholic tradition, the literature on these apparitions is, as I have said, sparse.

What literature does exist seems to fall into three categories. First, there are studies, mainly by Catholic authors, which are concerned with distinguishing "true" from "false" apparitions (e.g., Thurston, 1927; 1933; 1934; Billet, 1973). Second, there are those studies which take the fact of a particular Marian apparition as given, and which then try to explain the popularity of the cult which develops around this apparition as a response to prevailing social concerns. Examples of this sort of study would include the attempt by Turner and Turner (1982) to link the popularity of the Lourdes cult to the concerns of a post-industrial society, the various attempts (Wolf, 1958; Lafaye, 1976; Kurtz, 1982) to relate the Guadalupe cult to the social dilemmas created in Mexico by the Spanish Conquest, and Christian's (1981) study of apparitions in Renaissance Spain. Finally, there are those studies that are less concerned with the cult that develops in response to a Marian apparition and more concerned with the psychological processes that gave rise to the apparition in the first place. Carroll (1983) falls into this third category.

In that earlier article I examined 50 Marian apparitions that occurred over the period 1100-1896. Using a fairly straight-forward psychoanalytic perspective, I related the content of these apparitions to variations in the Oedipal process (produced in turn by cross-cultural variations in family structure), and then showed how the resulting interpretation could

2. As far as I know, there are as yet no accounts which provide an overview of the apparitions at either Necedah or Bayside. Information on the Garabandal apparitions can be found in Pelletier (1971). Nelson (1973) provides an objective account of the apparitions at Zeitoun.

be used to explain certain patterns that were associated with these apparitions. The psychoanalytic approach adopted in that earlier article, however, by no means exhausts the range of approaches that might be adopted in connection with the study of Marian apparitions. For instance, Proudfoot and Shaver (1975) use attribution theory to argue that a great many mystical experiences (presumably including religious visions) result from an attempt to make sense out of certain experiences. I strongly suspect that the approach they advocate would prove useful in the study of apparitions.

In this article, however, I want to do something much simpler. This is to study Marian apparitions using an approach that is routinely adopted by clinical psychologists and psychiatrists when confronted with a patient who reports having visions. This approach consists in trying to relate the content of the vision to some event or to some person in the patient's biographical experience. Such a broadly "psychodynamic" approach should be seen as a complement to the more explicitly psychoanalytic approach adopted in my earlier article.

One problem with the psychodynamic approach just suggested is that the need to consider the biographical experiences of individual seers makes it difficult to consider more than a small number of cases, especially within the confines of an article. For that reason, this article will be concerned with only two cases: the apparition which occurred to Maximin Giraud at LaSalette, France, in 1846 and the apparitions which occurred to Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes, France, in 1858.

The choice of these two cases is dictated by a number of concerns. First, the cults which developed around these apparitions proved to be especially popular (though the LaSalette cult now seems to be in decline), with the result that the circumstances surrounding the apparitions themselves have been well documented. Second, both apparitions occurred in France within a fairly brief span of time; this introduces some controls — however crude — for the cultural and historical factors that almost certainly influence the content of Marian apparitions. Third, in both cases, the central seer associated with the apparition is a child, which means that the amount of biographic information that needs to be examined is less than it would be in the case of an adult seer.

WHERE TO BEGIN

If we rule out *a priori* the possibility that Marian apparitions are actual instances of divine intervention (and not to do this would bring us outside the bounds of social science), then these apparitions are almost certainly either "hallucinations" or "illusions."

Although there are problems connected with the phenomenology of hallucinations (cf. Straus, 1962; Rabkin, 1970) that make *any* definition of "hallucination" controversial, most investigators tend to require two things before applying this term. First, an individual seer must perceive an auditory or visual stimulus (or both), and believe that this stimulus really exists (i.e., that it is not imaginary or only in one's head). Second, a third party (read: clinical psychologist or psychiatrist) must be unable to detect a stimulus of any sort that corresponds to the seers' perception. The difference between a "hallucination" and an "illusion" is that in the case of an illusion, a third party *can* usually detect a stimulus (of some sort) that corresponds to the seer's perception. An illusion, then, is usually defined to be the *mis*perception of a stimulus which is really there.

It is worth emphasizing the distinction between “hallucinations” and “illusions” because it is likely that some Marian apparitions are illusions, not hallucinations. In a number of well-known apparitions, for instance, observers present during the course of the apparition who did *not* see the Virgin Mary, nevertheless *did* report having seen a “light” or “luminescence” in the region of the supposed apparition. This seems to have been the case, for example, with regard to the apparitions of the Virgin Mary at Pontmain, France in 1871, at Knock, Ireland in 1879, and at Zeitoun, Egypt in 1968. If there was a physical stimulus of some sort in the region of each of these apparitions, then these apparitions were probably illusions, not hallucinations. The presence of an actual physical stimulus (of some sort) in these cases would also explain why the apparitions at Pontmain, Knock, and Zeitoun were “seen” (but not heard) by a relatively large number of people.³

In the case of both LaSalette and Lourdes, however, there were no observers who did not see the Virgin Mary and yet did see a physical stimulus in the region of the apparition, and so I am proceeding on the assumption that these cases were true hallucinations.

I must emphasize however, that in labeling these apparitions as “hallucinations,” I do not mean to imply that the seers involved were necessarily mentally ill. On the contrary, that hallucinations often occur to non-psychotic individuals (and in particular to non-psychotic children) is well established in the clinical literature (cf. Bliss & Clark, 1962; Eisenberg, 1962; Aug & Ables, 1971). Of particular relevance to the present study is Kroll and Bachrach’s (1982) study of 134 religious visions from the Middle Ages in Europe. The major finding of this study was that if we put aside the fact of the vision itself, then only 4 of the 134 medieval seers who had these visions seemed to possess any traits that might reasonably be regarded as indicative of mental illness.

If the apparitions at LaSalette and Lourdes were hallucinations, then, our first question would seem to be, “Why did the seer in each case hallucinate a vision of the Virgin Mary?” But surprisingly this is not so, since in the case of both LaSalette and Lourdes the “lady” seen in the apparitions was not initially identified by the seer involved as the Virgin Mary. Such an identification only came after the seer had discussed the apparition with others, notably including the Church authorities. The first question that must be answered, then in each case, is “Just whom did the seer see?”

THE LADY OF LaSALETTE

Our first case involves an apparition which occurred on a hillside near the village of LaSalette, France, on September 19, 1846. According to devotional accounts,⁴ this apparition was seen by two children, a girl named Melanie Mathieu (who was nearly 15 at the time) and a boy named Maximin Giraud (who was 11). Each child had been hired

3. A future article will deal in detail with those Marian apparitions (like the ones at Pontmain, Knock, and Zeitoun) in which Mary is seen but not heard, and for which there is some evidence that the apparitions are illusions, not hallucinations.

4. By “devotional account” I mean an account whose author accepts without question that the apparition is of supernatural origin. Devotional accounts of LaSalette can be found in Ullathorne (1942 [1854]), Gillett (1952: 193-201), Kennedy (1960), Northcote (1875: 233-300), Sharkey (1961: 34-41), Stern (1980) and Walsh (1906: 305-37). For a bibliography of works relating to LaSalette, see Stern (1975).

by a local farmer to herd cattle, and on that day the children had decided to herd their cattle together. Although the families of both children lived in the nearby town of Corps, Melanie and Mathieu had met for the first time only a few days earlier. Herding for Melanie was a routine activity, since she had been hired out to local farmers since she was nine. It was, however, a quite novel experience for Maximin, since he had been hired out, apparently for the first time, only within the preceding week.

According to the report later given by the children, they took a nap on that afternoon. When they awoke, they found the cattle gone. In searching for the cattle (which they found), they came on a bright light that seemed to be hovering above a boulder on a nearby hillside. On closer inspection, they perceived in the midst of this bright light a lady who was seated on the boulder and who was crying. The lady then arose and addressed the children. She initially spoke in French, but after delivering what turned out to be about half of her eventual message, she perceived that the children were having difficulty understanding her, and so switched to the local patois.

The message delivered by the woman at LaSalette has quite properly been described as "apocalyptic" (Turner & Turner, 1982: 156-64). She warned of the terrible punishments that would soon befall France as a result of the sinful ways into which the people had fallen. The following passages are typical:

... If the harvest is spoilt, you yourselves are the only cause of it. I made you feel this last year in the potatoes [referring to the potato famine], but you took no account of it; on the contrary ... you swore, and you took the name of my son in vain. ... There will come a great famine; and before the famine the children under the age of seven will be seized with a trembling, and will fall in the hands of those that hold them; the rest will do penance by the famine. The walnuts will become bad, the grapes will rot ... (Northcote, 1875: 237-238).

According to the lady, the bad habits that will provoke such terrible punishments included swearing, not going to church regularly, meat-eating during Lent, etc. Only if people abandoned such habits and turned to prayer would these disasters be avoided. During the course of her speech the lady also confided to Melanie a secret not heard by Maximin and to Maximin to secret not heard by Melanie.

It is important to note that at no point did the lady identify herself as the Virgin Mary, nor did the children identify her as such in their initial reports of the incident. When they first came off the hillside, the first person they met was the farmer who employed Maximin, and Maximin related to him the account of what had occurred. Maximin later went to the house of Melanie's employer, where he related his story to the "grandmere" of the house. It was *this* woman who first suggested that the lady seen on the hillside was the Virgin Mary (cf. Cox, 1956: 45-5). The next morning the two children were brought before the parish priest, and he too suggested that the lady was in fact the Virgin Mary.

Although the devotional account just given suggests that the lady of LaSalette was seen simultaneously by both Melanie and Maximin, there are several reasons for believing that the initial hallucination was Maximin's. First, as mentioned, it was Maximin who gave the first report of the apparition to a third party after the children had come off the hillside. Second, since later investigation indicated that Melanie knew no French at all and that Maximin knew at least some French (Hidec, 1969: 8-9), Maximin is the more likely originator of an hallucinated image who spoke French during the first half of her message. Third, the lady made at least one very specific reference to an event in Maximin's

life. This occurred when she asked the children if they had ever seen corn that was spoilt. When the children replied “no,” the lady addressed Maximin in particular, and said:

You have seen it my child, once when you were with your father at Coin. The owner of a piece of ground there told your father to go and see his wheat that was spoilt. You went, both of you, and you took two or three ears of corn in your hands; you rubbed them, and they crumbled into dust . . . [later] your father gave you a piece of bread, and said “Take this my child; let us eat it this year whilst we can get it; I don’t know who will be able to eat any next year if the wheat goes on like that” (Northcote, 1875: 239).

By contrast, although the lady dwelt at length and in detail on this incident from Maximin’s life, she did not refer to any specific incident in Melanie’s life, and this too makes it likely that Maximin was the original seer.

I want to emphasize that labeling Maximin as the “original seer” does not in itself imply that Melanie did not experience a hallucination too. On the contrary, it seems fairly well-established that the occurrence of an apparition to one child can easily provoke similar experiences in other children. At Lourdes, for instance (which will be considered in detail in the next section), several children experienced hallucinations at the Grotto of Massabielle in the weeks following the claim by Bernadette Soubirous that she had seen a lady in the same grotto. Thus, for instance, one girl heard voices “like that of a conflict between unclean beasts” (Estrade, 1946: 108); a boy saw a lady “covered in gold and decked out with furbelows” (Estrade, 1946: 110); another boy saw a child, a woman and a bearded man (Neame, 1967: 185); and there were many others (Thurston, 1927). True, in this case, these “other seers” saw something that was different from what Bernadette saw, but then the evidence suggests that these children did not associate with Bernadette. In the case of Melanie and Maximin, however, there was an opportunity for the two to discuss what Maximin was seeing at the time that he was seeing it.

Given the evidence which suggests that Maximin was the central seer at LaSalette, it is worth noting that Maximin showed some reluctance to identify the lady at LaSalette with the Virgin Mary. For instance, in 1850 Maximin had a well-publicized interview with the Cure d’Ars, a well-known French cleric of the time. Among other things, the Cure very explicitly asked Maximin if he had seen the Virgin Mary at LaSalette. Maximin replied simply “I do not know whether it was the Blessed Virgin. I saw something . . . a lady” (quoted in Northcote, 1875: 293; see also Kennedy, 1960: 105). Remember that this was four years after the apparition itself, at a time when the identification of the lady of LaSalette as the Virgin Mary was taken for granted by a wide variety of Catholics. But if the lady in Maximin’s hallucination was not the Virgin Mary, just who was she? The answer, I suggest, is not difficult to uncover.

Consider the following passage, which occurs early in the speech given by the lady and which preceded the list of calamities that would befall France:

If my people do not submit themselves, I must let the hand of my Son fall upon them; it is so strong, so heavy, that I can keep it up no longer. How long a time I have suffered for you! (Northcote, 1875: 236).

On the assumption that the lady is the Virgin Mary, then the “son” referred to in this passage is obviously Jesus Christ (which is why the “s” in “Son” is always capitalized in devotional accounts). To the devout, therefore, the meaning of this passage is clear:

Mary has until now restrained her Divine Son from punishing sinners, but will not be able to continue doing that for much longer. But if the lady in the original apparition is *not* assumed to be the Virgin Mary, other interpretations of this passage are possible. What makes all this especially interesting is that there is some evidence that both Melanie and Maximin *did* initially give this passage a different interpretation. Consider the following passage, which occurs in Ullathorne's (1942 [1854]: 44) early and still authoritative account of LaSalette:

... when the beautiful lady spoke of the heavy arm of her Son, he [Maximin] thought she meant that her Son had been beating her; for, as he at a later time explained, "he did not then know that the Lady was the Blessed Virgin."

It should be noted that most modern devotional accounts do *not* mention that Maximin originally interpreted what he saw and heard as a mother who complained of being beaten by her son.

To the devout of course, who assume that the lady at LaSalette was indeed the Virgin Mary, Maximin's initial impression here makes no sense, and so *must* be a misinterpretation. But if in fact the apparition at LaSalette was Maximin's hallucination, then what we probably have in the passage quoted above is a description of that hallucination as it was first reported to Melanie by Maximin on the hillside. In other words, it appears that what Maximin first saw and heard was a mother who complained of being beaten by her son. Only later, after the apparition had been discussed with others, did it come to be defined as an apparition of the Virgin Mary.

But once we consider the possibility that the lady at LaSalette was a "mother who had been beaten by her son," our attention is immediately drawn to a remark that *does* appear in almost all the devotional accounts. It is a remark uttered by Maximin when he and Melanie first caught sight of the lady. Melanie, apparently, was visibly frightened and dropped her staff, "but the boy [Maximin] told her to pick it up again, adding that he should take care of his [staff], for that if *it* (meaning the figure) offered to do them any harm, he would give it a good blow" (Northcote, 1875: 236; see also Cox, 1956: 17). Maximin, in other words, very clearly and very explicitly expressed a willingness to deliver a beating to the lady. Putting this together with the observation that the original hallucination was likely of a "mother beaten by her son" leads to the conclusion that the "son" in question was Maximin himself. In other words, Maximin hallucinated an image of *a mother whom he himself had beaten*. What could have given rise to such a hallucination?

In explaining Maximin's hallucination, I am going to be guided by Freud's belief that hallucinations, like dreams, represent an attempt to gratify an unconscious wish or desire, usually an unconscious wish or desire formed during childhood (Freud, 1953, 1957, 1961). But if hallucinations do reflect an attempt to gratify an unconscious wish, then what was the wish being gratified when Maximin hallucinated a mother whom he had beaten? The most straightforward possibility would seem to be that this hallucination represents an attempt to gratify a desire on Maximin's part to deliver a beating to his own mother. Does this "make sense" given what we know about Maximin's family background?

Actually, it makes perfect sense. Maximin's natural mother had died in 1837, when Maximin was two years old, and his father had married again almost immediately.

(Maximin's mother died in January, 1837, and his father's remarriage took place in April, 1837). It seems that Maximin was very much abused by his stepmother (Hidec, 1969: 8). The ill-feeling between Maximin and his stepmother was sufficiently strong for it to be included even in most of the devotional accounts of LaSalette (Cox, 1956: 12; Kennedy, 1960: 91).

I would suggest, therefore, that Maximin's hallucination of a "mother beaten by her son" is an attempt to gratify an unconscious wish to harm his stepmother, which derives from the intense hostility that was engendered in Maximin by the abuse that he had suffered at her hands. In support of this interpretation I might point out that one of the most recurrent findings in the clinical study of childhood hallucinations is that the children who have these hallucinations have usually, like Maximin Giraud, been neglected or abused by one or both parents (Bender, 1954: 16-50; Eisenberg, 1962; Esman, 1962; Bender, 1970).

I have no illusions (!) about the deficiencies of psychodynamic explanations of particular cases like the apparition at LaSalette. Such after-the-fact explanations are notoriously easy to construct and next to impossible to falsify. Critics are often quite justified in saying that such explanations are little more than "just so" stories tailor-made to fit whatever data happens to be at hand. Certainly, one of the most important methodological features of the Carroll (1983) study was precisely that it led to predictions which could be tested using quantitative data from 50 different apparitions. There is, however, no way to "test" an explanation of a particular case, in the usual sense of the term "test."

Nevertheless, the one great advantage of the sort of psychodynamic explanation presented here is that it can provide "intelligibility," that is, it allows us to bring into a coherent pattern a wide range of observations about a particular case that would otherwise seem unrelated and disparate (Cheshire, 1975). If we grant that "providing intelligibility" in this sense is a worthwhile goal (and many may not), then obviously one way to evaluate the adequacy of a psychodynamic interpretation of a particular case is to look at the range of observations that can be accounted for using that interpretation. In other words, the greater the number of such observations we can account for using a given interpretation, the better the interpretation.

With all this in mind, what aspects of the LaSalette apparition "become intelligible" on the hypothesis that the original hallucination was shaped by Maximin's unconscious desire to beat his stepmother? As a start, the hypothesis provides us with a fairly prosaic explanation for one of the most distinctive features of that apparition, namely, the fact that the lady was crying. She was crying because she had been beaten. Then too it appears that a common punishment administered by Maximin's stepmother was the withholding of food, and for this reason Maximin often went hungry (Hidec, 1969: 9). It therefore seems worth emphasizing that the punishment most emphasized by the lady at LaSalette was *famine*. The lady, in other words, threatened to withhold food from France "unless the people were good" in the same way that Maximin's stepmother threatened to withhold food from him "unless he were good."

But most importantly, the hypothesis offered here allows us to account for the general sense of "harshness" that pervades the message of LaSalette. This harshness partly derives from the fact that the bulk of the lady's message is concerned with punishment, that is, with spelling out in detail the terrible calamities that would befall France. But even

when specifying the things that will bring about this punishment (and thus, by implication, the things that must be done to avoid punishment), there is a seeming bitterness about the lady's tone, as in the following passages:

I have given you six days to labor in, I have reserved the seventh for myself; yet they will not give it to me. . . . Only a few old women go to Mass, the others work on Sundays during the summer; and in the winter, when they know not what to do, the youths go to Mass only to make mockery of religion. In Lent they go to the shambles [meat market] like dogs . . . (Northcote, 1875: 237-38).

The harshness and seeming bitterness evident in these passages stands in marked contrast to the tone of gentle reassurance that characterizes most other apparitions of the Virgin Mary. As we shall see, for instance, it would be difficult to think of the girl who spoke to Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes comparing people, even sinners, to "dogs." It is this harshness and bitterness in the LaSalette message that has led even a Catholic commentator like Thurston (1933: 530; 1934: 119), who fully accepts the authenticity of, say, Lourdes, to characterize the LaSalette apparition as "bizarre." Under the hypothesis being offered here, however, the harshness and bitterness that pervades the message of LaSalette derives very simply from the fact that the lady of LaSalette was in the end modeled upon Maximin's perception of his highly punitive stepmother.

A final point. One of the earliest English-language accounts of the message delivered by the lady of LaSalette appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1854. The anonymous writer tells us that his account is taken directly from a pamphlet he picked up while traveling in Europe. In comparing the text of the lady's message that appears in this 1854 account with the text of the message as it appears in later accounts, I find no substantial differences, except with regard to one detail. In that 1854 account, when the lady lists the bad habits that will bring about divine retribution, she includes the following: "they [the people] put stones in their pockets, to throw at girls when they go to church" (anon. 1854: 12). This particular "bad habit" seems relatively minor and thus strangely out of place in the midst of the lady's complaints about people who take God's name in vain, who don't go to Mass, etc. And this, I suspect, is why this particular "bad habit" is not generally mentioned in most devotional accounts of LaSalette. Nevertheless, though "throwing stones at girls when they go to church" might not seem like the sort of thing that would provoke the Lord to loose famine upon France, it is precisely the sort of thing that a mischievous eleven year old boy might do, and for which he might be severely punished by an unfriendly stepmother.

OUR LADY OF LOURDES

Now we come to the set of apparitions that are almost certain to be those most familiar to the readers of this article, namely, the apparitions which occurred at Lourdes, France, in 1858. The literature on the Lourdes apparitions is vast, far exceeding the literature which deals with the apparition at LaSalette. More importantly, in the case of Lourdes we have the advantage of possessing not only a number of devotional accounts,⁵ but also

5. The earliest, and still the most well known, of the devotional accounts of the Lourdes apparitions are the accounts by Lasserre (1872 [1868]) and Estrade (1946 [1899]), both of which originally appeared in French. Other devotional accounts can be found in Cox (1956: 69-132), Keyes, (1960), and Sharkey (1961: 45-56).

several first-rate critical accounts. I have relied heavily on the information presented in Neame's (1967) critical account in preparing this section.

The essential facts surrounding the Lourdes apparitions are easy to summarize. On February 11, 1858, a young fourteen year old girl named Bernadette Soubirous reported seeing a vision of a young girl in the Grotto of Massabielle, which is near the town of Lourdes. Bernadette called the girl "Aquero" which simply means "that" or "her" in Bigourdan, the Franch dialect spoken in the Lourdes area. In all, Bernadette saw Aquero on 18 different occasions in the period between February 11, 1858, and July 16, 1858.

In contrast to the lady at LaSalette (who talked for something like half an hour), Aquero did not say much to Bernadette. Although she did speak on seven different occasions, the sum total of her message (across all seven occasions) consists of 12 sentences. Most of these sentences are simply requests for some type of devotion from Bernadette or others (e.g., "Will you be so kind as to come here for 15 days?", "Penitence, penitence, penitency", "I wish people to come here in procession," etc.) But the most famous of all Aquero's statements was her last, which she uttered on March 25, 1858: "I am the Immaculate Conception." It is this last statement, of course, that, in the minds of the devout, makes it certain that Aquero was the Virgin Mary.

What must be emphasized, however, is that Bernadette herself was at first quite *unwilling* to identify Aquero as the Virgin Mary. As early as the third apparition, Bernadette was asked if Aquero was the Virgin Mary (Neame, 1967: 88). This same question was repeated when Bernadette was first interviewed by the local priest, Father Peyramale, who also made it clear during this same interview that many people in Lourdes had already concluded Aquero was the Virgin Mary (cf. Lasserre, 1872: 121-22). It was almost certainly asked of Bernadette on many occasions that have gone unrecorded. Nevertheless, Bernadette consistently answered such questions by saying that she did not know who Aquero was, and in particular, did not know if Aquero was the Virgin Mary. Bernadette did not identify Aquero with the Virgin Mary until March 25th, which was nearly six weeks after the apparitions had commenced, and even then, the identification was indirect, since it was made only by reporting Aquero's "I am the Immaculate Conception" statement. Yet if the Aquero in Bernadette's initial hallucination was not the Virgin Mary, who might she have been? As in the case of LaSalette, we might expect to find a clue to Aquero's identity by examining Bernadette's description of Aquero.

One of Aquero's most striking features, and a feature that most dramatically distinguishes her physical appearance from the physical appearance of the lady of LaSalette, is her age. Aquero was most definitely a girl, not a woman. Bernadette was quite insistent that Aquero was about the same age and height as herself. Bernadette (and thus Aquero) was 14 years old at the time (though she looked even younger) and was about 4 feet 6 inches tall. As Neame (1967: 222-24) has quite rightly emphasized, *Aquero-as-a-very-young-girl* is a feature of the Lourdes apparitions that the popularizers of those apparitions have tried to suppress. Thus, for instance, in the classic account of Lourdes by J. B. Estrade (who was a minor official in Lourdes in 1858, and who interviewed most of the participants involved, including Bernadette) Aquero was "about 16 or 17" (Estrade, 1946 [1899]: 26). Lasserre (1872: 29) made Aquero 20. The statue originally placed in the Grotto to commemorate the apparitions portrays a woman who is in her thirties, and in any event, the statue is about a foot and a half too tall. Bernadette herself very

clearly indicated that this statue did not resemble Aquero in the least (Neame, 1967: 228).

Bernadette's insistence that Aquero was about the same age and height as herself suggests that Bernadette felt there to be a strong association between herself and the girl she saw in her hallucination. This strong association is one of the things that must be accounted for by any adequate explanation of Bernadette's hallucination.

One of the things that makes it difficult to picture Aquero as a young girl "like Bernadette" is the fact that Bernadette seems clearly to have behaved towards Aquero as if Aquero were a reassuring mother. Consider Bernadette's description of the very first appearance of Aquero:

... there came out of the interior of the grotto a golden-colored cloud, and soon after a lady, young and beautiful ... and [she] placed herself at the entrance of the opening above the bush. She looked at me immediately, smiled at me and signed me to advance, *as if she had been my mother*. All fear had left me but I seemed to know no longer where I was. (quoted in Estrade, 1946: 26; emphasis added)

This sense of Aquero as a reassuring mother-figure comes through virtually all of Bernadette's accounts of the various apparitions, and it is probably the one thing that most distinguishes the "tone" of the Lourdes apparitions from the "tone" of the LaSalette apparition. In this connection too it might be noted that when Bernadette visited the Grotto of Massabielle for the last time (in 1866), just prior to entering the religious life, she cried out "My mother, my mother! How can I leave you?" and promptly fainted (Estrade, 1946: 204). In short, though there are grounds for arguing that Bernadette did associate Aquero with herself, it also seems clear (however, paradoxical it may seem, at least for the moment) that she also saw Aquero as an idealized mother-figure. Given all this, could Aquero have been based on Bernadette's own mother, just as the "woman" at LaSalette was based upon Maximin's stepmother? The problem in answering this is that Bernadette had three mothers.

Bernadette's natural mother was Louise Casterot. Louise had married Francois Soubrious in 1843, and altogether they had six children, of whom Bernadette (born in 1844) was the eldest. But when Bernadette was about eight months old Louise's bodice caught fire from an overturned candle and she was severely burned, with the result that she could no longer nurse Bernadette. She was also expecting her second child. For these reasons, Bernadette was sent to the nearby village of Bartres to be nursed by a farmer's wife named Marie Lagues, who had recently lost her own child. Bernadette remained at the Lagues household in Bartres for the next year and a half, and was then returned to her family in Lourdes. We are told, however, that Bernadette remained in contact with the Lagues over the years, and went to Bartres for an extended visit at least twice every year as she was growing up (von Matt & Trochu, 1957: 5-6).

Both of Bernadette's natural parents seem to have been fairly irresponsible individuals, who had a hard time holding on to money and who spent a large portion of what money they did have on drink. Francois Soubrious, for instance, had been a miller by trade and had been given charge of a mill run by the Casterot family when he married Louise. His slovenly business practices, however, resulted in the loss of the mill in 1854. He tried and failed to reestablish himself with another mill, and made do as best as possible with a series of casual jobs. In 1857 Francois was even arrested for theft. Around this time, the Soubrious family moved into a building that had been a jail, but was now too

dilapidated for that purpose. The building was infested with lice and overlooked an inner courtyard containing a dung heap that had been left to rot.

However, Bernadette herself was spared much of her family's misery. In 1855 or 1856 (the exact year is uncertain), Louise Soubirous' older sister, Bernarde Casterot Nicolau, offered to raise Bernadette. Bernarde Nicolau was a woman of some substance in the community (she owned a bar and the business was well managed) and she was Bernadette's godmother. The Soubirous' agreed to this arrangement; it did, after all, mean one less person to feed. Bernadette stayed with her aunt for at least one year, and possibly as long as two years (it depends on whether she moved in with her aunt in 1855 or 1856; Neame, 1967: 64).

Bernadette eventually moved back to her family sometime in 1857. Later in that same year, however, shortly after the Soubirous' had moved into the former jail, Bernadette was once more sent off, this time to live again in Bartres with her former foster-parents, the Lagues. The Lagues needed someone to help out with the work associated with their farm, and had requested Bernadette for this purpose. Bernadette returned to Lourdes (and to the lice-infested and stinking Soubirous home) in January, 1858. Her visions began a few weeks later.

Over the course of her early life, then, Bernadette had three mothers: her natural mother (Louise Casterot Soubirous), her foster mother (Marie Aravant Lagues), and her godmother (Bernarde Casterot Nicolau). Was any of these the model for Aquero? In fact, there are several independent lines of reasoning which lead us to the same conclusion: Aquero was modeled upon Bernadette's godmother, Bernarde Nicolau.

First, we saw earlier that Bernadette seems to have associated Aquero with a sense of warmth and reassurance. This in itself would tend to eliminate Marie Lagues as a possible model for Aquero. After Bernadette had entered the religious life, she revealed to a confidante that she had felt very much unloved, rejected and abused by Marie Lagues, at least during that last stay in the Lagues household which occurred just before the apparitions (Petitot, 1955: 4).

Bernadette's relationship with her natural mother is more difficult to evaluate. Devotional accounts, of course, suggest that Louise Soubirous loved her daughter greatly. Still, there are some hints that this relationship might have been more strained than such accounts suggest. We know that Louise was not at all supportive of Bernadette when she first reported her visions. For instance, Louise Soubirous' remarks to her daughter, when she encountered Bernadette after the second apparition, have been preserved: "So you want to make us the laughing stock of all who know us; I'll give it to you with your hypocritical airs and your stories of the lady" (Estrade, 1946: 32-33). On this same occasion Louise was about to beat Bernadette with a switch, and was prevented from doing so only by her sister, Bernarde Nicolau, who was also present. Even so, Louise forbade Bernadette to go to the grotto again.

Bernadette's relationship with her godmother, on the other hand, seems to have been uniformly positive. Her godmother, for instance, was a woman of some substance, and so, in a purely material sense, the 1-2 years spent in her godmother's household were probably the most comfortable that Bernadette had ever experienced up until the time of the apparitions. Then there is the fact that Bernarde, in contrast to her sister (Bernadette's mother) was consistently supportive of Bernadette when she reported her

visions. As mentioned, it was aunt Bernarde who prevented Louise from delivering a beating to Bernadette after the second apparition. More generally, Neame (1967: 90) has argued that it was the strong support of Bernarde Nicolau, a woman of substance and position in the community, that first legitimized Bernadette's visions in the eyes of the general public.

Thus, if Aquero was surrounded with warmth and reassurance, there is some basis for believing that Aquero is more likely to have been modeled on Bernarde Nicolau than either Louise Soubirous or Marie Lagues. I concede, of course, that the evidence just presented is not by itself compelling. Louise Soubirous's harsh words and actions for her daughter after the second apparition might, after all, be atypical of their relationship. But there are additional reasons as well for believing that Aquero was Bernarde.

Consider an incident that is reported in almost all the devotional accounts of Lourdes, but is invariably passed over lightly. The incident springs from Bernadette's description of what Aquero was wearing, namely, a white robe girded at the waist by a blue ribbon whose ends hung down the side of the robe, and a white veil. Such an outfit, it turns out, was well-known to the people of Lourdes. It was the outfit worn on ceremonial occasions by the women who belonged to the "Children of Mary," a Marian sodality that had been formed in the 1830's to promote devotion to the Miraculous Medal.

When Antoinette Peyret, a member of the Children of Mary, first heard Bernadette's description of Aquero's appearance, it occurred to Antoinette that Aquero might be an apparition of Elise Latapie, the 28 year old president of that sodality who had died only a few months previously. Elise Latapie had had a reputation for holiness, and the entire town of Lourdes is said to have turned out for her funeral. That Elise might be Aquero therefore seemed plausible (at least to Antoinette). Antoinette confided her suspicion to her employer, Madame Milhet, and together the two of them went to Bernadette's house. There they secured permission from Bernadette's mother for Bernadette to visit the grotto again (something that Louise Soubirous, remember, had forbidden Bernadette to do). Antoinette Peyret and Madame Milhet accompanied Bernadette to the Grotto, where Bernadette saw Aquero for the third time, and heard her speak for the first time.⁶ Afterwards, however, Bernadette made it clear that Aquero did not look at all like Elise Latapie. At this point, most devotional accounts let the entire matter drop from sight.

What no one seemed to have asked, as far as I can tell, is whether Aquero might have been modeled on some member of the Children of Mary *other* than Elise Latapie, someone perhaps that Bernadette herself might have known quite well. For instance, did any of Bernadette's three "mothers" belong to the Children of Mary? As far as I can tell, there was only one that did, and that was Bernarde Nicolau (Neame, 1967: 90). To the devout people of Lourdes in 1858, of course, a truly authentic apparition must be an apparition of a supernatural being, either the Virgin Mary, the deceased Elise Latapie, etc., and so the possibility that the apparition might be modeled on a living person (like

6. The third apparition, when Bernadette both saw *and* heard Aquero for the first time, was also the first time that she had been accompanied to the grotto by *adults* who accepted the authenticity of her visions; previously she had been accompanied to the grotto only by other children. This seems consistent with the findings (Esman, 1962: 342; Coren & Saldinger, 1967: 355) that childhood hallucinations are intensified whenever an adult does anything to suggest to the child that the hallucination is real, even if this means only that the adult pretends to "chase away" whatever it is that the child sees.

Bernarde) would not even be considered. Yet if the apparitions are considered as hallucinations, the fact that Aquero wore the ceremonial dress associated with the Children of Mary becomes just one more reason for believing that Aquero was modeled on Bernadette's godmother, Bernarde Nicolau, who was a prominent member of that sodality.

There is a final reason for believing that Aquero was Bernarde. It is less a piece of evidence and more a way of explaining something mentioned earlier, namely, the fact that Bernadette seems to have established in her own mind a strong sense of equivalence between Aquero and herself. If Aquero was modeled on Bernarde, then this strong sense of equivalence (between Bernadette and Aquero) would "make sense" if there was some basis for believing that Bernadette felt a strong sense of equivalence between herself and her godmother. There is: the two have exactly the same first name. Given our familiarity with the name "Bernadette," it is easy to overlook the fact that this is simply a diminutive of "Bernarde." In fact, both Bernadette and her godmother shared the same baptismal name: "Marie- Bernarde." Nor was this accidental, since Bernadette was her aunt's namesake. (Note, also, that Bernadette's name after entering the convent was "Sister Marie-Barnarde.") What I am suggesting then is that this identity of names established in Bernadette's mind a mental equivalence between herself and her godmother.

In the end, then, Bernadette's hallucination of Aquero was probably a composite. Parts of the hallucination (namely, Aquero's dress, and the sense of warmth and reassurance that emanated from Aquero) were elements directly associated with Bernadette's godmother, while other parts of the hallucination (notably, Bernadette's insistence that Aquero was about the same age and height as herself) resulted from the fact that Bernadette had established an equivalence between herself and her godmother (since both shared the same name). But whether the association is direct or indirect, the evidence suggests that Aquero *did* represent Bernarde Nicolau.

What would have provoked such a hallucination? Consider that in January, 1858, Bernadette had just returned from Bartres, where by her own testimony she had felt unloved and rejected. She found herself living in a lice-infested household, where the window in her own room overlooked that dung heap. She knew from past experience that good meals in the Soubirous household would be hard to come by. In this situation, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the young Bernadette might have longed for those 1-2 years when she had lived in relative comfort with her godmother, a woman with whom she had an especially warm relationship. The hallucination of Aquero, modeled as she was on Bernarde, can therefore be seen as an attempt to gratify Bernadette's desire to be living once more in comfort with her loving godmother, rather than in poverty with her natural parents.

As before, the adequacy of the interpretation just offered can be judged only by considering how many details of the apparitions being studied can be accounted for by this interpretation. With that in mind, I would like to show how the interpretation just offered here provides a new perspective on what is perhaps the most well-known feature of the Lourdes apparitions: the fact the Aquero said "I am the Immaculate Conception."

Devotional accounts are fond of pointing out that the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was not formally promulgated until 1854, making it highly unlikely that someone as ill-educated as Bernadette Soubirous would know of that doctrine in 1854. That Bernadette did nevertheless report the "I am the Immaculate Conception" statement

is therefore seen as evidence that her apparition was authentic. Such an account ignores two things.

First, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception had been celebrated (under that title) on December 8th for at least 150 years prior to 1858. Furthermore, in the Pyrenees, it was a day of obligatory church attendance (Neame, 1967: 197-98). This alone made it likely that Bernadette would have heard the phrase "The Immaculate Conception."

Just as importantly, Bernadette was likely to have heard about the Immaculate Conception in connection with the Miraculous Medal. This was a medal struck to commemorate the apparitions of the Virgin Mary to Catherine Laboure in 1830-1831. In these apparitions, the Virgin Mary herself had commanded that this medal be struck and that a sodality be formed to promote devotion to this medal. That sodality was the Children of Mary, the same organization of which Bernadette's aunt was a member. But because Catherine Laboure's description of the Virgin Mary varied so much from apparition to apparition, it was decided by Church authorities to model the image of Mary on the face of this medal on the more familiar image of Mary Immaculate (Walsh, 1906: 284). For this reason, the official title of the medal has always been "Medal of the Immaculate Conception," and millions of these medals were minted during the 19th century (millions are *still* being minted). It came to be called the Miraculous Medal only as a result of the many miracles with which devotion to this medal has been credited.

That the image on this medal, and the medal's association with the "Immaculate Conception," was well known in 19th century France is made clear, appropriately enough, in an early treatise on hallucinations by Brierre de Boismont (1855 [1846]). In the following passage he is describing the appearance of a 17 year old French girl named Alexandrine Lanois during one of her "ecstasies":

Her head was slightly inclined to the left, and leaned forward; her arms hung down at a short distance from her body; the hands were reversed, the palms turned outwards; the left limb was somewhat inflexed and the lower part of the body slightly inclined. In fact, she presented very faithfully the attitude of an image or statue of the Immaculate Conception, which was very common throughout our country [France], and being classic, was, I believe, known everywhere (Brierre de Boismont, 1855: 222).

I might add that this same girl later reported coming on "a lady habited in white" whom she recognized as the Virgin Mary and who conversed with her at length. Please keep in mind that Brierre de Boismont's book was originally published in 1846, long before the apparitions at Lourdes.

That Bernadette (like the now-forgotten Alexandrine Lanois) was familiar with the Miraculous Medal, and that the image on this Medal influenced her apparition (just as it obviously influenced Alexandrine's ecstasy), is established by Bernadette's own testimony. In describing Aquero as she appeared on the occasion of the 16th apparition (which was the apparition during which Aquero identified herself as the Immaculate Conception), Bernadette said: "The lady was standing above the rose-tree, in a position very similar to that shown on the miraculous medal" (Estrade, 1946: 97). The fact that Aquero stood just like the image of the Virgin Mary on the "Medal of the Immaculate Concept," just prior to *identifying* herself as the Immaculate Conception, can hardly be coincidental. On the contrary, it suggests that the image on this medal, as well as the

association of this medal with the Immaculate Conception, helped to shape Bernadette's image of Aquero.

What then did Bernadette's association of Aquero with the "Immaculate Conception" represent? Aquero made her "I am the Immaculate Conception" on the morning of March 25, 1858. On the afternoon of the same day, Bernadette described her experience to J. B. Estrade, and Estrade (1946: 99) is very clear in saying that although Bernadette *did* know that the phrase was associated with the Virgin Mary, she did *not* know the meaning of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception itself. In part, then, Bernadette's identification of Aquero with the Immaculate Conception probably reflects Bernadette's capitulation to the suggestion (which had been made to her often enough at that point) that Aquero was the Virgin Mary. On the other hand, the suggestion that Aquero was modeled on Bernarde Nicolau provides us with another, complementary interpretation of this identification.

Since Aquero, like Bernadette, spoke Bigourdan, what she actually said was "Que soy er'Immaculada Concepciou." As Neame (1967: 197) has pointed out, both "immaculada" and "concepciou" had perfectly ordinary meanings in Bigourdan prior to 1858: "Immaculada" meant "unspotted or untainted," while "concepciou" meant "conception as a lady conceives baïes." The words, in other words, meant just about what they now mean in English. What imagery would have been conjured up in Bernadette's mind when she heard the phrase "Immaculate Conception."

To determine this, try the following experiment, which I have tried with my students many times. Ask a group of non-Catholics (or Catholics without much training in their religion) to explain the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. The overwhelming majority will say that it refers to the Virgin Birth, that is, to the fact that Mary had not had sexual intercourse prior to giving birth to Jesus Christ. This is of course incorrect. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is the belief that Mary was herself conceived without taint of original sin. Nevertheless, that most people *think* that it refers to the Virgin Birth is in itself sufficient evidence to suggest that the term "immaculate conception" conjures up an image of "a woman who gives birth without aid of natural father."

Given that Bernadette was generally ill-educated, and given what her biographers consistently describe as her "excessive modesty" (Petitot, 1955: 7-8), it is highly likely that she was not particularly enlightened about sexual matters. In the mind of such a person "a woman who gives birth to a child without aid of a natural *father*" could easily be taken as more or less synonymous with "a woman who gives birth to a child without aid of a *husband*." This means, then, that Bernadette could easily have associated the phrase "immaculate conception" with an unmarried woman who gives birth to a child. As the reader will have guessed, Bernadette's Aunt Bernarde was just such a woman. Bernarde in fact gave birth to *two* illegitimate children.

Bernarde Casterot's first child was the result of an illicit union with Martin Tarbes, the owner of a local bar (Neames, 1967: 63). Sometime after the child's birth, however, Martin and Barnarde did marry, with the result that when Martin died Bernarde inherited his bar. It was this that provided the material basis for the elevated social position that Bernarde was to attain. Later, Bernarde "jumped the gun again" with a second admirer, and here again a birth resulted (Neame, 1967: 64). The second admirer's last name was Nicolau, and this union too was later legalized. Admittedly, these illegitimate births

occurred when Bernadette herself was quite young, but they would almost certainly have been talked about, however discreetly, over the years. In the young Bernadette's mind, then, it is highly likely that she thought of her godmother Bernarde as a woman who had "conceived immaculately" not once, but *twice*. That Bernarde in each case had given birth to a *son*, just like the Virgin Mary, would only serve to strengthen the association between Bernarde and the "Immaculate Conception" label. Pressed to associate Aquero with the Virgin Mary, and given that Aquero was really based upon Bernarde, Bernadette would quite naturally be inclined to associate Aquero with the one Marian label that she already associated with Bernarde: the Immaculate Conception.

CONCLUSION

Those who believe in the authenticity of the apparitions at LaSalette and at Lourdes will almost certainly criticize this article on the grounds that I have consistently *assumed* that these apparitions were hallucinations instead of trying to *prove* that they were hallucinations. This criticism is perfectly valid, and it is worth re-emphasizing my reasons for proceeding in the way that I have. First, to allow even the *possibility* of divine intervention as the proximate cause of human thought or behavior would be to move the analysis beyond the bounds of social science. Second, if we do set aside the possibility of divine intervention, then these apparitions seem most similar to hallucinations, a subject that has been well-studied by contemporary psychologists and psychiatrists.

Simply labelling these apparitions as "hallucinations" is of course no great value in itself. What *is* of value is explaining why a particular hallucination occurred at a particular time to a particular person. This is what I have tried to do in the case of both LaSalette and Lourdes. In each instance, I have tried to account for the distinctive features of the apparition by relating those features to the experiences of the seer who saw the apparitions, and in each case the apparition can be seen as reflecting, in a fairly straightforward way, the gratification of an unconscious desire on that seer's part.

I must hasten to add, however, that throughout this article I have been concerned only with the process that led to the original hallucination. A full account of any Marian apparition would have to investigate the processes whereby such apparitions come to be defined as authentic either by the Church or by the general (Catholic) public or by both. Those investigations that try to relate the popularity of a particular apparition to existing social concerns are in effect concerned with this second process. But there are other aspects of this second process that have not as yet been investigated.

For instance, I have pointed out (Carroll, 1983) that Italy has always accounted for the largest proportion of all reported Marian apparitions. Yet if we look at those Marian apparitions in the 19th and 20th centuries which have been approved by the Church, at least at the episcopal level, we find that most of them are either in France (e.g., at Paris [to Catherine Laboure], LaSalette, Lourdes, Pontmain) or in French-speaking areas (e.g., Beauraing and Banneaux, both in Belgium). The remaining "approved" apparitions (e.g., at Knock, Fatima) have also tended to occur in non-Italian areas. Why does Italy account for such a disproportionate share of "reported apparitions" and so few "approved apparitions"?

Partly, the answer is probably political. A Marian apparition is, in the end, a case

of an individual who has direct access to the sacred and who thus bypasses the Church, which is supposed to act as Mediator between God and human beings. Promoting devotion to a local apparition, then, is one way that the bishops in a particular country can assert, however symbolically, a certain independence from a Catholic Church that has always been dominated by Italian clergy. This argument of course needs to be developed and documented at greater length. I mention it only as an indication of one of the directions that future research on Marian apparitions might take.

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