

historical content and once (perhaps as a slip?) refers to it as the host desecration "fiction". Given the various contexts, the prudent historian should be as loath to discount the factual background completely as he is to be completely credulous.

The book is a compelling tale in the history of propaganda and the power of narrative, and finds chilling echoes in our own time in the genocides of Armenia, the Holocaust, and the Balkans. When presented with clarity, as Rubin does, and when read with care, as the modern reader must, these stories and their studies remind us that such hatreds (even on a massive scale) are certainly nothing new, or even all that unusual, and that we still have much to learn.

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LOURDES: BODY AND SPIRIT IN THE SECULAR AGE by Ruth Harris (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1999). Pp. xxi + 474, £25.00 hbk.

Too often presented in a caricatural way either as a spectacular proof of the divine plan or as the epitome of catholic obscurantism, the Lourdes phenomenon is here at last clearly and objectively analysed by a secular historian. One of the most striking aspects of this impressive study is the ability of Dr. Harris to brush away the layers of hagiography and positivist propaganda that have burdened the story of the miracles and of the beginning of the pilgrimage tradition. Her well-balanced work presents the apparitions within the context of the enigmatic and moving character of Bernadette on the one hand, the creation of the legend by Laserre and the activities of the Assumptionists on the other hand.

The author achieves a *tour de force* in reconciling the demands of scientific historiography with the acknowledgement of the supernatural. The preface, outlining her methodology, warns of this without embarrassment. Unlikely to be accused of religious partiality as catholic historians so often are, Harris is able to freshly address her topic with all its strangeness and ambiguities. Much more at ease than a René Laurentin with non-scientific facts, she offers a much more comprehensive analysis of the shrine by the incorporation of the irrational (p.54). Rarely has an historian, without falling into the clichés of a poorly mastered psychoanalysis, so well succeeded in enabling the reader to understand the phenomenon of the miraculous.

Dr. Harris does not adopt the view of the anti-clerical school which generally sees the majority of the pilgrims as hysterical females, sexually frustrated, in the hands of a dominating reactionary clergy. Her chapter on 'The Vision of the "Self"' is particularly innovative and subtle in the analysis of the diverse experiences of those cured, and especially of the women: 'Rather than seeing the transformations at Lourdes as the effects of suggestion on women who were psychologically impoverished and susceptible, the cures of Lourdes raise a vision of the 'self' as actively engaged and resourceful, able to overcome afflictions that all

other therapies had failed to alleviate. Such healings deserve to be seen as having something of the "miraculous" about them.'

In the same subtle way, Harris avoids falling into the standard treatment of the commercialist aspects of the developing pilgrimage town. Keen to understand the real motivating forces behind this economic boom, she takes into account the general belief among the Lourdais that 'there was nothing impious in making the best use of her gift [the Virgin's apparitions]'.

The justice in her criticism is also noticeable in her long survey, in the second part of the book, of the role of the Assumptionists. Even as Harris is well aware of the extreme-right mentality of the order at the time, she recognises the charisma and dedication of its leaders as well as the extraordinary charitable work accomplished by them and their lay assistants. The rapid and tremendous success of the pilgrimages to Lourdes owed much to the military-like organisation of the Assumptionists and Harris underlines this fact, passing (perhaps too quickly) on more controversial aspects of the Order's ideology, such as its antisemitism and royalism.

It might be regretted after her fine criticism of the major historians of the shrine (Laserra, Cros) that Harris did not pursue the task with respect to the work of Laurentin, whom she only briefly mentions. In the same way, it would have been helpful if she had ventured a comparison between the shrines of Lourdes and, for example, La Salette, as a way of highlighting the reasons for the vastly greater success of the former. In a book otherwise remarkable for its knowledge of 19th century rural life, one mistake should be noted: in the description of the altarpiece of Notre Dame de Garaison (p.41), the object held by Anglèze de Sagazan, and described by Harris as a parasol, is in fact a distaff.

Much thanks to Dr. Harris, however, Lourdes no longer appears as an anachronistic place of medieval superstition in the positivist era but rather as a remarkably original shrine where the old popular piety coexists with a rational view of the faith as embodied in the Medical Bureau.

The sharpness of Harris' study is due not only to her evident enthusiasm for her subject, but to her pluralistic methodology. Indeed she puts to good use the resources of anthropology, discourse analysis, gender study, and art history as well as the more traditional historical tools, thus showing the richness of an interdisciplinary approach. Last but not least, this study of Lourdes is served by a very rich, carefully chosen, and well-placed iconography.

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