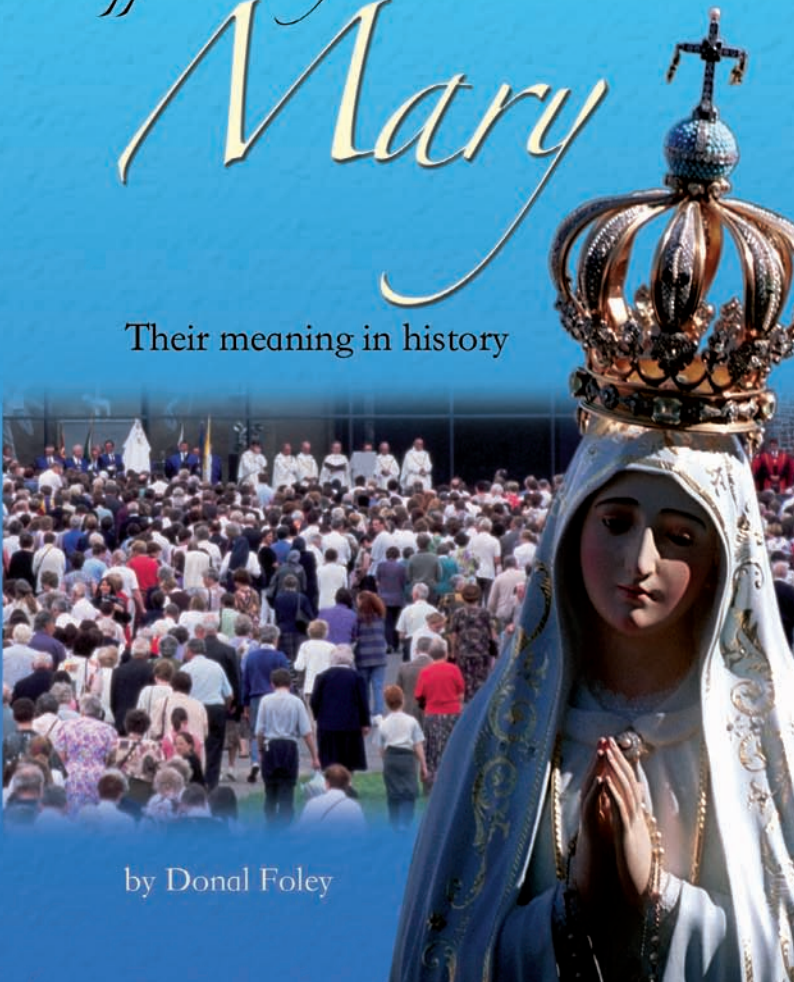


*Apparitions of*  
*Mary*

Their meaning in history

by Donal Foley



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**- THEIR MEANING IN HISTORY -**

by  
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## INTRODUCTION

This booklet looks at the nine major Marian apparitions that have occurred during the last five centuries or so, and which the Catholic Church has decided to accept as authentic. It relates them to secular happenings, exploring the idea that they parallel important “revolutionary” events in modern Western history, such as the Reformation, the French and Russian Revolutions, and the rise of Nazism. It is argued that the major modern apparitions of the Mother of Jesus, as approved by the Catholic Church, and particularly Fatima, are not random or historically inconsequential events, but actually seem to follow a preordained plan. Thus they have a crucial importance if we are to understand the events of the last five hundred years which have so shaped the modern world. The cumulative effect of these revolutions has been the development of the present immoral and unjust world-wide civilisation, which has been aptly described by the Pope as a “culture of death.”

However, there is a remedy to all this evil and that is acceptance of the teaching of the Church, particularly as it is expressed in the message of Fatima. The power of this message is evident in the huge changes that have taken place in Russia and its former satellites since the

collegial consecration carried out in 1984 by Pope John Paul II. Russia has not yet been converted but it is evident that the power of communism has been largely broken. This evil though has been replaced by another in the form of a global atheistic ideology, one based on materialistic evolution, which threatens to destroy any remnants of Christian morality.

In answer to the threat represented by these successive revolutions, Mary has repeatedly appeared and asked for repentance, a turning away from sin, if the most awful disasters are to be avoided. As the spiritual Mother of mankind she cannot stand idly by and watch humanity destroy itself through sin and selfishness. Her apparitions have played a large part in the major Catholic renewals of recent centuries, and if the message of Fatima is heeded then the Church can again experience a renaissance. As the details of the Fatima message make clear, this is necessary if we are to have true peace in the world.

This booklet also explores some interesting typological affinities between the Marian apparitions and incidents found in the Bible. That is it looks at the idea that each of the apparitions has a biblical type, a symbolic representation, in the same way that many of the incidents in the Gospel accounts of Jesus have an Old Testament type to which they correspond. An example of this is the typological identification made between Abraham's son Isaac, who carried the wood for his own

sacrificial fire on his back, and Christ, who carried the cross on his back to Calvary (*Gen 22:1-19; Jn 19:17*). These typologies mainly concern biblical types of Mary identified by the Church Fathers, and found between the books of Genesis and Ezekiel.

Looking at the historical processes which have led to the modern world, in the light of the Marian apparitions, we can say that the Protestant Reformation represents the crucial break in the ideal and reality of Christendom, with Guadalupe in Mexico, in 1531, being Mary's response to that particular revolution. The events connected with Catherine Labouré and the miraculous medal at Rue du Bac in 1830, which coincided with the Paris Revolution of that year, happened in the aftermath of the French revolution. Likewise, the apparition at La Salette in 1846 took place shortly before the European revolutionary outbursts of 1848, while Lourdes in 1858 occurred just a year before the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, an event which represents the beginning of the modern atheistic intellectual revolution. The apparition at Pontmain in France, in 1871, took place at the time of the Franco-Prussian War, while the apparition at Knock in Ireland, in 1879, fortified the Irish in their struggle against religious and social oppression. The apparitions at Fatima in Portugal, in 1917, took place just as the Russian Revolution was unfolding, while those at Beauraing and Banneux, in 1930s Belgium, happened

just as Hitler was coming to power in Germany. The above nine major apparitions, which are generally recognised as the most important Marian apparitions, have all enjoyed various degrees of Church recognition. In most cases this has included Episcopal sanction, liturgical grants, the building of a basilica, and Papal approval, as well as continuing large scale pilgrimages.

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## GUADALUPE, THE REFORMATION, AND SECULARISATION

### The Reformation

The link between important historical revolutions and the Marian apparitions is evident in the case of Guadalupe in Mexico, which occurred in 1531, only fourteen years after the beginning of the Reformation in 1517. In reality the Reformation was the first stage in the long revolt against the Church, truth, and reason, which has been going on ever since, a revolt that destroyed the unity of medieval Christendom and ushered in the modern secular age. It is true that the Church was in need of reform, but the revolutionary movement begun by Luther in 1517 was really a rejection of fifteen hundred years of history and tradition, often carried out with brutal force and the covert intention of seizing Church property. It was not a genuine religious reform. Luther's ideas on justification by faith alone, and his emphasis on the Bible, were meant to return the Church to a "golden age" before it had been corrupted by "priestcraft." But the main results of his work were the destruction of Christendom and the introduction of a corrosive questioning attitude to all aspects of medieval society.



**Our Lady of Guadalupe (detail). By kind permission of Br Francis Mary of the Academy of the Immaculate.**

All the upheavals of the preceding centuries, including the Avignon Papacy, the Great Schism, and the Black Death, had a cumulative negative effect on medieval society. Respect for authority, both religious and secular, declined, and this also effected morality. All this took place against a background of social, educational, and technological change that unsettled people's minds and made them susceptible to new ideas and simplistic solutions to very difficult problems. Germany in particular was in a state of ferment in the early sixteenth century, with a weak central government and antagonism between the different social classes. Humanistic ideas had become a serious rival to the teachings of the Church, as people began to lose sight of the central role of the Papacy. In addition, the great wealth of the Church began to seem very tempting to those who wanted to get their hands on ecclesiastical lands. Heavy taxes and financial abuses, particularly in the area of indulgences, led to feelings of exasperation, especially when it seemed as though Rome and the Renaissance Popes were unable or unwilling to do anything much to remedy all this. Thus the stage was set for the religious and political revolution we call the Reformation.

Spanish explorers began to colonise the Caribbean area after the discovery of the Americas in 1492, but it was not until 1519 that the Aztec empire, in what is now Mexico, was conquered by Cortés. Christianity was slow

to take root in the country and thus Mary appeared to Juan Diego in December 1531, preparing the way for the conversion of millions of believers in the New World, just as so many were being lost to Protestantism in Europe. 1531 is an important year because it represents the moment when the Protestant revolt had grown to such proportions that it was a real threat to the Habsburg empire. In February 1531 the Lutheran rulers set up the Schmalkaldic League, an anti-imperial alliance centred on the Protestant areas of Germany; this was an indication that Protestantism as a political force had become firmly established. At this time Spain was rapidly becoming the most powerful country in Europe, one that was to prove the mainstay of the Catholic Reformation, so perhaps it was appropriate that the first great Marian apparition of the modern age should have occurred in the new Spanish territory of Mexico.

### **The Apparitions at Guadalupe - 1531**

Juan Diego, the seer of Guadalupe, was a recently baptised adult convert, aged 57, when Mary appeared to him in 1531 at Tepeyac hill, formerly the site of a pagan temple. His wife had died in 1529 and he was now living with his uncle. On his way to Mass on 9th December, the feast of the Immaculate Conception at the time throughout the Spanish Empire, he saw an apparition of a beautiful young girl, who looked about fourteen, surrounded by

light. She gently asked him where he was going, and he told her he was going to Mass; she smiled in approval before telling him that she was “the perfect and ever Virgin Holy Mary, Mother of the God of truth through Whom everything lives, the Lord of all things near us, the Lord of heaven and earth.”

She promised the people her love, compassion, and protection, and requested that he go to Bishop Zumarraga and ask that a “little house” be built for her there. This Juan Diego did but the result was that he was initially rebuffed by the perplexed bishop. He went back towards Tepeyac hill and the route home, to find Mary waiting for him. He recounted the details of his meeting with the bishop, before asking the “noble Lady” to entrust her mission to someone more important. She, however, just smiled, and asked him to return to the bishop and emphasise that she really was the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God.

Juan Diego went to see the bishop again but Zumarraga said that he would really need more evidence, such as a sign from heaven, in order to believe him. Juan Diego again met the beautiful Lady and, after telling her what had happened, begged for a sign so that he would be believed. She spoke to reassure him telling him that she would indeed give him a sign; she also intervened to cure his uncle who had fallen ill. Relieved, Juan Diego volunteered to take the promised sign to the bishop. Mary told him to climb back to the top of the hill and gather the

flowers that he would find growing there and bring them back to her. He complied and was amazed to find beautiful, almost heavenly, flowers, including roses, all blooming completely out of season. He spread out his rough outer garment or tilma, made of ayate or cactus fibre, and scooped up the wonderful flowers before returning to Mary and presenting them to her. She rearranged them with her own hands saying as she did: "My youngest and dearest son, these different kinds of flowers are the proof, the sign that you will take to the Bishop. ...I strictly order you not to unfold your tilma or reveal its contents until you are in his presence. You will relate to him everything very carefully...so that my house of God which I requested will be made, will be built."

Juan Diego hurried on towards the city carrying his precious cargo with its beautiful fragrance. It happened that the bishop was with some important people at this time, including the new governor of Mexico, as Juan Diego told of what had just happened to him at Tepeyac; he then released the ends of the fabric allowing the flowers to fall to the floor. All present must have been amazed at this sight, but they were in for a further surprise as they raised their eyes to the tilma still being held by Juan Diego. They saw a beautiful and glorious Image of Mary, just as she had been described by him, imprinted on the coarse fabric, and reverently sank to their knees. They were the first people to see the miraculous Image of

Guadalupe which has been preserved now in Mexico for over four and a half centuries, although such fibre garments usually disintegrate within twenty years.

Juan Diego later returned to his village with a guard of honour to find his uncle recovered from his illness as promised. He related to the older man all that had happened to him, being told in turn that it must have been the same beautiful Lady who had appeared and cured him. She had also told Juan Diego's uncle the name by which she wished to be known. This information was later related to the bishop by an interpreter, who thought that the old man had been trying to say; "The Ever Virgin, Holy Mary of Guadalupe," a reference to the name of an ancient Marian shrine in Spain. It is more likely though that this represented the Nahuatl phonetic equivalent of what Juan Diego's uncle was trying to say, Coatloxopeuh, a word that means, "She who breaks, stamps or crushes the serpent."

This explanation makes perfect sense as a reference to the use of the snake symbolism that was so prevalent amongst the Aztecs, and so closely bound up with the worship of their main gods in their religion of human sacrifice. Snakes were the most frequently portrayed animals in Aztec sculpture, which was the major medium of Aztec art. Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent deity, was one of their most important gods. As Warren Carroll, a writer on Our Lady of Guadalupe points out: "An almost

universal symbol in Mexican religion was the serpent. Sacrifices were heralded by the prolonged beating of an immense drum made of the skins of huge snakes, which could be heard two miles away. Nowhere else in human history has Satan so formalised and institutionalised his worship with so many of his own actual titles and symbols.” Thus at Guadalupe, Mary, the “Woman of Genesis,” crushed the head of the monstrous Aztec religion, and prepared the way for a new beginning in Mexico.

In terms of biblical typology, Guadalupe seems to equate with the account of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis. Certainly, many of the early Christian writers saw Mary as the New Eve, contrasting her humility and obedience with Eve’s pride and disobedience. This list includes St Justin Martyr, St Irenaeus, and St Cyril of Jerusalem (*c.315-386*), who wrote: “Through Eve, yet a virgin, came death; there was need that through a virgin, or rather from a virgin that life should appear, that as the serpent deceived the one, so Gabriel should bring good news to the other.” This theme was summed up by St Jerome: “But now that a virgin has conceived in the womb and has borne to us a child ...now the chain of the curse is broken. Death came through Eve, but life has come through Mary.”

These texts are based on the Protoevangelium of Genesis, the promise from God that the offspring of the “Woman” would crush the head of the serpent, that is the

devil (*Gen 3:15*). This is a reference to Jesus, as the offspring of Mary, defeating the power of sin and the devil through his crucifixion and resurrection.

### **The Secularisation of Western Culture**

Although the Catholic Reformation, spearheaded by the Jesuits and summed up in the Council of Trent, prevented Europe from becoming completely Protestant, it could not prevent the division of the continent on religious and, eventually, cultural lines. In England, the Secularisation of the monasteries by Henry VIII started the process by which the country became almost completely Protestant. This seizure was only possible after the authority of the Pope and the Catholic Church had been replaced by that of an English State Church headed by the King. This was a significant development because without the support of England it is quite likely that the Reformation would have failed in Europe, and possibly current influences playing on the modern world might have been mitigated.

The Protestant countries of the North gradually became more secular as the capitalist ideal, which historically developed in such countries as Holland and England, predominated. It is true that the origins of capitalism are found before the Reformation, but the medieval Catholic Church was largely able to keep it within reasonable bounds. This situation changed because the Protestant Revolution largely destroyed the old medieval Catholic

culture. This was particularly the case with Calvinism, a more extreme form of Protestantism, which turned capitalistic enterprise almost into a virtue and helped to release the economic energies of the bourgeoisie, who felt that in making money they were doing the will of God. Thus despite its religious overtones the Reformation was essentially a political revolution, but one which eventually led to an economic revolution while also greatly increasing the power of the State and promoting Secularisation. R.H. Tawney, indicates the importance of this process: "In one sense, the distinction between the secular and religious life vanished. Monasticism was, so to speak, secularised; all men stood henceforth on the same footing with God; and that advance, which contained the germ of all subsequent revolutions, was so enormous that all else seems insignificant."

Protestantism did not act alone in this process of secularism though, and was part of the general upheaval in thought, exemplified by the Renaissance and humanism, which characterised the revolt against the medieval world. Still it played a crucial part in all this, in that it legitimised capitalism by giving it a religious flavour, thus helping to further liberate man from supernatural bounds, although the Reformers had no idea that this was where their ideas would lead.

In France there was a desperate struggle between Catholicism and Calvinism, with the country eventually

retaining its ancient Catholic faith but with determined groups of Protestant Huguenots being left to eventually become a leaven of unbelief and scepticism. This division in French life has been a weakening factor down through the centuries. Writers such as Descartes (1596-1650), further undermined previous intellectual ideals through the promotion of a subjective philosophy based on the individual's state of mind, evident in his emphasis on elements such as "doubt" and "certainty". As such he was an important precursor of the Enlightenment, the movement that would attempt to do away with religion altogether and replace it with a new culture based on "reason," an attempt which largely succeeded.

In the meantime a parliamentary regime was growing up in England, one that would have a profound influence on the modern world. The so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688, in which William and Mary came to power, was a great triumph for the Protestant cause, although it actually meant a reduction in the power of the monarchy, as a privileged oligarchy increased their grip on power. This new form of government transformed the whole of English society, and formed a model for the future development of Europe, and indeed the world.

## **THE ENLIGHTENMENT, THE FRENCH REVOLUTION, AND THE CATHOLIC REVIVAL**

### **The Enlightenment**

In the post-Reformation period France became the most powerful country in Europe, as during the eighteenth century a rationalistic culture began to develop, one that exalted science and reason, with religion increasingly being pushed to the margins of society and regarded as merely the concern of the individual. The religious wars which followed the Reformation, and which raged until well into the seventeenth century, also had a very harmful effect on Christian culture and hastened the process of Secularisation. An intellectual climate hostile to religion was thus being created, one which would be favourable to another stage in the process of revolution. Deism, the belief that God is a distant figure with little interest in humanity, gradually gave way, in many cases, to outright atheism. Writers such as Voltaire, with his attacks on Christianity, and Rousseau, with his idea of man's "original goodness," contributed to this ferment. This last notion, that the ills suffered by mankind are mainly due to "society," rather than individual sinfulness, has been extremely influential. The Jacobin revolutionary party, which was very active in the French revolution, would use

Rousseau's ideas as the basis of its political philosophy, in the same way that communism would later use the theories of Karl Marx. Their "religious" beliefs would mimic Christianity in that the Jacobins would have their own creed in the Declaration of Rights and their own Bible in the Social Contract, but these were beliefs based on reason alone. Freemasonry was also a malign background influence, and one which the Papacy repeatedly condemned.

This was also an era of increased criticism of the Bible as it was progressively devalued as a genuine revelation by sceptical attacks; the critical spirit initiated by the Renaissance and the Reformation thus further undermined religious belief. Great scientific and mathematical discoveries were being made, giving the impression that a completely rationalistic explanation of man and the universe was possible. Enlightenment thinkers believed that they were on the brink of a new cultural era, a time when the influence of "throne" and "altar," that is the monarchy and the Church, would be overthrown and destroyed. In reality, though, through its anticlerical and anti-Christian principles the Enlightenment would prepare the way for our present Godless and immoral world.

### **The French Revolution**

The French Revolution, when it came, turned out to be the second great act in the revolt against all that Christendom had stood for before the Reformation, and in

many respects it represented the violent fulfilment of Enlightenment thinking. Although it began, in 1789, as a reforming movement, it quickly exhibited a strong anti-Christian bias. The Church's goods were turned over to the state and by 1792 open persecution had begun, as attempts were made to destroy Christianity and replace it by a substitute religion based on reason. This was a revolution keen to assert the "Rights of Man," while excluding God. As in the case of the Reformation in England, Church goods and properties were sold off thus creating a class of powerful new landowners with no desire to restore Catholicism to its previous position.

Many ordinary Christians suffered in the persecutions of the Church which developed as a dreadful "Reign of Terror" took place. The western part of France, particularly the Vendée, rose up against the revolutionaries once the king, Louis XVI, had been executed, but this rising was put down with dreadful ferocity. Thus a concerted effort was made to destroy Catholicism in France as a totalitarian regime was created, but eventually Robespierre fell from power in 1794 and was executed. Although there was more persecution in 1797, gradually the Church's position improved, as Napoleon's coup of 1799 led to a new era.

The rise of Napoleon meant the end of open persecution of Catholicism, as he realised that he needed the Church to restore order to the country. He saw that

attempts to destroy it had not succeeded and had only caused chaos. A concordat was thus agreed between the new French ruler and the Papacy while Napoleon pursued his policy of creating a great French Empire in Europe and indeed farther afield, but he was excommunicated by Pope Pius VII for annexing the Papal States. His imperial ambitions were thwarted by England and finally ended with his defeat at Waterloo in 1815. There followed a determined attempt to put the clock back by the victorious European powers, that is to ensure that the dangerous revolutionary ideas which had been unleashed in France were kept firmly under control. However, one of the unfortunate consequences of Napoleon's defeat, given its future role, was the strengthening of Prussia. More than a quarter century of turmoil had left Europe and the Church in a weakened state, and although the Revolution had been defeated its legacy of revolutionary idealism remained a powerful influence on European society throughout the nineteenth century and beyond.

### **The Apparitions at Rue du Bac - 1830**

The first major "modern" approved apparition of Mary took place in Paris in 1830, nearly three hundred years after her apparitions to Juan Diego at Guadalupe in 1531, in a Church still weak and recovering from the Revolution. Catherine Labouré was a 24 year old novice sister when she was privileged to see Mary, late at night,

on 18th July 1830, in the chapel at the convent at Rue du Bac in Paris. She was escorted by a figure she later took to be her guardian angel and saw Mary descend the altar steps and sit in the spiritual director's chair. Mary told Catherine of the bad times which were to come, but promised help and grace for those who prayed. She also foretold the coming revolution in Paris. Catherine repeated all this to her spiritual director, Fr Aladel, who was sceptical, but this scepticism disappeared when the revolution in Paris began just over a week later. After a few days Charles X was overthrown and eventually replaced by his cousin, Louis Phillipe, but unfortunately the Church was implicated in his downfall, and bishops, priests and religious were imprisoned, ill-treated, and in some cases killed. There were also revolutionary upheavals in Belgium, Poland and Ireland, while in Italy and Spain liberal movements grew in strength.

Later in the same year, on 27th November, during community meditation, Catherine again saw Mary in the chapel. She was dressed in white, standing on a globe and holding a golden ball, with rings on her fingers flashing with light. An inner voice told her that the ball represented the whole world and that the rays coming from Mary's fingers represented graces for individuals. This apparition then changed to represent Mary with her arms outstretched, inside an oval frame with golden lettering: O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who

have recourse to thee. Again, an interior voice spoke telling her to have a medal struck on this model. It would be a source of great graces and should be worn around the neck. Then she was shown the reverse of the medal: this was to consist of a large “M” surmounted by a bar and cross with two hearts, representing the hearts of Jesus and Mary, all encircled by twelve stars. Again Fr Aladel was reluctant to act, but once the medal was struck and distributed it rapidly earned the title of the “Miraculous” medal. It was an important element in reviving Catholic belief in France, as well as in preparing the way for the proclamation of the dogma of Mary’s Immaculate Conception by Pope Pius IX in 1854. Catherine worked in a hostel for old men for forty years and was eventually canonised as St Catherine Labouré, in 1947.

### **Jacob, Joseph and the Miraculous Medal**

Regarding biblical typology, the apparitions at Rue du Bac seem to equate with events from the lives of the Patriarchs Jacob and Joseph. Jacob had a dream in which he saw a mysterious ladder that reached to heaven (*Gen 28:11-12*), and a number of the early Christian writers saw this ladder as a type of Mary, in that she provides a link between mankind and God. St John Damascene compared Mary with Jacob’s ladder in this way: “That man [Jacob] contemplated heaven joined to earth by the two ends of a ladder and saw angels going up and down upon it ...So

you have assumed the role of a mediatrix, having become the ladder by which God comes down to us, ... Thus [O Mary] you have reunited what had been divided”.

It seems too that incidents from the life of Joseph, Jacob’s favourite son, parallel the apparitions involving the miraculous medal. Joseph’s ability to interpret dreams meant that he eventually came to the notice of Pharaoh, foretelling that seven years of plenty in Egypt would be followed by famine, a famine which was to effect the whole known world. Pharaoh was so impressed by Joseph that he made him governor of Egypt, second only to himself, and put a gold chain around his neck and his own ring on his finger. Once the famine began Joseph was able to save all Egypt, as well as his family, through the distribution of the grain he had ordered to be stored during the seven years of plenty (*Gen 37-47*).

If we compare this with the miraculous medal apparition some interesting points emerge. Joseph was made second to Pharaoh in the kingdom, and similarly Mary is the human being who is second only to Christ the God-man. Pharaoh took the ring from his hand and put it on Joseph, while Catherine saw rings on Mary’s fingers giving out rays of light that symbolised the graces that would be poured out on those who asked for them. Pharaoh put a gold chain around Joseph’s neck and, of course, the miraculous medal is meant to be worn on a chain around the neck. This is unusual because other

sacramentals worn around the neck, such as the brown scapular, are made of cloth and are not meant to be used with a chain.

Joseph gathered in all the grain of Egypt, storing it until the time of famine when it was redistributed, and likewise, Mary is the intermediary between Christ and mankind who offers up the prayers and sacrifices of those who pray to her, while in turn redistributing God's graces to them. People came to Egypt from all over the known world to get grain; they were literally in Joseph's hands, and Mary held a globe in her hands to symbolise the way the whole world is dependent on her in the order of grace. There is also an allusion to Pharaoh's words to the Egyptians when they appealed for food; "Go to Joseph and do whatever he tells you," in the advice Mary gave to the servants at the wedding feast at Cana, "Do whatever he tells you" (*John 2:5*).

### **The Nineteenth Century Revolution**

The apparition at La Salette took place two years before the further European revolutionary upheavals of 1848, as the industrial revolution was gathering momentum and changing society very rapidly. The apparitions at Rue du Bac had started to influence the Church in France, through the miraculous medal, but it was still weak, with indifference towards religion a growing problem. Wealth began to be increasingly concentrated in the hands of the

few and working conditions were often dreadful. This “unbridled” capitalism, with all its injustices, was to give socialism and communism their chance to grow. Migrants from the countryside began to work in the factories, thus creating a growing class of people, the industrial proletariat, with no real connection to the old social order and thus open to socialist propaganda. The new machinery was usually economically beyond all but the rich, and this led to a further concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, with more and more people becoming “wage-slaves.”

New economic and philosophical theories were developed by writers such as Adam Smith, who favoured the removal of all restrictions on trade as the best way of increasing productivity and prosperity, even though individuals might suffer in the short term. Thomas Malthus was a clergyman and economist who produced his *Essay on the Principles of Population* in 1798. This set out the notion that poverty and hardship were unavoidable since population numbers always tended to increase much more quickly than food supply, and thus any attempts to eradicate poverty were doomed to failure. David Ricardo was an early *laissez-faire* economist who also, like Malthus, had a rather harsh view of the way ordinary people should be treated. He argued that all commodities, including labour, had a “natural price,” and that even if this fell below subsistence level for the ordinary worker it should be adhered to. He saw the society of his day, with

all its economic problems and widespread distress, as the inevitable state of things. The importance of thinkers like Malthus and Ricardo lay in the fact that influential members of society really believed what they said, and used their arguments to oppose programs of charitable relief and factory legislation.

Utilitarianism, the philosophy developed by the English writer Jeremy Bentham, also became popular as the nineteenth century progressed. It was an attempt to order society on purely rational grounds, without reference to either God or nature, and was concerned with what was socially useful and with the “happiness” of the majority, even if this meant misery for a minority. Thus the first part of the nineteenth century saw the further development of ideologies and practices hostile to traditional Christian thinking, whether in terms of utilitarianism, “eugenic” Malthusianism, laissez-faire economics, finance capitalism, or in the injustices facing working people in an expanding industrial revolution.

### **La Salette Apparition - September 1846**

Mélanie and Maximin, the two children privileged to see Mary in 1846, came from the town of Corps near Grenoble, in a poor part of south-eastern France. Maximin Giraud was eleven years old at the time and Mélanie Mathieu (or Calvat) fourteen. On Saturday 19th September, they were looking after their employer’s cattle,

high up on the pasture above La Salette, a village near Corps, when they saw a wonderful apparition of Mary. A globe of light opened to reveal a resplendent woman seated on a stone with her head in her hands. The children later described her as very tall and beautiful, wearing a long white pearl studded, sleeved dress; she also had a shawl and a tiara or crown on her head. Hanging from her neck was a large crucifix adorned with a small hammer and pincers, with a brilliantly shining figure of Christ on it. The whole effect was as if she was made of light. She spoke tearfully to the children:

“If my people do not obey, I shall be compelled to loose my Son’s arm. It is so heavy I can no longer restrain it. How long have I suffered for you! If my son is not to abandon you, I am obliged to entreat Him without ceasing. But you take no heed of that. No matter how well you pray in the future, no matter how well you act, you will never be able to make up to me what I have endured on your behalf. I have given you six days to work. The seventh I have reserved for myself, yet no one will give it to me. This is what causes the weight of my Son’s arm to be so crushing. The cart drivers cannot swear without bringing in my Son’s name. These are the two things which make my son’s arm so heavy.”

She also spoke of coming punishments for these sins, including crop blights and famine. Finally she asked the children to spread her message, before disappearing. This

they did and it appears that there certainly was a religious revival in that part of France once the message of La Salette become well known. After four years and having set up two commissions of enquiry, and despite quite a degree of opposition, the aged bishop of Grenoble, Mgr de Bruillard, approved of devotion to Our Lady of Salette in the following terms:

“We declare that the apparition of the Blessed Virgin to two shepherds, on September 19, 1846, on a mountain in the Alps in the parish of La Salette, bears in itself all the marks of truth and that the faithful are justified in believing without question in its truth. And so, to mark our lively gratitude to God and the glorious Virgin Mary, we authorise the cult of Our Lady of La Salette,”

### **La Salette and Moses**

There seems to be a fascinating typological connection between Moses and the events at La Salette. The Ten Commandments were delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai, with the first being concerned with the prohibition of other gods, and the second and third prohibiting blasphemy and Sabbath breaking (*Ex* 20:7-10). There seems to be a connection between these commandments and the basic message given to the children by Mary. When the children first saw her she was sitting on a stone in tears, and this is a significant point since Moses is the only person described as sitting on a stone in the Old Testament, an

incident that occurred in the wilderness, after the Israelites complained to Moses of being thirsty. This led God to miraculously provide water through Moses striking the rock with his staff. The Amalekites attacked the Israelites and it was only after Moses had sat on a stone, with Aaron and Hur underneath his arms, holding them up, that Joshua's forces were able to defeat them (*Ex* 17:1-13). Here we have all the elements present in the apparition, with the water from the rock symbolic both of the tears of Mary and the water that was to come from the spring at La Salette. The stone that Moses sat on thus prefigures the one sat upon by Mary, and there is also a Christological significance in the fact that Aaron and Hur held Moses' arms up, such that he assumed the shape of a cross.

What is even more important though is the reason why they held Moses' hands up; it was because they were growing too heavy, and this is precisely the complaint that Mary made to the children: "If my people do not obey, I shall be compelled to loose my Son's arm. It is so heavy I can no longer restrain it."

Mary's appearance during this apparition strongly suggests elements of the dress of the Jewish high priest, originally Aaron, Moses' brother. This point is further discussed in the chapter on the apparition at Pontmain. It seems to be the case that the description of the sanctuary and the high priest (*Ex* 25-31), as given by God to Moses on the mountain, provides the biblical typology for Mary's

appearance at La Salette, while the actual construction of the sanctuary and the institution of the priesthood (*Ex* 35-40), seem to provide the typology for Mary's appearance and actions at Pontmain, 25 years later, in 1871.

Certainly, the fact that Mary was wearing a large cross, next to which a hammer and pincers hung in the air, symbols of expiation and sacrifice, seems to give a link with the idea of priesthood and of Jesus as the new high priest (*Heb* 9). In particular it could represent the breastplate of judgement worn by the high priest. Similarly, the "apron" worn by Mary is reminiscent of the ephod of the high priest, while Exodus tells us that Aaron was to wear two chains of twisted gold with attached golden settings around his neck (*Ex* 28:13-14); Mary's "shawl" was edged with multicoloured roses, and she had two golden chains around her neck, one of which supported the crucifix. She also wore a crown or tiara, with a garland of roses around it, and in the same way the high priest was to wear a turban with a golden flower on it, a symbol of his consecration to God (*Ex* 28:36-38). Finally, Deuteronomy details the reiteration of the Law by Moses to the Israelites once they had come near the promised land. It also has a series of blessings and curses (*Deut* 28:3-5, 16-18, 21-22, 38-40) which are very similar to Mary's words on the subject of coming punishments. Thus there seem to be strong typological parallels between the message of La Salette and the teaching and activities of Moses and Aaron.

## **LOURDES AND DARWIN'S THEORY OF EVOLUTION**

### **Bernadette and Lourdes - 1858**

The revolutionary outbursts of 1848 were far more serious than the events of 1830 and profoundly shocked Europe. Nationalistic and socialist ideas were becoming more prominent, as living and working conditions for ordinary people were slow to improve. Exploitation was commonplace as workers were forced to work long hours for very low wages, with child and female labour being used wherever possible. Although governments in Europe remained “conservative” following the abortive revolutions of 1848, for the most part they were opposed to religion, and so society continued to become more secular. Thus it was during unsettled times that Mary chose to again appear in France.

The apparitions at Lourdes took place only four years after the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, in 1854, and given their nature it is only natural to see a strong link between the two. It seems too that the events at Lourdes are symbolised by some further incidents from the life of Moses, providing a link with La Salette. Bernadette Soubirous, the seer of Lourdes, was born into a very poor family in January 1844. At the time of the apparitions, in early 1858, they were reduced to

living in a back room of the former jail, the Cachot. On Thursday 11th February 1858, fourteen year old Bernadette saw a beautiful young girl in a niche at a rocky outcrop called Massabielle, about a half mile outside the town. She was near a wild rose bush and surrounded by a brilliant light and a golden cloud, smiling, with her arms extended towards Bernadette, who took out her rosary beads. When she had finished praying the rosary the apparition beckoned to her, but Bernadette did not move and the girl smiled at her before disappearing. She later described how she had seen a young girl of about her own age and height, clothed in a brilliant and unearthly white robe, with a blue girdle around her waist and a white veil on her head. A rosary with a gold cross hung from one arm, her hands were joined at her breast in an attitude of prayer, and her whole bearing gave an impression of holiness, grace, majesty, and tenderness. Bernadette later said: "She is so beautiful that when you have seen her once, you would wish to die in order to see her again."

This was the beginning of a whole sequence of apparitions, eighteen in all, which occurred during the spring and early summer of 1858. Mary first spoke to Bernadette on 18th February when she asked her if she would come to the grotto for a fortnight. On Sunday, 21st February, with about a hundred people present, Mary again spoke, giving Bernadette her mission: "Pray for sinners," while looking out over the spectators with sadness.

Thursday, 25th February, saw a crowd of about three hundred, and the discovery that was to make Lourdes famous, that of the miraculous spring in the grotto. Bernadette was part way through her rosary when she began to move about on her knees towards the back of the cave. She scratched at the ground and drank some dirty water she found there, before rubbing her face with it, following the instructions she had been given: "Go drink at the spring and wash yourself in it." She then repeated the words of the Lady just loudly enough to be heard: "Penance! Penance! Penance!" The next day it was noticed that water was trickling from the place where Bernadette had scratched, and that this flow was growing greater with time. On Saturday 27th Bernadette again had to carry out a humiliating request, being told to "kiss the ground as a penance for sinners." Mary also said to her, "You will tell the priests to have a chapel built here." Bernadette presented herself before Fr Peyramale, the local parish priest, and delivered her message, but he told her that he needed to know who this Lady was and see some sort of sign, before he could agree to this.

Meanwhile, some workmen had dug a basin for the water coming from the spring, as talk about cures began to grow. These included cases such as that of Louis Bouriette, a man who had been blinded in an accident but had now recovered his sight, as well as a young child who was cured of some form of consumptive wasting disease

after being placed in the spring water. These particular cures were submitted to the Episcopal commission and declared miraculous in 1862. By the end of the year it had become necessary to establish a medical commission to deal with an increasing number of healings, and this work was carried on by the Lourdes Medical Bureau from 1884.

Crowds continued to grow as the apparitions went on, but Fr Peyramale told Bernadette that he could do nothing until he knew the Lady's name. Early on 25th March, the feast of the Annunciation, Bernadette again felt the inner summons and made her way to the grotto, where the beautiful Lady was already waiting for her. Bernadette asked Mary her name and after joining her hands at the breast and looking up to heaven she said, "I am the Immaculate Conception." Bernadette hurried off toward the presbytery, repeating these strange words, so as not to forget them. She met Fr Peyramale and left him dumbfounded with the words "I am the Immaculate Conception"; he realised that the Lady had indeed answered his request for her name.

Bishop Laurence set up a Canonical Commission into the apparitions and their cause on 28th July. This body first interviewed Bernadette in mid-November, and was impressed by her testimony and by a growing number of cures. It was not until January 1862 though, nearly four years after the apparitions, that the bishop delivered his verdict on Lourdes in a Pastoral letter, a verdict which silenced those hostile to Bernadette.

“We adjudge that the Immaculate Mary, Mother of God, really appeared to Bernadette Soubirous on February 11th, 1858, and subsequent days, eighteen times in all, in the Grotto of Massabielle, near the town of Lourdes: that this apparition possesses all the marks of truth, and that the faithful are justified in believing it certain. We humbly submit our judgement to the judgement of the Supreme Pontiff to whom is committed the Government of the whole Church.”

Bernadette's later years were increasingly marked by sufferings, and thus she lived out the “hard saying” she had heard from Mary: “I do not promise to make you happy in this world but in the next.” She died on 16th April 1879, at the age of thirty-five, at the convent in Nevers, and was finally canonised in December 1933, becoming St Bernadette.

### **Moses and Bernadette**

There seems to be an interesting correlation between events involving Moses and the happenings at Lourdes, including his encounter with the burning bush. A number of the early Christian writers saw Mary as a type of this burning bush: amongst others Cyril of Alexandria, identified Mary in this manner, while Proclus described her as the “living bush that was not burned by the fire of the divine birth.” St Gregory of Nyssa, (c.330-c.395), in a Christmas homily, saw the burning bush as representative

of Mary's virginity: "It seems to me that already the great Moses had known of this mystery by means of that illumination in which God appeared to him, when he saw the bush burning without being consumed. ...That is what in fact was prefigured in the burning bush; ...the mystery in the Virgin was fully manifested. As on the mountain the burning bush was not consumed, so the Virgin brought forth a child and did so without stain,"

When Moses asked if he could see God's glory, he was told to stand on a rock, and then put in a "cleft of the rock," until God had passed by, only being allowed to see his back (*Ex 33:18-23*). Mary too appeared in a niche or "cleft" of the rock of Massabielle. Again, Moses struck the rock, following God's instructions, and water flowed from it bringing relief to the Israelites (*Ex 17:1-7; Nu 20:1-11*), while Mary told Bernadette where to find a spring of water, which was to become a source of both spiritual and physical healing for many.

Perhaps the most striking point of comparison though, is that both God speaking to Moses from the burning bush, and Mary speaking to Bernadette, made known their names, thus revealing their most essential characteristic. God had described himself to Moses as "I am he who is," that is as the eternal self existent being who is the cause of all things, renewing this self declaration when he proclaimed his name before Moses (*Ex 34:6-7*). Mary also described her "essence" when she said "I am the

Immaculate Conception,” since this privilege was the immediate cause of her dignity as the Mother of God.

### **Lourdes and Evolution**

Although there was no overt revolution associated with Lourdes, there was a “revolutionary” event in the following year, 1859, that is the publication of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*, with its promotion of evolution. At Lourdes Mary described herself as the “Immaculate Conception,” that is that she was conceived without sin, unlike the rest of mankind which is affected by original sin. Thus she was implicitly supporting the biblical account of mankind’s origin and fall, which has always been the teaching of the Catholic Church, and rejecting a purely “animal” origin for man.

The disruption caused by the French Revolution had shaken the older view that society was essentially static, and so the nineteenth century was generally predisposed to the possibility of change and evolution. Darwin’s ideas symbolised and crystallised the whole way of thinking that had developed from the philosophies arising out of the Enlightenment and its reaction. His theory of natural selection, influenced by Malthus’ principle that only the fittest survive, seemed to give a scientific basis to evolution. For atheists evolutionary ideas were the perfect vehicle for getting rid of the concepts of religion and revelation, in an age when it was felt that science would

soon be capable of doing nearly anything, and when man was apparently progressing to a new golden age, but one without God.

Evolutionary ideas were also applied to social life and so the older humanitarian ideals of benevolence and brotherhood were replaced by a philosophy that posited an egoistic and often militaristic “struggle” between individuals and peoples. It isn’t an exaggeration then to say that just as the eighteenth century was dominated by Newton’s thought, so the nineteenth and indeed the twentieth centuries have been dominated by the idea of evolution. And just as the Enlightenment was a revolutionary movement, so evolution also involved a complete revolution, an overthrowing of the previously accepted view of how man and the universe had come into being. This was a most significant revolution in modern times, preparing the ground for communism. It has also been a very successful revolution, since among Christians there are those who accept evolution as an explanation of how we got here, despite the fact that it still remains very much an unproved theory.

When the ideas of Darwin and Marx are taken together, along with Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic movement, which was to develop around the turn of the century, we can see how the thoroughgoing materialism of our own era came about. Certainly, both Marxism and modern psychology, which have done untold damage in the

political and moral fields respectively, base themselves to a great extent on an evolutionary understanding of man. There is also an intimate connection between the thinking of Darwin and Marx; when the *Origin of the Species* was published, Marx saw it as scientific proof for his idea of dialectical materialism: just as the struggle between animals led to higher forms, so, according to Marx, the struggle between classes would lead to a higher form of society. Revolutionary Marxism sought to do this by offering those oppressed by capitalism and industrialisation a chance to liberate themselves, but unfortunately, as history has shown, the resulting communism was a far worse form of slavery than anything capitalism was capable of.

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## PONTMAIN AND KNOCK APPARITIONS

### **The Apparition at Pontmain - 1871**

The religious situation in Europe continued to deteriorate as the nineteenth century progressed, with the Papacy coming under particular attack. The Papal States were annexed by Piedmont in 1860 as Italian nationalism grew, but although the temporal power of the Popes was waning their spiritual prestige was growing ever greater. Pope Pius IX prophetically condemned communism and socialism in 1864, correctly foreseeing that they were capable of destroying the whole moral basis of society if implemented. The Pope called the first Vatican Council in 1869 to enable the Church to face the threat posed by irreligion, and its main achievement was the proclamation of Papal infallibility in 1870. This greatly strengthened the position of both the Papacy and the Church, but the instability of the general political situation was demonstrated by the abortive 1871 Paris revolution, organised by members of the Commune who were motivated by an anti-religious and “socialistic” agenda.

The next Marian apparition was that of Pontmain in France in 1871, where, although adults were present, Mary was only seen by a handful of children. This apparition, which lasted only a few hours, took place on

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