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ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION* ON "NATURAL REALITIES AND THE SUPERNATURAL"

T.K. Our discussion is focused on preliminaries to a history of the Marian pilgrimages, especially during the nineteenth century. First, we want to distinguish between pilgrimages centered on shrines without Marian apparitions and others on shrines with Marian apparitions at their origins. Then too, we recognize differences between pilgrimages made to very old shrines, like Chartres, and those made to newer shrines, like Lourdes, La Salette, etc.

There is also an attendant theological problem. Some writers describe only what is sociological or psychological in these pilgrimages; in short, they limit their approach to the human sciences. Yet we see that there is, for believers, another area or mode of reality: the supernatural or non-empirical, or better perhaps, the impact of the Word and the action of God in our world.

René Laurentin's work on Lourdes marked the beginning of scientific studies of Marian apparitions. He also studied the appearances of Mary at Pontmain and at Rue du Bac in Paris¹. Other careful investigations were done by M. R. Vernet for Pellevoisin² and by Jean Stern who compiled a bibliography on La Salette³, preparing for a new study on that shrine. There seems to be a renewal of interest in the Marian centers of pilgrimage. The reasons are various: our new Pope does not hide his love for Marian shrines, especially for Our Lady of Czestochowa; Lourdes never ceases to attract the attention of the mass media.

T.A.Ks. I feel equipped only to talk about the scientific aspect and not the theological one, so I will just say a few things about what some

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¹ See indications given in the *Preface*, p. 11, note 19.

² M. R. VERNET, *La Vierge à Pellevoisin*. Paris: Téqui, 1978.

³ J. STERN, "La Salette, Bibliographie," in *Marian Library Studies*, 7, 1975, 3/302.

of the social sciences and the historical sciences have to say about the context of pilgrimages in the nineteenth century. I know that Father Laurentin is already very familiar with this. For example, I was reading recently about the relationship between the Miraculous Medal and the cholera epidemic. Well, the epidemic was obviously a necessary context for the diffusion of the Miraculous Medal in its early stages. More generally, I would say that there are several examples of the way in which sociological and historical studies provide necessary background for studying the history of pilgrimages. From the viewpoint of sociology, I think that perhaps the single most significant fact about the nineteenth century for France is that it was a century when industry and urbanization developed as never before. Typically, both these movements have been associated with a decline in religion; sociologists in America and in England—and to some extent in France—still identify modern economic forces with a decline in religious practice. I think that that's true, but, at the same time, there is a sense in which the disruptive forces of industrialization have the effect of awakening in the average person the need to find a sense of rootedness and community.

Pilgrimages help to give people the sense of continuity with the past and that sense of community which modern society tends to break down. There is another minor point, having to do with the role of the Church and the clergy, in the development of pilgrimages. It's fairly well-established at this point that there was a shift in the recruitment of the clergy from the eighteenth to nineteenth century, from an urban bourgeois to a more rural clergy, one that was more closely tied to the people. I think that to some extent you can see this as necessary to a context for understanding the new development of pilgrimages in the nineteenth century; that is, these nineteenth-century clergymen were more sympathetic towards popular religion than were the clergy of the eighteenth century. The eighteenth-century clergy were more likely to be from the middle classes.

R.L. Meaning that in the eighteenth century, the clergy were largely from the common people?

T.A.Ks. Yes, that's been pretty well-established. Louis Perouas, Timothy Tackett, and some other people who have studied clerical recruitment over the course of two centuries, have noted that there was a ruralization of the clergy in the nineteenth century.

R.L. But not the bishops. Because the bishops were noble persons, of aristocratic origin . . .

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T.A.Ks. Yes, that's right. . . . In the nineteenth century, I think it's fair to say, from Gadille's study of the bishops from the Third Republic, that the bishops do tend to be more from the middle classes or the aristocracy. But the clergy at the parish level, not the vicars general or the bishops, came from the lower classes.

One more point that I think is worth making has to do with the need for cross-cultural studies. For example, anthropologists who have studied healing rituals in Africa, like Victor Turner, have a lot to say about the human aspects of miracles that occur at pilgrimage shrines. Studying pilgrimages and miracles from an anthropological perspective, in which attention is paid to societies and cultures other than those of the West (France, Germany, the United States), will allow us to see things that otherwise we would miss.

T.K. Could we say that the present interest in scholarly investigations of pilgrimages and shrines is a very recent one? Before the great work done on Lourdes by Laurentin, there was only a pietistic interest. We had devotional and hagiographical literature for each shrine, but researchers who were really interested in the problem of making scientific studies on the origins and the history of these popular centers of prayer were rare.

R.L. Indeed, I think that the study of popular religion and pilgrimages was quite abandoned by the intellectuals; at the university level such matter was despised. I can say that when I began my studies on Lourdes, this was not a favorable position for a young theologian, especially in Germany but also in France. For many years people often asked me, "Are you the same man who wrote on Luke 1 and 2, on the future of the Church (This was at the time of the Council.), and also about Lourdes and Pontmain?!"

When I began to work on the history of Lourdes, popular religion was a sector surrendered to popular concern; the leadership for such devotion was more or less left to the inspiration of certain exalted, mystical, passionate personages. These were often even more questionable than the doubtful prophets associated with non-approved appearances, such as San Damiano or Garabandal. For a scholar, to be concerned with "apparitions" was a new field. Thus, my way had to be new also. What I discovered first was that when scholars (such as Duchesne) studied apparitions, it was from outside, from a stance of suspicion. They sought to find the weak points and to explain the devotion, not in terms of the sources presumed by those who made the pilgrimages: Christ and Mary, but by their own presumed

source which they interpreted as the subjective influence of pagan religion. I tried instead to consider the facts from inside. One has two avenues for considering facts: from outside or from inside. I don't know if one is more objective than the other, but I tried to keep the method of a perspective from inside. Nevertheless, I also wanted to study everything possible from outside, to collect and accept every possible element of information, of insight, any procedure to get the maximum documentation, and to give a maximum of objectivity to the final presentation. First of all, I follow the fundamental law of chronology. The presentation of data must be chronological, because without that order we remain in confusion and darkness. Otherwise, we may have documents but fail to show their worth. The first act must be to ask: "What is the date of this document, and what place do I give it in my dossier?" In this way, I find an objective order of priority, of influence, etc. Chronological order itself corrects many mistakes.

In all my research, I try to accept all the exigencies of textual criticism, literary criticism, and historical criticism, but always with the intention to interpret the facts in the light of faith. After all the preliminary work, we encounter this problem of which light we will follow for analysis and interpretation. You can have either the light of faith or another light; for instance, you can have a Marxist light. But you need a light. Therefore, you have to choose your light. If you are a Marxist, your hypothesis will be that production is the explanation underlying every fact in the story of Lourdes. Father Recroix, a priest who studied with a Marxist professor in 1958, attempted such an explanation. It was interesting, but his light was Marxist. My light is faith, a light more adequate for facts of faith. One can also follow human sciences. You can have an anthropological light, a structuralistic light. I think that in following the light of faith, we can still use many of these other lights. They are particular lights, insights from special research; we can use them objectively. Now I hope that the light of faith helps me to remain free to judge what real light is brought to the facts by each particular method. And sure, when I am at work, I have to see successively, sometimes from inside and sometimes also from outside, how facts appear in different lights. Nothing is more difficult than comparing facts seen from two or three perspectives. It is like trying to reconstruct a building in your mind from different pictures. For example, photographs of the University of Dayton taken from East, West and North—where is the point of convergence? In intellectual work this is even more difficult, I think, than using pictures and topography.

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T.K. *Newsweek* published an article on Lourdes¹. What kind of stimulus do you think prompted them to publish on such a subject? My own guess is that because the Pope went to Czestochowa and made some impression on public opinion, they wanted to give their audience some related information.

R.L. Yes, we have to understand the purpose of the Press. I am a journalist at the *Figaro*. The specific object of the Press is to present "news". In France, especially, Lourdes is a constant source of news, particularly this year, because it is the centenary of Bernadette. All the better-known periodicals, analogous to *Newsweek*, must prepare a major article on Lourdes from one or two angles of interest.

T.K. But related to Bernadette? . . . Or do they forget Bernadette?

R.L. Yes, sometimes they have forgotten Bernadette, even though the occasion was focused on her. When newspapers sent reporters to Lourdes for the centenary of Bernadette, these journalists were often more struck by the sight of the commercial proliferation of religious articles and by the spectacle of pilgrims on their sickbeds and in wheelchairs. These actualities frequently overshadowed concern about Bernadette and her role at Lourdes. Certain themes will always appear in newspaper articles on Lourdes: commercialism, the sick. If I have to write for a newspaper, I know that it is necessary to speak about these topics, because otherwise the editor will say: "You forgot something."

T.K. The *Newsweek* article I mentioned before indicated that if we have miracles and healings at Lourdes, we have the same proportion of unexplained cures in our hospitals.

R.L. Yes, that was also said in a book; I don't remember the title, but it was widely disseminated in a recent French television broadcast in which I participated. I think it is difficult to determine the real proportion. This statement is more like a catchword or slogan. I should like to try to verify this slogan. It would be very difficult to make a comparison between the number of miracles attributed to Lourdes every year and the unexplained

¹ E. KEERDOJA and E. SCIOLINO, "The Town That Faith Built," in *Newsweek*, July 23, 1979, p. 12.

cures in various hospitals. It would depend on quite variable criteria. Although I think that with good criteria we could arrive at a proportion between cures at Lourdes and in our hospitals, really we don't know exactly. No explicit norm was used to express this impressive conclusion. In reality, for me it is not a legitimate deduction; it is merely an unproven slogan.

T.K. Couldn't we say that one of the big problems on a scientific level is the failure to make distinctions between all these "illnesses"? There are illnesses of all degrees; for example, there are illnesses that will end rapidly in death and illnesses, like blindness, with the irrevocable loss of some faculty. In this latter case, a healing is not the same kind of healing as that of someone whom everybody knows is dying from leukemia. When there are such healings, could we not require that hospitals would meet the same specifications demanded at Lourdes?

R.L. I am familiar with many sorts of miracles: those of Lourdes and those of the charismatic renewal. I am very interested, but I don't think that we have our documentation established in a way which would permit us to begin a valid comparison. I have an intuitive perception of the problem, but for a methodical confrontation much groundwork would have to be done. We can only express our impressions. Dr. Kselman spoke about healing and the analogies between healings of witch-doctors in Africa and those of Lourdes. I am interested in determining the specificity of faith, the light of faith. I don't know much about African healings, but I would be interested in the specificity of Christian healing. It seems to me but I'm not sure, that the most evident Christian characteristic would be gratuitousness. I am very struck that in sound charismatic healing services nobody really asks for healing; it is more an occasion of thanksgiving. Because God is good and loving, He has healed people, as we read in the Gospel; He wants to do it today, and people offer themselves to this grace. It is essentially a service of thanksgiving, not a service of demand for healing. Sometimes healing occurs, but it is really secondary. I don't know if this aspect or another aspect would specify the magical healing in Africa. Perhaps we have almost the same situation in Lourdes: the magical aspect in Africa and in Lourdes the unpredictability, "Why does God cure one and not another"? It is not because one is better than another. We may not judge that this man is not healed because he did something bad. We say it is the gratuitousness of God. I doubt we would find this reasoning in the case of a witch-doctor. I think it would be interesting to

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make these comparisons. I think that ethnology and anthropology are inclined to reduce the facts, as far as possible, to general laws. Indeed, if we view healing as a structure, as a constant structural element, we can create a pattern: when a person is sick, he or she looks and asks for healing and finally is healed or not healed. We must note that in this structure we have a certain number of interventions: those of the ill person himself and those of the charismatic healer. But for me, the general structure is less interesting than the specific element which I see here: it is here in the "clair-obscur" (light-and-shade) that God can do something in this encounter with man. After the encounter of conversion, which usually comes first, there follows an encounter of liberation from all the inhibitions and dependencies which are in every person. Then, according to the experience, the third step in Christian healing would be healing itself, inner healing (healing of psychological wounds) and finally [par surcroît] physical healing. I should think that such a scheme would be very different from the African scheme, (as I can see from very general and vague knowledge . . .).

T.K. Could we go back to actual history? For example, for Chartres, could we establish where we are in our studies? It would seem that in iconography, studies were done and very well done. But Chartres is not only a monument of religious art, it is also a historical reality with accompanying events, pilgrimages. For example, analyzing the historical data from the nineteenth century, can we justly conclude that Chartres was only an important center of French nationalism, and that this was the most typical aspect of Chartres during the nineteenth century?

R.L. I think that documents will be published, giving a lot of information to answer these questions. It is always complicated to give a general answer to particular questions, because frequently only the apparent elements are cited. For example, if one day a politician comes to deliver a political speech at Chartres, this is very visible. If each year one million persons come discreetly to pray in the Chapel of the Miraculous Medal, without any external element of pilgrimage, this makes no "news". Ordinarily nothing will be preserved about that in history books, except that I shall note these statistics in one of my books, and this makes a contribution. I think we have here a significant event in a great stream of devotion of simple people coming to pray.

Marian Library Studies will publish a study on *La Voix de Notre Dame de Chartres*. I don't remember if this periodical gives the number of pilgrims and an idea of their prayer. Perhaps not so much, though actually this

is the essential. That which is more apparent is simply a little "news"; it is superficial. Why, in later years, was the great "news" related to Chartres the presence, the writings of Péguy? He was not Christian; he was not baptized. Péguy went to Chartres to find his roots: the roots of his social involvement (as a socialist) or his French roots (in the years before the war of 1914), to find again the faith, the feelings, the roots of his people. He celebrated all this in admirable poems. And so Chartres acquired a new reputation. But Péguy was only one interpreter of the millions of silent pilgrims who came to Chartres during the nineteenth century. Was his interpretation really something new? Furthermore, in what way was Péguy new? He was the interpreter of old roots going back to the tenth century or even to the first.

T.K. Could you compare Chartres with the Rue du Bac (at the beginning of the century), with Lourdes (at the middle of the century), and Pontmain (at the end)? Can we say that politics was the prevalent factor for Rue du Bac, and, therefore, for Chartres, Lourdes, and Pontmain?

R.L. One difference is certainly the antiquity of the sanctuary. This is something very important; the date of birth for every person or event (national, religious) is always important. The origin of Chartres is obscure: the Middle Ages or, perhaps, even earlier. I think that Chartres is a body, in the sense that we speak of the mystical body of a nation. We perceive this reality with the Shrine of Czestochowa for Poland, and more so with Guadalupe: the birth of that shrine is the origin of the Mexican nation. Certainly, Chartres is not exactly for France what Czestochowa is for Poland or Guadalupe for Mexico. We have to say that in full humility.

The shrines built in the nineteenth century have their own date of birth and their unique environment. In this perspective, *Rue du Bac* in the nineteenth century was the first charismatic reaction which appeared after the seventeenth century, the century of reason, and also after the eighteenth century, "le siècle des lumières," with its philosophical and anticlerical rationalism. After the French Revolution (a revolution that was rational, mystical and mythological), we find a striking resurgence of faith, of private revelations. I studied the history of the Miraculous Medal, after studying Lourdes and other shrines, and I was very impressed by the similar resurgence of the irrational. Sociologically, we can explain this as a reaction against the preceding period. But it is also something quite gratuitous, a gift of God.

T.K. Was it a popular movement or a revival among the elite? One for simple pilgrims or for an Alphonse Ratisbonne?

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R.L. I think, it was essentially popular, but from roots more profound than popular. The gratuitous impulse which launched the popular movement was also responsible for the conversion of the rationalist Jewish banker, Ratisbonne. We must distinguish different levels. While the gratuitous action of God is not an object of direct scientific verification, still we have to understand that it is observable through the perceptible level. Praying people do not leave many discernible traces in history: only some writings, reactions, accounts, and records of political exploitation. I think that politics was often involved in an exploitation of gratuitous visions and movements of prayer. This is true for the Miraculous Medal; it is true for Lourdes; it is true for Pontmain. Such shrines were not well prepared to avoid political manipulation. But they became conscious of this danger. For example, some leaders of the Algerian war tried—for the famous 13th of May—to use Our Lady of Fatima to mobilize Christian forces in support of their revolution. They did not succeed, but their intention was to use Our Lady of Fatima for a political purpose.

T.A.Ks. I would say, first, that the revival of intellectual interest in pilgrimages was due in part to the romantics, such as Chateaubriand, who were very interested in popular piety. Such men saw the need for intellectuals to get in touch with popular piety, which they admired a great deal. The clearest example of this I can think of is the relationship between Clemens Brentano and Anne Catherine Emmerich. In this case a scholar, a German intellectual, went to the house of Anne Catherine Emmerich, a poor and uneducated but very pious woman, and transcribed word-by-word everything she reported about her visions of Christ and Mary. The relationship between Brentano and Emmerich can serve as a symbol for the need that intellectuals felt to recover a sense of supernatural reality that they saw in the religious beliefs of the poor and the simple. I would question the way that you talked about the relationship between pilgrimages and politics. There was political exploitation of pilgrimages in the nineteenth century, but I think "exploitation" carries connotations too exclusively negative. I'm thinking specifically of the pilgrimages after the Franco-Prussian war. The pilgrimages to Lourdes, Chartres, and Paray-le-Monial were in a sense political. There were, for example, deputies from the National Assembly present at them. Furthermore, the issues that preachers at the shrines raised were political; they were providing assurances that France as a political entity would survive. But I think at the same time that there

was also a religious question here, because with the collapse of the state the only way that ordinary people could feel certain of national survival was by looking at their religious traditions. What I'm describing is similar to the feelings of the Polish people for Our Lady of Czestochowa.

When the state collapses, the only ties they feel with their own past come through religion. So I would say that the question of the relationship between politics and pilgrimages is not simply one of exploitation; there is a relationship there that is positive for both: for the people as regards the religious aspect and also, of course, for the politicians, because they can mobilize popular support for their positions. But I would say that the relationship is more complex, I think, than one of simple exploitation.

T.K. Could we interject into this discussion the fact that France had a so-called "ant clerical crisis"? We can, of course, criticize the terms of the question. Was it *political*? We ought perhaps first to define what is political, and, secondly, we need to see how wars of religion became wars between those who didn't believe, or didn't want to believe, and those who continued to believe. I think that such matters are not well studied today.

R.L. Indeed, the symbiosis between religion and politics is inextricable. Religion always has a political weight in a society and for this reason it has a political dimension, even when the bishops and priests don't want that. Politics also always has an element of religion, because it unites people and creates a society with more or less the temptation of totalitarianism, the temptation to be the life of the people. For this reason, religion and politics are mutually implicated. Religion forms bonds; according to the Latin etymology, *religare*, means "to link". As you said, during the nineteenth century, there was a moment where politicians began to see a way to escape from the influence of religion. Philippe le Bel had already tried, but it was not possible in his time because religion and politics were much too intertwined. During the nineteenth century, the separation of religion from secular politics became possible, but the Holy Office, the Church, was not favorable to that. It was surely a strange fight with the Church defending all positions, not only one of faith but also a position more or less political. And the state defended, with absolutism and sometimes totalitarianism, the absolute independence of its power against this Church. This was a factor in the complexity of the situation, as I said, related to many other problems, like the accusation of obscurantism and so on.

Editor's Conclusion

In the *London Tablet*, September 6, 1979, Sheridan Gilley reviewed a study by Paul Bew¹ on the history of Ireland; his conclusion is an illustration of our own purpose in the foregoing discussion on the presence of a divine Salvation History in what we call World History. In summation of Bew's book, Gilley wrote:

This is Irish history with all the passion left out and that leaves out half of Irish history. It is significant that in this, the centenary year of both the land war and of the shrine of our Lady at Knock, this strange intrusion of the supernatural in Ireland should not figure in Dr. Bew's argument; yet here was a vision to the dispossessed, inaccessible to practitioners of the "dismal science". For all this shortcoming, however, Dr. Bew has given us an excellent account of the strange twists and ironies of a most important event in modern Irish history, and he has made an important contribution to understanding modern Ireland².

Clearly, we must approach the study of historical events scientifically, and, among such events, religious phenomena like Lourdes and Chartres take their place. The history of nineteenth-century France cannot be written without the study of Lourdes, as the studies of René Laurentin have demonstrated. Yet, the fact remains that Lourdes cannot be reduced to only a concatenation or merely an interdependence of factors of a geographical, or economical, or sociological, or political order. Even though such syntheses ought to reflect the scientific research used to master facts and render them historically significant, they should also include the acknowledgment that something new—historically—began at Lourdes with Bernadette and her message: the belief of millions of pilgrims cannot be ignored by responsible historians. Similarly, scholars should write the history of the cathedral of Chartres, utilizing all the tools of modern historical sciences. But the faith of the pilgrims is integral to this history. Therefore, while we have here published a sociographic profile restricted to the mentality which can be uncovered in *La Voix de Notre Dame de Chartres*, we hope that future studies will show other aspects of this great Marian pilgrimage. Furthermore, we want to encourage other monographies which could assist such Marian shrines in a continuous renewal of their apostolic work.

¹ P. BEW, *Land and the National Question in Ireland, 1858-82*. Dublin: Gill and Mac-Millan, 1978.

² S. GILLEY, in *London Tablet*, Sept. 6, 1979, p. 849/50. Quotation given by E. R. CARROLL in his "Survey of Recent Mariology," in *Marian Studies*, 31, 1980.

New directions¹ are already being set during annual conventions of the rectors of shrines in various countries. We see this in France, for example, with the AOM (Association des œuvres mariales, 78, rue de la Tombe-Issoire, Paris, 75014), the Association nationale des directeurs de pèlerinage, and the Association des recteurs de sanctuaires, Les Sanctuaires de Lourdes, etc. In Italy we find the Collegamento mariano nazionale (Santuario delle Madonna del Divino Amore, via Ardeatina, km 12, Roma 00134) and the Convegno nazionale dei rettori dei santuari d'Italia. A further development in Italy is the establishment of the URM (Unione redazionale mariana) by which the bulletins issued from the various shrines of that country are being united, without suppressing the particular contributions made by each of the editors.

¹ See B. BILLET, "Œuvres mariales" in *Catholicisme* 35 (1978), cc. 626-630 (art. *Marie*. IV).