

## **Contemporary Scientifically Validated Miracles Associated with Blessed Mary, Saints and the Holy Eucharist**

Some scientists might deny the possibility of a miracle because they mistakenly believe that miracles require the suspension of inviolable physical laws. Though there is no reason why God – as a super-natural creative being—would not be able to suspend the laws of nature, it is not necessary to explain miracles this way. C.S. Lewis put it quite succinctly—“The divine art of miracle is not an art of suspending the pattern into which events conform but of feeding new events into that pattern.”<sup>1</sup> God does not need to suspend the laws of nature to make His extraordinary presence manifest—He need only add a trans-natural power to those occurring in nature.

Perhaps the greatest miracle is not the manifestation of trans-natural power, but the fact that nature itself not only has regularity, but that this regularity is describable by mathematics in a most surprising—indeed completely unexpected way. The Nobel prize winning physicist and mathematician, Eugene Wigner, recognized this remarkable coincidence of natural laws and mathematics, referring to it as a “miracle” or “the scientist’s article of faith.” “It is, as Schrödinger has remarked, a miracle that in spite of the baffling complexity of the world, certain regularities in the events could be discovered.”<sup>2</sup> Wigner later goes on to describe a four-fold miracle in the connection between classical physics, quantum physics, higher level mathematics, and the human mind’s ability to recognize it:

Finally, it now begins to appear that not only complex numbers but so-called analytic functions are destined to play a decisive role in the formulation of quantum theory. I am referring to the rapidly developing theory of dispersion relations. ¶ It is difficult to avoid the impression that a miracle confronts us here, quite comparable in its striking nature to the miracle that the human mind can string a thousand arguments together without getting itself into contradictions, or to the two miracles of the existence of laws of nature and of the human mind's capacity to divine them.<sup>3</sup>

Though Wigner was using the term “miracle” loosely here, this four-fold non-necessary coincidence of physics, mathematics, aesthetics, and the human mind is completely inexplicable in terms of logic, mathematics and physics themselves. Wigner and Schrödinger leave us to draw our own conclusions, but people of faith will see rigorous rationality and creative serendipity in this four-fold coincidence which has all the earmarks of creative intellection coursing through nature—and intellection pointing toward a supernatural mind.

More recently, Michio Kaku (one of the founders of String Theory) has articulated a new approach to the same “miracle” within the natural universe manifesting supernatural intellection. He assumes that the pre-big-bang universe is in the hyper-dimensionality of M-theory (11-

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis 1947 *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (New York: Harper One) p.95

<sup>2</sup> Eugene Wigner 1960 The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences in *Communications in Pure and Applied Mathematics, vol.13, No.1* (New York: John Wiles & Sons, Inc.) <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~matc/MathDrama/reading/Wigner.html>

<sup>3</sup> ibid

dimensional string theory), and further postulates the need for primitive semi-radius tachyons to create free spaces for interaction within the universe. If his view of the pre-big-bang universe is correct (and we do not have confirmation of this), then this universe with its primitive semi-radius tachyons would be such an elegant manifestation of extreme complexity (like a matrix) that Kaku can see only one ultimate solution-resolution – a divine mind capable of mathematical super-intellection.<sup>4</sup>

Impressive as the miracle of mathematical-physical laws may be, the divine intellect has also seen fit to manifest his supernatural intellect and power in the world by, as Lewis notes, “feeding new events into the patterns of nature.” The Lord does this to manifest His presence in the world, which is particularly noteworthy in the actions of Old Testament prophets – such as Moses, Elijah, and Elisha – and above all, through Jesus and the disciples who continue to work them in His name to this very day.

This kind of miracle is rare – otherwise it would not be differentiable from natural patterns and therefore not a “miracle.” Yet these miracles occur every day throughout the world by the power of the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus. We need only make a simple internet search to see literally hundreds of testimonies to contemporary miracles attributed to the Holy Spirit and the name of Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

The most remarkable and scientifically validated contemporary miracles have occurred through the appearance of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the intercession of Catholic saints. These miracles are also done through the power of the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus, but they have, as it were, a third agent – the Virgin Mary or a saint. This “sharing” of power and glory by the Lord typifies what we noted above – namely that even though the Lord is center stage, He does not want to be the whole show, but rather, in conformity with His unconditionally loving will, shares His healing power and glory with His beloveds.

We will first examine some well-known Marian apparitions (and the medically validated miracles associated with them) and then examine some scientifically validated miracles

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<sup>4</sup> Michio Kaku 2016 in *Geophilosophical Association of Anthropological and Cultural Studies* (June 13, 2016). <http://www.express.co.uk/news/science/742567/PROOF-of-God-real-Michio-Kaku>.

<http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/barbara-hollingsworth/string-theory-co-founder-sub-atomic-particles-are-evidence-0>

<sup>5</sup> There are multiple sites that publish non-validated accounts of miracles by the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus, such as <http://www.christian-faith.com/true-stories-testimonies-of-jesus-christ/>; and <http://www.apologeticspress.org/AboutAP.aspx> and <http://www.godisreal.today/modern-day-miracles/>. There are also many good books about contemporary miracles done through the Holy Spirit and the name of Jesus – such as, Craig Keener 2011 *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (2 Volume Set); (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic). See also Jeff Doles 2008 *Miracles and Manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the History of the Church* (Seffner, FL: Walking Barefoot Ministries).

associated with contemporary saints – Saint Padre Pio, the Venerable Fulton J. Sheen, and Saint John Paul II.

## I.

### Three Marian Apparitions

The Church is quite careful about approving Marian apparitions as valid because a validation which is subsequently falsified would undermine her credibility. Perhaps this is why the apparition at Medjugorje has not been approved despite its initiation in 1981. The Church's long-standing criteria (administered by the Sacred Congregation for Propagation of the Doctrine of the Faith) are as follows:

1. There must be moral certainty, or at least great probability, that something miraculous has occurred, something that cannot be explained by natural causes, or by deliberate fakery.
2. The person or persons who claim to have had the private revelation must be mentally sound, honest, sincere, of upright conduct, and obedient to ecclesiastical authority.
3. The content of the revelation or message must be theologically acceptable, morally sound and free of error.
4. The apparition must yield positive and continuing spiritual assets: for example, prayer, conversion, and increase of charity.

Over the last five centuries, there have been nine Marian Apparitions approved by the Church. We will discuss three of them that have undergone particular historical and scientific scrutiny:

- A. The Apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe;
- B. The Apparition of Our Lady of Lourdes;
- C. The Apparition of Our Lady of Fatima.

#### I.A

### The Apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe

According to several well-attested accounts (see below) the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to a native Aztec, Juan Diego, on December 9, 1531. She asked him to ask his Bishop --Juan de Zumarraga – to build a church atop Tepeyac Hill (now within the confines of Mexico City). Juan Diego did as he was instructed, but after relating his story to Zumarraga, he did not believe him. The Blessed Virgin appeared again to Juan Diego that same day (December 9<sup>th</sup>) and asked him to return to the Bishop. On December 10<sup>th</sup>, Juan Diego returned to Zumarraga, but he still had doubts, and asked Juan Diego to return to the Hill and ask the Virgin for a miraculous sign. He did as he was instructed and the Lady promised a sign the next day (December 11). However, before Juan Diego could return to the Hill on December 11 his uncle Juan Bernardino became quite ill and Juan Diego stayed with him to find medical assistance and a priest. On December 12<sup>th</sup> when Juan Diego left his uncle to find a priest, the Virgin met him on the road and assured him that his uncle would be cured and told him to proceed to the Hill where he would find the sign required by Bishop Zumarraga. He went to Tepeyac Hill and found Castilian roses growing there (not native to Mexico), gathered them and put them in his tilma. When he returned with the roses to Bishop Zumarraga and opened his cloak to allow the roses to fall, the picture of the Lady of Guadalupe appeared on the tilma. Apparently the roses and the image were sufficient to convince Bishop Zumarraga to build the first Church (and sanctuary for the image) atop of Tepeyac Hill.

Some scholars have challenged the veracity of this story because it was not found either in the writings of Bishop Zumarraga or in an ecclesiastical report about the image. However, in 1995, Jesuit historian Xavier Escalada published a four-volume encyclopedia on the image and history of Our Lady of Guadalupe in which he reports and analyses a hitherto unknown sheet of parchment dated 1548 called “*Codex Escalada*.”<sup>6</sup> The parchment contains an illustrated story of the vision of Juan Diego and is signed by Antonio Valeriano and Bernardino de Sahagun. These signatures were authenticated by Banco de Mexico and Charles E. Dibble. The authentication of the signatures -- along with the parchment, illustrations, language, and style – validate both the parchment and the existence and vision of Juan Diego.<sup>7</sup>

The image itself has many extraordinary attributes that border on the miraculous, and probably verify them as miracles. Five attributes have been scientifically tested in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries:

1. The material of the tilma has maintained its chemical and structural integrity for almost 500 years. This is quite remarkable considering that most replicas of tilmas with the same chemical and structural composition last only *15 years* before analyzable decomposition. Furthermore, the tilma was displayed without protective glass for its first 115 years, and was subjected to soot, candlewax, incense, and touching throughout its history. There is currently no scientific explanation for its physical and chemical longevity.<sup>8</sup>
2. Though there are several parts of the cloth which have been painted subsequent to the original image (e.g. the moon underneath the Virgin’s feet, the angel holding the cloth, and the rays coming from the image), the original image of the Virgin herself does not appear to have been painted by an artist at the time. There is no sketch underneath it, no brush strokes, no corrections, and it appears to have been produced in a single step. These features were identified by Dr. Philip Serna Callahan (biophysicist and NASA consultant) who photographed the image under infrared light.<sup>9</sup>
3. According to Nobel Prize winning biochemist, Richard Kuhn, who analyzed a sample of the fabric, the pigments used were from no known natural source, whether animal, mineral, or vegetable. Given that there were no synthetic pigments in 1531, this enigma remains inexplicable.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See the *Codex Escalada* 1548 in [http://basilica.mxv.mx/web1/-apariciones/Documentos\\_Historicos/Mestizos/Codice\\_1548.html](http://basilica.mxv.mx/web1/-apariciones/Documentos_Historicos/Mestizos/Codice_1548.html)

<sup>7</sup> See Alberto Peralta (2003). “El Codice 1548: Critica a una supesta Fuente Guadalupeana del Siglo XVI.” *Articulos* (in Spanish). Proyecto Guadalupe. See Stafford Poole (July 2005). "History vs. Juan Diego". *The Americas*. **62**: 1–16.doi:10.1353/tam.2005.0133. Stafford Poole (2006). *The Guadalupean Controversies in Mexico*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press..

<sup>8</sup> See Giulio Dante Guerra, AlleanzaCattolica.org, "La Madonna di Guadalupe". 'Inculturazione' Miracolosa. Christianita. n. 205–206, 1992. , accessed December 1, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> See P. Callahan (1981). *The Tilma under Infrared Radiation: CARA Studies in Popular Devotion, vol. II, Guadalupe Studies, n° 3*. Washington D.C.: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, pp. 6–13. See also Thomas Sennott. 2011 "The Tilma of Guadalupe: A Scientific Analysis" in <http://www.motherofallpeoples.com/2011/12/the-tilma-of-guadalupe-a-scientific-analysis/>.

<sup>10</sup> See the comments of engineer Dr. Jose’Aste Tonsmann of the Mexican Center of Guadalupean Studies during a conference at Pontifical Regina Apostolorum Athenaeum in 2001. Reported in *Zenit* 2001. <https://web.archive.org/web/20100620110845/http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/religion/re0447.html>

4. Dr. Callahan also noted that the original image on the tilma had not cracked, flaked, or decayed over 500 years while the paint and gold leaf had flaked or deteriorated considerably. This phenomenon has not yet been scientifically explained – and may not be able to be so explained.
5. The eyes of the Virgin have three remarkable qualities that cannot be explained through known technology in 1531 – and would be difficult to replicate with today’s technology enhanced by computers, ophthalmologic knowledge, and digital photography:
  - a. Engineer, Jose’ Aste Tonsmann, has amplified an image of the pupils of the Blessed Virgin by 2500 times, and can identify not only what appears to be the image of Bishop Zumarraga, but also several other witnesses of the miracle reflected there.
  - b. The images in the pupils also manifest the triple reflection called the Samson-Purkinje effect – which was completely unknown at the time of the image’s formation.<sup>11</sup>
  - c. The image in the eyes of the Virgin follow the curvature of the cornea precisely in the way it occurs in a normal human eye.

The first ophthalmologist to identify both the Samson-Purkinje effect and the precise corneal curvature in the images in both of the Virgin’s eyes was Dr. Javier Torroella Bueno, MDS in 1956. Dr. Rafael Torrija Lavoignet made a detailed examination of the Virgin’s eyes with an ophthalmoscope, and confirmed Dr. Bueno’s findings, noting other remarkable similarities to human eyes. Since that time, the eyes have been examined by more than 20 ophthalmologists confirming the conclusions of the original examination. As noted above, Dr. Jose Aste Tonsmann (formerly of Cornell University working at IBM) amplified the Virgin’s eyes by a factor of 2,500 times, and used a series of filters to eliminate “noise” in the amplified images. He not only confirmed the precise corneal curvature and the Samson-Purkinje effect, but also several other figures behind Bishop Zumarraga (the front figure pictured with a beard) all of whom were looking at the tilma in amazement.<sup>12</sup> Readers interested in some of Dr. Tonsmann’s photographs will want to consult the following URL: <http://www.sancta.org/eyes.html>.

The above five enigmas in the tilma of Juan Diego are scientifically inexplicable today – and certainly cannot be explained by the artistic and preservation capabilities between 1531 to 1900. In view of this, it is reasonable and responsible to believe that this tilma had more than an extraordinary origin – indeed, a supernatural one.

In addition to the seemingly miraculous origin of the image, there have been many miracles associated with the tilma over the last several centuries – some concerned with healing, and one concerned with the tilma’s remarkable survival when a bomb was placed underneath it by a Mexican secularist in 1921. Despite the fact that a brass crucifix was completely bent over, and the altar was damaged, the tilma was left unharmed.<sup>13</sup> Among the many healings that have taken place over the centuries through the tilma – or replicas that have touched the original – this author is personally acquainted with one man who has publically testified to being cured of

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<sup>11</sup> This was first discovered by

<sup>12</sup> Joe Aste Tonsmann 1981 *El Secreto de sus Ojos*. (Mexico City: Editorial Diana).

<sup>13</sup> See D.A. Brading, *Mexican Phoenix. Our Lady of Guadalupe: Image and Tradition Across Five Centuries*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, (2001), p. 314; Stafford Poole, *The Guadalupean Controversies in Mexico*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press (2006), p. 110.

fourth stage cancer in a remarkably short time after being prayed over under a replica of the tilma.<sup>14</sup>

In conclusion, devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe portrayed on the remarkable tilma in the Cathedral atop Tepeyac Hill, has been a most remarkable source of conversion to Catholicism throughout Mexico. It has also been a source of strength and grace for the Catholic religion, particularly in times of persecution and secularism. The message of Our Lady to Juan Diego – filled with love and affection for the native people of the western hemisphere has inspired tens of thousands of people beyond the boundaries of Mexico, and she is now considered to be the patroness of all the Americas.<sup>15</sup> Her image can be found all over the United States as well as other non-Mexican countries in Latin America. The influence of this single devotion has been so great that Pope Benedict XIV in 1754 wept and uttered the words of Psalm 147 when he looked upon it for the first time -- “God has not dealt in like manner with any other nation.”

## **I.B**

### **The Apparition of Our Lady of Lourdes**

The appearance of the Blessed Virgin Mary to Bernadette Soubirous at the Grotto of Lourdes in 1858 is probably the most well-known Marian apparition in history—not so much because of the apparition itself as the thousands of miraculous cures that have taken place through the water of the Grotto.

On February 11, 1858, just outside of Lourdes, France, Bernadette Soubirous (a 14-year old girl without much formal education), her sister Toinette, and a friend Jeanne Abadie were searching for kindling and bones in a cave. Just as she had taken off her shoes and stockings, a lady, small in stature, dressed in white with a blue sash around her waist, and holding a gold rosary appeared to her. Bernadette tried to make the sign of the cross but was so scared she could not, at which point the Lady asked her to pray the rosary with her, restoring her calm. Bernadette was the only one to see and hear the apparition.

When Toinette returned home, she told their mother and both parents punished them for telling such a “story.” Nevertheless, Bernadette was drawn back to the cave, and the lady appeared to her again. Bernadette brought holy water with her, and sprinkled it on the apparition to see if she would shrink from it, but the Lady only smiled, at which point Bernadette told her that if she was not of God she would have to go away.<sup>16</sup> The lady smiled and bowed and Bernadette went into a kind of ecstasy—sensing her holiness and love. Her companions witnessed this ecstasy which seemed to last long after the apparition.

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Patterson, Seattle, Washington, was prayed over while being covered by a replica of it at the Napa Institute 2015. He testified to this at the same institute in 2016.

<sup>15</sup> See Carl Anderson 2009 *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Mother of the Civilization of Love* (NY: Doubleday Religion).

<sup>16</sup> Anonymous, “The Apparitions in 1858” on the official Lourdes website. <https://en.lourdes-france.org/deepen/bernadette-soubirous/the-apparitions>.

Bernadette returned a third time to the Grotto, and the lady gave her instructions to return several times throughout the upcoming two weeks. On February 20th, the lady taught her a prayer and asked for penance for the conversion of sinners.

Bernadette returned to the Grotto on several other occasions accompanied by hundreds of people. The official Lourdes website lists the major points of the apparitions as follows:<sup>17</sup>  
*Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> February.* Early in the morning, Bernadette was accompanied by about 100 people, after the apparition she was questioned by the Police Commissioner, Jacomet.

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*Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> February.* Surrounded by 150 persons, Bernadette arrived at the Grotto. The Apparition reveals to her a secret "only for her alone".

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*Wednesday 24th February.* The message of the Lady: "Penance! Penance! Penance! Pray to God for sinners. Kiss the ground as an act of penance for sinners!"

*Thursday 25th February.* Three hundred people were present. Bernadette relates; "She told me to go, drink of the spring (...) I only found a little muddy water. At the fourth attempt I was able to drink. She also made me eat the bitter herbs that were found near the spring, and then the vision left and went away."

*Saturday 27th February.* Eight hundred people were present. The Apparition was silent. Bernadette drank the water from the spring and carried out her usual acts of penance.

*Sunday 28th February.* Over one thousand people were present at the ecstasy. Bernadette prayed, kissed the ground and moved on her knees as a sign of penance. She was then taken to the house of Judge Ribes who threatened to put her in prison.

*Monday 1st March.* Over one thousand five hundred people assembled and among them, for the first time, a priest. In the night, Catherine Latapie, a friend from Lourdes, went to the Grotto, she plunged her dislocated arm into the water of the Spring: her arm and her hand regained their movement.

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Several additional cures occurred at the Grotto (seven of which were considered medically inexplicable--and therefore miraculous) which drew even more people to the cave. This caused a great deal of controversy both within the Church and the town. A decision was made in March to barricade the Grotto which had the effect of bringing it to the attention of the national press and national government. Bernadette was not to be deterred, and so visited the barricaded Grotto at night on several other occasions. On one such occasion (March 25, 1858) the lady declared that she was "the Immaculate Conception." Her last apparition occurred on July 16, 1858.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

The controversy concerning the closure of the Grotto became a national issue, compelling Emperor Napoleon III to formally reopen the Grotto on October 4, 1858. The Catholic Church was concerned about the immense popularity of the Grotto and the potential for people to be misled, and so the Bishop assembled an ecclesiastical committee in November 1858 to assess the veracity of Bernadette's apparitions.<sup>18</sup> On January 18, 1860 the Bishop, following the advice of the committee, declared the apparition to be authentic. Bernadette was canonized as a saint in 1933. Today, almost 4 million pilgrims per year visit the shrine, and hundreds receive extraordinary and miraculous cures.

### **I.B.1 The Miraculous Cures**

From the time of Blessed Mary's first apparition to Bernadette Soubirous, the water from the Lourdes Grotto has been a source of miraculous healings both for those who have visited the Grotto and even for those who used the water in remote places. Since the time of Bernadette, over 7,000 miraculous cures have been reported to the Lourdes Medical Bureau by pilgrims who have visited Lourdes (which does not include miracles that have taken place outside of Lourdes). There were so many purported cures associated with the water and Grotto of Lourdes that the Catholic Church decided to set up the Lourdes Medical Bureau to be constituted by and under the leadership of physicians and scientists alone. The forerunner of the Bureau was started by doctors affiliated with the Grotto in 1883. Pope Pius X formally constituted the Medical Bureau we know today in 1905. The objective of the Bureau is to render a judgment that a particular cure was near instantaneous, efficacious throughout the remainder of life, and in all other ways, scientifically inexplicable. The Bureau is constituted by 20 physicians and scientists. Its records are open to any physician or scientist who wants to make their own investigation or challenge to any particular case recognized by the above criteria as "miraculous."

Since 1883, only 69 cases have been recognized as "miraculous" according to the strict standards of the Bureau. But this does not mean that the 7,000 other cures were not miraculous by other standards. These cases simply cannot be shown to be *completely* scientifically inexplicable – though their occurrence could be truly extraordinary and possibly – or even probably – miraculous. Recall the definition of "miracle" mentioned above – that the Lord is introducing transphysical (supernatural) causes and events into the natural patterns of physical nature.

The 69 cases approved by the Lourdes Medical Bureau have been inspected by large numbers of physicians and scientists, and the vast majority of them have been shown to be permanent and inexplicable cures. A list of cures is available at the following website -- [http://www.miraclehunter.com/marian\\_apparitions/approved\\_apparitions/lourdes/downloads/lourdes\\_cures.pdf](http://www.miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/approved_apparitions/lourdes/downloads/lourdes_cures.pdf). Books and websites have been written about particular cases, but readers

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<sup>18</sup> The Church has definite criteria for judging the authenticity of an apparition. APPROVAL FOR MARIAN APPARITIONS (from the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Doctrine of the Faith): 1. "There must be moral certainty, or at least great probability, that something miraculous has occurred, something that cannot be explained by natural causes, or by deliberate fakery. 2. The person or persons who claim to have had the private revelation must be mentally sound, honest, sincere, of upright conduct, and obedient to ecclesiastical authority. 3. The content of the revelation or message must be theologically acceptable, morally sound and free of error. 4. The apparition must yield positive and continuing spiritual assets: for example, prayer, conversion, increase of charity."



desiring more information on the above 69 cases will have to visit the Lourdes Medical Bureau. Arrangements can be made through the following website:

<http://en.lourdes-france.org/deepen/cures-and-miracles/miraculous-cures-in-lourdes>.

Though many of these cases were truly remarkable, we will only examine three of them which had an impact far beyond the individual's receiving a miraculous cure:

1. The case of Marie Bailly – attested to by the Nobel Prize winning physician Alexis Carrell – 1902.
2. The case of Gabriel Gargam – 1901.
3. The case of John Traynor – 1923.

### **I.B.2**

#### **Marie Bailly and Alexis Carrel – 1902**

The first case concerns Marie Bailly, attested to by the Nobel Prize winning physician – Dr. Alexis Carrell. This case was examined by Fr. Stanley Jaki, Ph.D., who received two doctorates in physics and theology, was a notable contributor to the history and philosophy of science, and a Templeton Prize winner.<sup>19</sup> This case is as much about Dr. Carrell as the recipient of the miraculous healing – Marie Bailly. Dr. Carrell won the Nobel Prize for techniques he perfected in vascular surgery and *Scientific American* credited him with “having initiated all major advances in modern surgery, including organ transplants.”<sup>20</sup>

In 1902 a physician friend of Dr. Carrell invited him to help take care of sick patients being transported on a train from Lyons to Lourdes. Carrell, at that time, was an agnostic who did not believe in miracles, but consented to help out, not only because of friendship, but also an interest in what natural causes might be allowing such fast healings as those taking place at Lourdes. On the train, he encountered Marie Bailly who was suffering from acute tuberculous peritonitis with considerable abdominal distension with large hard masses.<sup>21</sup> Though Marie Bailly was half-conscious, Carrell believed that she would pass away quite quickly after arriving at Lourdes – if not before. Other physicians on the train agreed with this diagnosis.

When the train arrived at Lourdes, Marie was taken to the Grotto where three pitchers of water were poured over her distended abdomen. After the first pour, she felt a searing pain, but after the second pour, it was lessened, and after the third pour, she experienced a pleasant

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<sup>19</sup> Stanley Jaki made a thorough examination of Dossier 54 on this case at the Lourdes Medical Bureau. He gives the physician depositions (from Carrel and two other physicians) in the Dossier, as well as an analysis of it, in his introduction to a new edition of Alexis Carrel's *The Voyage to Lourdes*. This was published by his own publishing company, Real View Books, and is available for purchase online at <http://www.realviewbooks.com/>. Fr. Jaki summarized the main parts of this case in a lecture given for the Catholic Medical Association. See Stanley Jaki 1999 “Two Lourdes Miracles and a Nobel Laureate: What Really Happened?” *Catholic Medical Association*. <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=2866>.

<sup>20</sup> See *ibid*.

<sup>21</sup> Dr. Carrell wrote about this cure himself in a book entitled *The Voyage to Lourdes* using as the main protagonist Dr. Lerrac (“Carrel spelled backwards”) and changed the name “Marie Bailly” to “Marie Ferrand” in the story. It is a complete description of what Dr. Carrel saw on his train ride to Lourdes. See Dr. Alexis Carrel 1950 *The Voyage to Lourdes*, trans. by Virgilia Peterson (NY: Harper Brothers). An online is available free of charge at [http://www.basincome.com/bp/files/The\\_Voyage\\_to\\_Lourdes.pdf](http://www.basincome.com/bp/files/The_Voyage_to_Lourdes.pdf).

sensation. Her stomach began to flatten and her pulse returned to normal.<sup>22</sup> Carrel was standing behind Marie (along with other physicians) taking notes as the water was poured over her abdomen, and wrote: “The enormously distended and very hard abdomen began to flatten and within 30 minutes it had completely disappeared. No discharge whatsoever was observed from the body.”<sup>23</sup> Marie then sat up in bed, had dinner (without vomiting), and got out of bed on her own and dressed herself the next day.<sup>24</sup> She then boarded the train, riding on the hard benches, and arrived in Lyons refreshed. Carrel was still interested in her psychological and physical condition, and so asked that she be monitored by a psychiatrist and a physician for four months.<sup>25</sup> After that, Marie joined the Sisters of Charity – to work with the sick and the poor in a very strenuous life – and died in 1937 at the age of 58.<sup>26</sup>

When Carrel witnessed this exceedingly rapid and medically inexplicable event, he believed he had seen something like a miracle, but it was difficult for him to part with his former skeptical agnosticism – so he did not yet return to the Catholic faith of his childhood. Furthermore, he wanted to avoid being a medical witness to a miraculous event because he knew that if it became public it would ruin his career at the medical faculty at Lyons.

Nevertheless, Marie Bailly’s cure seemed so evidently miraculous (being so rapid, complete, and inexplicable) that it became public in the news media in France and throughout the world. Reporters indicated that Carrel did not think the cure was a miracle which forced Carrel to write a public reply stating that one side (some believers) was jumping to a miraculous conclusion too rapidly and the other side (the medical community) had unjustifiably refused to look at facts that appeared to be miraculous.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Carrel implied that Bailly’s cure may have been miraculous.

As Carrel feared, his advocacy of the possibility of Bailly’s miraculous cure led to an end of his career at the medical faculty of Lyons which ironically had a very good effect on his future – because it led him to the University of Chicago and then to the Rockefeller University. In 1912, he received the Nobel Prize for his work in vascular anastomosis. Carrel returned to Lourdes many times, and on one occasion, witnessed a second miracle – the instantaneous cure of an 18-month old blind boy. Despite these two miracles, Carrel could not bring himself to conclusively affirm the reality of miracles – real divine supernatural intervention manifest in the world. In 1938, one year after the death of Sr. Marie Bailly, Carrel became friends with the Rector of the Major Seminary in Rennes, who told him to consult with a Trappist monk -- who was a well-known spiritual director and friend of Charles de Gaulle – Fr. Alexis Presse, with whom he began a dialogue. In 1942, Carrel announced that he believed in God, the immortality of the soul, and the teachings of the Catholic Church. Two years later, in 1944, as Carrel was dying in Paris, he sent for Fr. Presse, who administered the Last Rites of the Church to him. He had not been able to let go of the miracles of Lourdes, and they had led him to continue his

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<sup>22</sup> See Jaki “Two Lourdes Miracles...”

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Jaki. ”Two Lourdes Miracles...”

inquiry into his spiritual nature and Christian revelation. Ultimately he would find himself joined to the Lord through the Church of his childhood.

### **I.B.3 Gabriel Gargam -- 1901**

The second case, that of Gabriel Gargam, occurred in 1901. He was born to practicing Catholic parents, but lost his faith at the age of 15, and no longer practiced it. Later in life he became a postal sorter, and during the course of his work in 1899, the train on which he had been sorting collided head on with another train travelling at 50 mph. He was thrown 52 feet from the train and was badly injured. After eight months, he was at the point of death -- a mere 78 pounds with gangrenous feet, unable to take solid food. He could only be fed once every 24 hours by a tube and required two nurses to take care of him. His condition was well-attested not only by his physicians, but by those involved in the lawsuit he filed against the railroad – the court records and physicians’ testimonies still exist today.<sup>28</sup>

Gargam spent two years in bed – unable to be moved from his room. Though his aunt (a religious sister) and his mother begged him to go to Lourdes, he refused to do so preferring to suffer his fate in his room. Finally he relented and consented to the trip, but being moved on a stretcher and riding on the train almost killed him. When he arrived at Lourdes he was in dire condition, and he went to confession and received a piece of Holy Communion, and then he was brought to the waters in the Grotto. The strain was so great, that he fell into a swoon and his attendants believed him to be dead, so they put him on a carriage, put a cloth on his face, and began to wheel him back to the hotel. On the way there, a Eucharistic procession was passing by. The priest leading the procession saw the sorrowful crowd around Gargam, and he blessed them with the Holy Eucharist, at which point Gargam’s legs began to move under the sheets. He then sat upright by his own power (which he had not been able to do for two years), and then proceeded to get off the carriage and walk around by his own power. The astonished crowd accompanied him back to his hotel where he sat down to eat a hearty meal (though he had not taken solid food for two years).<sup>29</sup>

On August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1901, Gargam was examined by 60 physicians, all of whom pronounced him completely cured. They could not explain his cure through any known form of physical causation – a judgment which still holds true today. Gargam also underwent a spiritual metamorphosis, consecrating himself to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the service of the sick at Lourdes. He lived a normal healthy life until his death at 83 years of age.<sup>30</sup>

### **I.B.4 John Traynor – 1923**

The third case, John Traynor, occurred in 1923. Traynor was raised a Catholic and was a bonafide WWI hero who was severely injured during the war. In 1915, in a third battle where he

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<sup>28</sup> Elaine Jordan “The Lourdes’ Miracle of Gabriel Gargam” in *Tradition in Action*, [http://www.traditioninaction.org/religious/h106\\_Lourdes.htm](http://www.traditioninaction.org/religious/h106_Lourdes.htm).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

received severe wounds, he was sprayed with machine gun fire. A bullet lodged under his collarbone, he was wounded in the chest, and another bullet hit his head (which caused a permanent hole revealing his pulsating brain that was later blocked by a silver plate). As result of these injuries, Traynor's right arm was paralyzed (and his muscles atrophied), his legs were partially paralyzed, and he was epileptic (from the wound in his head). He was not able to do anything, and had to be moved from his bed to his wheelchair, sometime suffering four epileptic fits per day.<sup>31</sup>

In 1923, Traynor's diocese of Liverpool organized a pilgrimage to Lourdes. Traynor who had a sincere devotion to the Blessed Virgin, wanted to go, though his physicians, wife, the government ministry of pensions, and even the priest organizing the pilgrimage begged him to stay home. They thought the trip would be suicide, and they were almost correct. Traynor was wheeled to the train in Liverpool, and suffered tremendously on the trip to Lourdes. When he arrived he was almost dead, and one woman wrote to his wife indicating that he would be buried at Lourdes. During his stay, he was taken to the baths nine times, and on the occasion of his tenth time (July 25, 1923), his legs felt agitated in the bath. After the bath, he was placed in the wheelchair to receive a Eucharistic blessing from the Bishop of Rheims who was passing by in a Eucharistic procession. After being blessed by the host, his arm (which had been paralyzed for 8 years) grew so strong that he was able to burst through his bandages. He then regained the use of his legs (which had been partially paralyzed for 8 years preventing him from standing and walking). He got out of his chair and walked several steps, but his attendants put him to bed for the evening because they were afraid he might hurt himself. During the night, he leapt out of his bed, knelt down to finish a rosary, and ran out his door to go to the Grotto – to the utter amazement of everyone watching. He knelt down in the Grotto to finish his prayers, but seemed to suffer a temporary lapse of memory about his condition prior to going into the bath for the tenth time. The healing not only cured his paralysis and epilepsy, it seemed to mask the memory of his former misery. Two days later, while riding on the train back to Liverpool, Archbishop Keating of Liverpool came into his compartment, and reminded him of his former condition – only then was his memory revived, and both he and the Archbishop broke down in tears.<sup>32</sup>

His cure was so complete that he went into the coal and hauling business (lifting 200-pound sacks of coal), pledged himself to service at the Grotto of Lourdes every summer, and died on the Eve of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception in 1943 (20 years after his cure). A large number of conversions occurred in Liverpool as a result of the obvious miracle.<sup>33</sup>

In 1926, the Lourdes Medical Bureau certified that Traynor was instantly and permanently cured in a completely scientifically inexplicable way. Not only was the paralysis in his arm and legs completely cured, but he regained the muscle and tendons in his skeletal arm. Moreover, the permanent hole in his temple healed completely, leaving no mark but a slight indentation. He received a certificate from Dr. McConnell of Liverpool attesting that he had not had an epileptic fit since 1923. All these cures occurred simultaneously and instantly.<sup>34</sup> A movie

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<sup>31</sup> See anonymous "Miracles of Lourdes" in Our Lady of the Rosary Library. <https://olrl.org/stories/lourdes.shtml>.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

is currently being made by his great great grandson about the miracle, and will be available sometime in 2017.<sup>35</sup>

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## **I.B.5 Conclusion**

As previously noted, there are many other miraculous cases of healings associated with Lourdes beyond the above three – 69 of them officially judged a miracle by the Lourdes Medical Bureau, and literally thousands of others that are truly extraordinary, but not susceptible of being judged *completely* scientifically inexplicable. In view of this, it is highly likely that an extraordinary power – indeed, a supernatural power – appears to be continuously present and operative at the Grotto of Lourdes. The evidence is so extensive that even slight openness to the existence of God and God’s action in the world, would lead one to draw this conclusion – at least prospectively.

If one concludes to the presence of divine power and healing at Lourdes, what would this mean beyond the obvious conclusion of God’s existence and action in the world? One conclusion might be that God is love, for this is not only evident in the actual cures that take place multiple times every year at the Grotto, but also in the loving service of so many people who have dedicated their time, and even their lives, to helping sick pilgrims to bathe in these waters of hope. But what about those who do not receive a cure? What happens to them? The vast majority – though perhaps initially disappointed – find themselves spiritually renewed by the prayer, spiritual witness, and loving service at the Grotto. The experience causes them to refocus – not on receiving a cure in this world, but on their eternal salvation with the loving God who is so extraordinarily present at the sanctuary and the Grotto. Very few pilgrims leave the Grotto embittered. Quite the opposite – they are edified, spiritually rejuvenated, and focused on life with God which they now know includes an element of the cross to help them along the way. Acceptance of the cross as an integral means to the purification of love, and its ultimate purification in heaven, is perhaps the hardest dimension of human existence. Yet Lourdes, even when cures do not occur, has the remarkable effect of inciting us quite rapidly toward this acceptance. Lourdes is clearly about the love of God manifest in healing, service, and most blessedly in the acceptance of the cross of Jesus Christ.

How else does this remarkable story and Grotto affect us? There is the most obvious point of all – not only is God the Father and the risen Jesus present, but also the Blessed Virgin Mary. The modern age seems to have so much difficulty accepting the involvement of the Blessed Virgin in the work of divine providence and salvation. Yet as we have seen at Guadalupe and now at Lourdes, Blessed Mary has a way of appearing to people much like herself when she was a young woman in Nazareth. As noted earlier, the persons of the Blessed Trinity are not interested in monopolizing the providential stage – they desire to share it first with the Blessed Mother, then with saints such as Bernadette Soubirous, and even men of medicine like Alexis Carrel.

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<sup>35</sup> See also Eleanor Barlow 2016 “Liverpool ‘miracle’ soldier’s story to be told in documentary directed by great-great-grandson” in *Echo News* (Liverpool), June 2016. <http://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/liverpool-miracle-soldiers-story-told-11455815>.

The Blessed Virgin's vital presence at Lourdes shows her centrality in the order of salvation by God's will. We might ask why He would want her to have such an important role in providence and salvation. One answer might be, as illustrated by Guadalupe and Lourdes, that He seeks a feminine and motherly voice in the manifestation of His care and salvific intention. Mary's motherly affection toward Juan Diego and Bernadette shows this essential dimension – as well as the dimension of family – in God's providential plan and love. This motherly dimension is truly important for those who are suffering and need the kind of encouragement and solace that only a mother can give. This motherly care and solace richly complements the unconditional love of the Prodigal Son's father (Abba) and the unconditional brotherly love of Jesus Himself.

Some people might object that this constitutes "Mariolatry" – a divinization and worship of Mary. Far from it! Catholics are not interested in divinizing or worshipping Mary, but only acknowledging her vital role in the order of salvation – not only in first century Nazareth, but throughout history. When the Father made all of us adopted children through His Son Jesus, He also made us adopted children of Jesus' Mother Mary. She accepts us within the divine-human family she initiated through her consent to be the Mother of His Son. We are her children – not just in the first century – but for all time – and the miracles of Guadalupe and Lourdes confirm this logic of familial love.

One last observation—when the Blessed Virgin appeared to Bernadette Soubirous, she announced herself as "the Immaculate Conception." This is another doctrine that non-Catholics believe to be extra-Biblical and somewhat difficult to believe. Though the Bible does not explicitly mention Mary being free of original sin at the time of her conception, the Church believed that this followed from her sinlessness-- almost universally attested by the Church Fathers. On this basis, the doctrine was declared by Pope Pius IX in 1854 in the papal bull *Ineffabilis Deus*. Given the veracity of the many miracles that have occurred at Lourdes, it is reasonable to assign the same veracity to Bernadette's account of the apparitions which apparently confirms the veracity of the Immaculate Conception by Mary's own words. This doctrine confirms God's long-standing providential plan to choose Mary as the mother of His son, and to keep her from being affected by concupiscence—one of the effects of the fall. This would protect Mary's capacity to raise Jesus with a perfected love. This doctrine makes complete sense. If the Son of God is to become incarnate as a baby (because He is fully human), then it seems fitting that His mother be able to raise Him in accordance with the fullest potential for human love. Though Bernadette may not have recognized the significance of Mary's announcement (at the age of 14 without formal education), she became a conduit to confirm an important doctrine about God's foreknowledge, unconditional love, providence, and intention to save.

### **I.C** **The Apparition of Our Lady of Fatima**

In the spring of 1916 three Portuguese shepherd children – Lucia Santos and her cousins Jacinta and Francisco Marto were visited three times by an apparition of an angel who identified himself as "The Angel of Peace." They said that the angel taught them prayers and encouraged them to spend time in adoration. On May 13, 1917, the children were visited for the first time by

the Blessed Virgin Mary at the Cova da Iria in Fatima, who appeared to them as exceedingly radiant. She wore a white mantle edged with gold, and carried a rosary, telling the children to devote themselves to the Holy Trinity and to daily recitation of the rosary for an end to the First World War.

Though Lucia had asked her two cousins to keep the apparition secret, Jacinta told her mother, who in turn told it to several neighbors which made the children's apparition quite public. On June 13, 1917, the children experienced the second apparition, at which time the Blessed Virgin revealed that Jacinta and Francisco would die soon, but that Lucia would live longer to spread the message of peace from Fatima. This prediction proved to be true. Jacinta died in 1918 and Francisco died in 1919 during the world flu pandemic, but Lucia lived to be 97, dying on February 13, 2005 after spending most of her life in a disalced Carmelite Monastery.

On October 13, officials of the Portuguese government intercepted the children who were returning to the Cova da Iria, and interrogated them because hundreds of people were flocking to the Cova, and officials considered the three secrets that the Blessed Virgin had revealed to the children to be politically disruptive. The children returned to the Grotto on August 19 where the Blessed Virgin promised an extraordinary miracle on October 13. The Virgin visited the children three more times prior to October 13 with a similar message about praying the rosary for world peace.

On October 13, 1917, a huge crowd of around 50,000 people gathered at the Cova da Iria to witness the great miracle that Lucia had predicted would occur on that date. It had been raining and then it began to clear. Lucia shouted, "Look at the sun." The sun appeared to be rotating on its own axis, throwing out a variety of colors, and then it appeared to approach the earth causing many to believe that the world was ending. It then returned to its normal state. Though the ground had been quite wet from the rain prior to the miracle, the sun's activity during the miracle dried the ground significantly, baffling many of the engineers and scientists present. The miracle was variously described by reporters, doctors, and scientists. Dr. Domingos Pinto Coelho, reporting for the Catholic newspaper, described the event as follows:

The sun, at one moment surrounded with scarlet flame, at another aureoled in yellow and deep purple, seemed to be in an exceedingly swift and whirling movement, at times appearing to be loosened from the sky and to be approaching the earth, strongly radiating heat.<sup>36</sup>

A reporter from the Lisbon paper, *O Dia* saw it this way:

The silver sun, enveloped in the same gauzy grey light, was seen to whirl and turn in the circle of broken clouds ... The light turned a beautiful blue, as if it had come through the stained-glass windows of a cathedral, and spread itself over the people who knelt with outstretched hands ... people wept and prayed with

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<sup>36</sup> Cited in John DeMarchi 1952 *The Immaculate Heart: The True Story of Our Lady of Fatima* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young) p. 147.

uncovered heads, in the presence of a miracle they had awaited. The seconds seemed like hours, so vivid were they.<sup>37</sup>

Dr. Almeida Garrett, Professor of Natural Sciences at Coimbra University described it as follows:

The sun's disc did not remain immobile. This was not the sparkling of a heavenly body, for it spun round on itself in a mad whirl, when suddenly a clamor was heard from all the people. The sun, whirling, seemed to loosen itself from the firmament and advance threateningly upon the earth as if to crush us with its huge fiery weight. The sensation during those moments was terrible.<sup>38</sup>

Fr. John DeMarchi spent seven years researching the Fatima accounts of both the apparitions and the miracle of the sun, obtaining hundreds of testimonies to the phenomenon and presents them in three important works:

1. *The Immaculate Heart, The True Story of Our Lady of Fatima*,<sup>39</sup>
2. *The True Story of Fatima*,<sup>40</sup> and
3. *Fatima: From the Beginning*.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to the large group of witnesses at the Cova de Iria, several witnesses reported seeing the solar phenomenon in the surrounding area – some as far as 18 to 40 kilometers from the Cova. DeMarchi found no witnesses outside the 40 kilometer perimeter of the Cova. The vast majority of those present attested to the sun's highly unusual and beautiful activity, giving various reports of how it seemed to look. DeMarchi found no one present who denied it.<sup>42</sup>

How can this event be explained? It could not have been an astronomical phenomenon because it was not witnessed by anyone beyond 40 kilometers from the Cova da Iria. Therefore it had to be either a highly unusual local *atmospheric* phenomenon or a supernatural phenomenon acting like a gigantic spinning lens or prism suspended in the atmosphere. If it was caused by atmospheric conditions, such conditions would be exceedingly unusual in human recorded history. Though some scientists, such as Steuart Campbell, have suggested that the phenomenon might be explained by a large cloud of stratospheric dust (similar to one that created a reddening effect on the sun in China in 1983), this explanation does not explain how the phenomenon made the sun spin on its own axis, approach the earth, and then recede to its original position. Even if it could, the fact that the children predicted the precise time and place for such a highly unusual atmospheric event goes beyond natural explanation.<sup>43</sup>

The atmospheric explanation requires a convergence of a large number of highly unusual factors whose spontaneous occurrence would be very difficult to explain by natural causation. Even if one attributes the phenomenon to purely natural causes, the convergence of so many

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p. 143.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. 146.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> John DeMarchi 1956, *The True Story of Fatima* (St. Paul Minnesota: Catechetical Guild).

<sup>41</sup> John De Marchi 1981 *Fatima: From the Beginning* (Fatima, Portugal: Missoes Consolata).

<sup>42</sup> John DeMarchi 1952 *The Immaculate Heart, The True Story of Our Lady of Fatima*, p. 143.

<sup>43</sup> Stanley Jaki, the well-known Benedictine professor of physics and philosopher of science notes that the children's prediction alone shows the supernatural origin of the phenomenon. See Stanley Jaki, *God and the Sun at Fatima* (South Orange, NJ: Real View Books).



highly unusual atmospheric conditions, to produce a rotating disc approaching and then receding from the earth on the precise day predicted by the children strongly suggests that the phenomenon had a supernatural dimension. Recall C.S. Lewis' definition of a miracle: "The divine art of miracle is not an art of suspending the pattern into which events conform but of feeding new events into that pattern."<sup>44</sup>

Alternatively, the phenomenon could be explained on a purely supernatural basis – as a sort of transphysical round lens or prism suspended in the atmosphere spinning on its own axis, approaching the earth and then receding back to its original position. In either case, if the 50,000 witnesses were not deluded by mass hallucination, it seems that something supernatural took place at the Cova da Iria on October 13, 1917.

The explanation of mass hallucination has been proffered by some critics especially because the event was religious, and the witnesses were expecting a miracle to occur. Yet such an explanation is highly dubious because of the large number of witnesses (50,000) who ranged from believers to skeptical non-believers and included physicians, scientists, reporters, churchmen, attorneys, and other people of high education and repute. Furthermore, those who witnessed the event 18 to 40 kilometers away could not have been under the same "spell" as those in the Cova da Iria. Finally, the fact that the phenomenon dried wet ground (from a lengthy preceding rain) in a very short time shows that the event was not only in the minds of the participants. According to De Marchi, "Engineers that have studied the case indicated that an incredible amount of energy would have been necessary to dry up in a few minutes, the pools of water that had formed on the field."<sup>45</sup> De Marchi concludes to the high improbability of mass hallucination as follows:

The prediction of an unspecified "miracle", the abrupt beginning and end of the alleged miracle of the sun, the varied religious backgrounds of the observers, the sheer numbers of people present, and the lack of any known scientific causative factor make a mass hallucination unlikely.<sup>46</sup>

In view of the combination of circumstances – the children's accurate prediction, the drying effect of the phenomenon, the highly unusual nature of the phenomenon (particularly the spinning, approaching, and receding of the sun), the large number of witnesses from various backgrounds and education, and the witnesses from as far away as 18 to 40 kilometers, it is reasonable and responsible to conclude to the presence of supernatural power at the Cova da Iria on October 13, 1917 – whether the event was produced by a convergence of highly unusual atmospheric factors or had a purely supernatural cause (such as a transphysical spinning lens or prism).

There have been many healing miracles connected with the Cova da Iria and the intercession of Our Lady of Fatima. Unfortunately, these miracles have not been as assiduously documented and medically confirmed as those at Lourdes; therefore I do not mention them here. The miracle of the sun is sufficient to speak of the authenticity of the apparitions.

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<sup>44</sup> C.S. Lewis 1947 *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (New York: Harper One) p.95

<sup>45</sup> See *Ibid.* p. 150.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* p. 278-82.

## II. Validated Miracles through the Intercession of Contemporary Saints

There are many well-documented medically confirmed miracles by objective scientific panels that occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries in connection with the canonization of some well-known saints – Saint Padre Pio, Saint John Paul II, Saint John XXIII, Blessed Fulton J. Sheen, etc. As the reader may know, one such miracle is required for beatification and a second miracle is required for canonization (declared sainthood). The diocese in which the miracles occurred is responsible for convening an objective scientific panel to judge whether a miracle is beyond any natural explanation. Such miracles are frequently instantaneously cured long-term malignancies, the instantaneous regeneration of dead tissue, instantaneous cure of blindness or long-term paralysis, etc. I will present only three such miracles here – one concerned with Padre Pio, another with Fulton J. Sheen, and another with Saint John Paul II. If readers are interested in dozens of other scientifically confirmed miracles of this kind, they need only do a google search for the canonization miracles of their favorite saints (e.g. “canonization miracles of St. John Paul II”). Normally, a description of the miracle and the procedures used to validate its non-natural (supernatural) origin are given in abundant detail.

### II.A. A Miracle Attributed to St. Padre Pio

During his lifetime, Padre Pio performed a large number of miracle cures, about which several books have been written.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, I will limit myself to a miracle connected with Padre Pio’s beatification, because this kind of miracle must be approved by a Diocesan Scientific Board, a Diocesan Theological Tribunal, a Vatican Scientific Board and a Vatican Tribunal. I have also taken the miracles for Venerable Fulton J. Sheen and St. John Paul II from the proceedings concerned with their beatification to assure the same quality of investigation and medical-scientific scrutiny.

The miracle used for St. Padre Pio’s beatification process was the case of Consiglia De Martino, a married woman with three children from Salerno, Italy. On October 31, 1995 Consiglia began to feel acute pain, followed by a very fast-moving growth in her neck. It quickly reached the size of a grapefruit, causing her and a friend to call their husbands to go to the Riuniti Hospital in Salerno. After ordering two CAT- scans (see the following link for photographs) <http://caccioppoli.com/The%20path%20of%20Padre%20Pio%20to%20sainthood,%20the%20miracle%20of%20Consiglia%20De%20Martino,%20the%20miracle%20of%20Matteo%20Pio%20Colella.html>) the examining physician determined that she had suffered from diffuse lymphatic spilling of approximately two liters (two quarts) resulting from a rupture of the lymphatic canals. Consiglia was told that she would have to have a very difficult and complicated surgical intervention as soon as possible, and so the doctor scheduled the surgery for November 3.

Consiglia began to pray immediately to Padre Pio, and phoned his monastery at San Giovanni Rotondo where she spoke with Fra Modestino Fucci (a brother who was Padre Pio’s

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<sup>47</sup> See for example Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate, 1999 *Padre Pio: The Wonder Worker*, (New Bedford, MA: Our Lady’s Chapel) or Renzo Allegri, 2000, *Padre Pio: Man of Hope* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications)

friend and who had been promised by him before he died that he would be helping him with intercessory prayers). He prayed at the tomb of Padre Pio on November 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>. During that time, prior to the surgical intervention, physicians gave no medical treatment to Consiglia.

On November 2, Consiglia noticed a marked decrease in pain followed by a rapid diminution of the swelling in her neck. The following day Consiglia was examined by physicians prior to the scheduled surgery. They noticed immediately the disappearance of the swelling in her neck and ordered x-rays of that area as well as her abdomen. The x-ray showed not only the complete cure of the rupture of the thoracic duct (the largest lymphatic vessel of the lymphatic system) that caused the lymphatic spilling, but also the complete disappearance of the large 2-quart liquid deposit in her neck as well as other liquid deposits in her abdomen. The surgery was cancelled, and a cat scan was ordered for November 6 which confirmed the results of the x-ray taken on November 3. Evidently, Consiglia had been immediately and inexplicably cured of a complex and dangerous condition without any medical intervention whatsoever. She attributed the cure to Padre Pio to whom she, her family, and Fra Modestino had been praying. Successive examinations of Consiglia showed no long-term effects of the condition.

The diocesan investigation of the miracle took place from July 1996 to June 1997 in the Salerno curia. Two ex officio experts and a medical consultant studied the published documentation and unanimously declared the “extraordinary and scientifically inexplicable” nature of the cure.<sup>48</sup> On April 30, 1998, the 5-member Medical Committee of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints (CCS) at the Vatican declared unanimously that “The healing of the traumatically ruptured thoracic duct of Consiglia De Martino on November 3, 1995 is scientifically inexplicable.”<sup>49</sup> After the positive conclusion of the Medical Committee, the assembly of Cardinals and Bishops Members of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints approved the Consiglia De Martino case as a miracle on October 20, 1998.

## **II.B**

### **A Miracle Attributed to Fulton J. Sheen**

A miracle used in the process of the beatification of Bishop Fulton J. Sheen took place on September 16, 2010 in Peoria, Illinois when James Fulton Engstrom – a newborn baby of Bonnie and Travis Engstrom – was found to be stillborn. During the delivery, James’ umbilical cord became knotted, cutting off blood, oxygen, and nutriment from the baby during the delivery process. When he emerged, James was apparently stillborn. Unlike healthy babies, he was pulseless, his arms and legs flopped to the sides and he was blue in color. Since Bonnie Engstrom had decided on a home delivery, the midwife and others had to perform CPR on the baby in anticipation of an ambulance to take him to the hospital. After 20 minutes, the ambulance arrived and took the lifeless child to the hospital. Upon arriving, doctors again tried to revive him through resuscitation and epinephrine injections, but after 61 minutes, were about

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<sup>48</sup> Anonymous Vatican source 2011 “The Cure of Signora Consiglia De Martino” in *Inside the Vatican*.  
<https://miraclesatholic.wordpress.com/2011/03/11/the-cure-of-signora-consiglia-de-martino/>.

<sup>49</sup> “The Path of Padre Pio to be Proclaimed Saint”  
<http://caccioppoli.com/The%20path%20of%20Padre%20Pio%20to%20sainthood,%20the%20miracle%20of%20Consiglia%20De%20Martino,%20the%20miracle%20of%20Matteo%20Pio%20Colella.html>.

to declare him deceased. Throughout the ordeal, his parents and some family friends prayed through the intercession of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen for the life of the child.

At the moment the doctors were about to call the death of James, his heart started to beat for the first time – at a normal heartbeat of 148 beats per minute. This in itself was extraordinary because James moved from lifelessness to ordinary cardiac activity instantaneously. However this is only part of the story. After 61 minutes of cardiac arrest and significant oxygen deprivation (except for the times during which CPR was administered), doctors expected James to suffer from massive organ failure. When this did not occur, they predicted that he would be severely disabled, noting that he would probably have cerebral palsy, requiring him to be strapped to a wheelchair with feeding tubes for the rest of his life, and consigning him to blindness and virtually no mental activity. Contrary to all expectations, James did not manifest any of these deficiencies or symptoms, but very clearly continued to develop like a normal child.

A seven-member panel of medical specialists assembled in Peoria (the place of the miracle) to examine all medical records associated with the case as well as James himself. They concluded in March 2014 that James’ recovery and development could not be explained through any scientifically known natural causation. Given the circumstances, he should have been either dead or severely disabled. A panel of theologians was subsequently convened that rendered a decision attributing James’ restoration to health as a miracle occurring through the intercession of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen.

## **II.C**

### **A Miracle Attributed to St. John Paul II**

The second miracle leading to the canonization of John Paul II concerned a 50 year old woman from Santiago, Costa Rica, Floribeth Mora Diaz. She suffered a brain aneurysm in April, 2011. After a series of tests in a hospital, including a brain scan, and after a three-hour operation, the doctors told her that her condition was inoperable and terminal and that she would have only one month to live.

After receiving the bad news, Floribeth went home, and was consigned to bed to keep her comfortable for the remainder of her short life. She had a strong devotion to Pope John Paul II and so began praying for his intercession so that she could live to be with and help her husband and four children. Coincidentally, the beatification of Pope John Paul II was scheduled to take place on May 1, 2011, and Floribeth decided to watch the events on T.V. After watching the beatification she went to sleep, at which time she had a vision of John Paul II speaking to her, saying “Get Up! Don’t be afraid!” Much to the surprise of her husband, she got out of bed and told him that she felt well—and that this had occurred after a vision of Pope John Paul II. Floribeth subsequently underwent several medical tests—including new brain scans—which left her neurologist and other doctors completely stupefied by her recovery. They declared that her virtually instantaneous cure on May 1, at 2 a.m. was scientifically inexplicable by any known natural agency. Later a commission of medical physicians was assembled by the Vatican who brought Floribeth to Rome in secret, admitted her to a hospital for a new examination, comparing her current state of health to neurological records and scans from before her cure on May 1,

2011. They also concluded that her cure was scientifically inexplicable. This paved the way for the theological commission and Pope Francis to declare Pope John Paul II to be a saint.

### III.

#### A Contemporary Eucharistic Miracle

A true Eucharistic miracle occurs at every holy mass when the priest utters the words of consecration and the substance of the bread is transformed into the substance of Jesus' body and the substance of the wine is transformed into the substance of His blood. However, this term is sometimes used to refer to extraordinary empirical signs of Jesus' presence in the Eucharist, most notably, bleeding hosts, or the transmutation of a consecrated host into a piece of cardiac muscle tissue. The first reported Eucharistic miracle of the second (rarer) sort – the miracle of Lanciano -- took place in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

Eucharistic miracles are quite difficult to certify scientifically, because of problems certifying that the blood came from the host or that the transmuted flesh was originally a consecrated host. However, one notable exception to this difficulty occurred under the auspices of Pope Francis (at that time Archbishop Jorge Bergoglio) on August 18, 1996 in the Church of Santa Maria y Caballito Almagro in Buenos Aires Argentina.<sup>50</sup>

On that day in the evening, Fr. Alejandro Pezet was told by a woman parishioner that a consecrated host had been desecrated on a candleholder in the back of the Church. Unable to consume the host, Fr. Pezet put it into a glass of water into the tabernacle so that it would dissolve (the ordinary practice for respectfully handling such a host). When he opened the tabernacle on August 26, he saw that the host had been transformed into a piece of bloody tissue which was much larger than the original host. He informed Archbishop Bergoglio of the occurrence, who asked him to have the host professionally photographed. This occurred on September 6, 1996. It was decided to keep the host in the tabernacle without publicizing it or its origin.

After three years, the bloody tissue had not decomposed (which is truly extraordinary and virtually impossible to explain through natural causation – particularly because no special attempt was made to preserve it). Since the original photographs revealed the complete lack of decomposition, Archbishop Bergoglio asked that the bloody tissue be scientifically examined. On October 5, 1999, in the presence of the Cardinal's representatives, scientist Dr. Ricardo Castanon Gomez took a sample of the bloody fragment and sent it to New York for analysis.<sup>51</sup> Since Dr. Gomez did not want to prejudice the scientific committee who would be examining the tissue in New York, he did not reveal its source. A team of five scientists was assembled, including the famous cardiologist and forensic pathologist, Dr. Frederic Zugibe (author of many books on forensic pathology, deceased 2013<sup>52</sup>). Zugibe testified that:

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<sup>50</sup> See Mieczyslaw Piotrowski 2010 "Eucharistic Miracle in Buenos Aires" in *Love One Another!* [http://www.loamagazine.org/nr/the\\_main\\_topic/eucharistic\\_miracle\\_in\\_buenos.html](http://www.loamagazine.org/nr/the_main_topic/eucharistic_miracle_in_buenos.html). For a summary of this article, see Aleteia website 2016 "Eucharistic Miracle Beheld by Pope Francis? A Polish magazine tells of Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, and an event in Buenos Aires" in <http://aleteia.org/2016/04/22/eucharistic-miracle-beheld-by-pope-francis/>.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. Aleteia website.

<sup>52</sup> Wikipedia "Frederic Zugibe" in [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick\\_Zugibe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_Zugibe).

The analyzed material is a fragment of the heart muscle found in the wall of the left ventricle close to the valves. This muscle is responsible for the contraction of the heart. It should be borne in mind that the left cardiac ventricle pumps blood to all parts of the body. The heart muscle is in an inflammatory condition and contains a large number of white blood cells. This indicates that the heart was alive at the time the sample was taken. It is my contention that the heart was alive, since white blood cells die outside a living organism. They require a living organism to sustain them. Thus, their presence indicates that the heart was alive when the sample was taken. What is more, these white blood cells had penetrated the tissue, which further indicates that the heart had been under severe stress, as if the owner had been beaten severely about the chest.<sup>53</sup>

What is so remarkable about this testimony is not so much the fact that the tissues comes from the wall of the left ventricle, but that white blood cells are present in large numbers in it, requiring that the tissue be removed when the heart was still alive and pumping. This feature precludes a great number of possible scenarios of fraud which a critic might propose, for it cannot be thought that officials in the Church had authorized the torture and death of a male with AB blood type (the same as on the Shroud of Turin and the Facecloth of Oviedo), opened his chest while he was still alive (after torturing him), and removed the tissue from his beating heart. If this scenario is out of the question, then one must ask the origin of this tissue which came from the tabernacle where the desecrated host was stored (as witnessed by the physician who extracted it, Dr. Ricardo Castanon Gomez). How did a piece of non-decomposing cardiac muscle tissue from the wall of the left ventricle with significant numbers of white blood cells (which had penetrated the tissue) make its way into the glass inside the tabernacle where the desecrated host had been stored in secret by Fr. Alejandro Pezet? How did this specific piece of tissue (which could only have come from a live, tortured subject) make its way into the tabernacle? The major factors needed to avert the criticism of “pious fraud” are in place, because solid medical evaluation shows that the sample had not decomposed and cannot be obtained from a deceased subject (i.e. a cadaver). Short of the fantastic scenario mentioned above, this non-decomposing piece of tissue appears to be the result of a transmutation of a consecrated, desecrated host witnessed not only by Fr. Alejandro Pezet, but also by his Bishop, Archbishop Jorge Bergoglio (Pope Francis).

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The above three Marian apparitions (and the miracles associated with them), the three intercessory miracles of the saints, and the Eucharistic miracle witnessed by Pope Francis, are but a very small sample of miracles manifest in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They are recounted here because they have been subject to considerable scientific scrutiny by experts who are believers and non-believers. As noted above, the Medical Commission of Lourdes has certified 69 miracles, the complete documentation for which is available through the Lourdes Medical Commission. Yet these 69 miracles do not exhaust the miracles of Lourdes – there are literally thousands of them that have not been subject to the above scientific scrutiny – or could not be unanimously declared by believing and unbelieving scientists to be *completely* beyond scientific

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Aleteia website.

and natural explanation. The same holds true for healing miracles associated with the Tilma of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the water and apparition of Our Lady of Fatima. Padre Pio performed dozens of miracles during his lifetime, and every canonized saint in the 20<sup>th</sup> century had to be connected with at least two miracles judged to be completely scientifically and naturally inexplicable. Though Eucharistic miracles are much rarer, the above miracle associated with Pope Francis in Buenos Aires does not exhaust the domain of Eucharistic miracles.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, as noted above, there are literally thousands of miracles associated with charismatic healing services (in the name of Jesus) that have been catalogued and reported.<sup>55</sup>

The above miracles not only help to give credence to Christian faith, the risen Jesus, and His real presence in the Eucharist, but also ground the rich theology of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints that constitute the mystical body and the living tradition of the Catholic Church. It seems strange to me that some Christian denominations think that God would not want to share His glory and His Son's glorification with all of us – and allow our little unique sparks of glorified goodness and love to constitute His Son's mystical body. After all, all Christians acknowledge that God is unconditional love, and as such, He cannot possibly want to hoard His glory for Himself. His nature is to give it away, to share it, to create community, and to allow His infinite richness to be expressed like countless little finite expressions that come together in His providential weave like a gigantic tapestry.

The Christian view of God shouts out that He would not only share His glory, but delight in its being freely appropriated and magnified again with everyone in the mystical body. Hence, devotion and prayers to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints is perfectly consistent with His infinitely good and loving nature – and it enriches our experience of His goodness, glory, and love. Since we are finite in intellection and intuition, we cannot appropriate God's infinite glory, goodness, and love in a single intuitive moment. All we can do is appreciate finite manifestations of that glory in His Incarnate Son, in the goodness and wisdom of scripture, in the manifestations of the Blessed Virgin Mary who has become our Mother, and in the lives of the saints, who though imperfect reflect in so many extraordinary ways, God's glory, love, and goodness in their lives.

This fills our contemplative experience with great richness, for it breaks the Divine Light into a multifaceted spectrum, enabling us to appreciate evermore deeply not only the infinite goodness and love of God, but also His glory and beauty. Gerard Manley Hopkins saw His glory and beauty in nature in his poems “God's Grandeur” and “The Wind Hover,” but he also saw God's beauty manifest in the goodness and love of the saints in his poem “Kingfishers.” Beginning with God's glory, beauty, and richness manifest in nature, he concludes with his recognition of a higher beauty manifest in justice and love:

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<sup>54</sup> For example, one has been recently reported in Poland. See Ibid. See Mieczyslaw Piotrowski 2010 “Eucharistic Miracle in Buenos Aires” in *Love One Another!*

<sup>55</sup> There are multiple sites that publish non-validated accounts of miracles by the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus, such as <http://www.christian-faith.com/true-stories-testimonies-of-jesus-christ/>; and <http://www.apologeticspress.org/AboutAP.aspx> and <http://www.godisreal.today/modern-day-miracles/>. There are also many good books about contemporary miracles done through the Holy Spirit and the name of Jesus – such as, Craig Keener 2011 *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (2 Volume Set); (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic). See also Jeff Doles 2008 *Miracles and Manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the History of the Church* (Seffner, FL: Walking Barefoot Ministries).

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;  
 As tumbled over rim in roundy wells  
 Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's  
 Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;  
 Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:  
 deals out that being indoors each one dwells;  
 Selves — goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,  
 Crying *What I dó is me: for that I came.*  
 I say móre: the just man justices;  
 Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;  
 Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is —  
 Christ — for Christ plays in ten thousand places,  
 Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his  
 To the Father through the features of men's faces.

What Hopkins understood is that Christ's glory is expressed not only in His goodness, love, and truth, but also in the beauty of His person. Beauty awakens us, takes hold of us, and moves us deeply within our being filling us with a sense of appreciation, awe, resonance, harmony, and fulfillment. It moves us at once to great excitement and great calm as if it is filling our deepest interior needs with a completion or fulfillment beyond our capacity to produce. Beauty takes hold of us – we do not take hold of it, and when the highest beauties of the divine person, love, goodness, and truth take hold of us, they can move us not only to feelings of ecstasy over joy, but also to an awareness of holiness, mystery, and communion with God. In the first volume of his trilogy *Glory*, Hans Urs von Balthasar expresses it this way:

Before the beautiful—no, not really *before* but *within* the beautiful—the whole person quivers. He not only 'finds' the beautiful moving; rather, he experiences himself as being moved and possessed by it.<sup>56</sup>

Von Balthasar's observation pertains to all beauty – from natural beauty to divine beauty – but when it applies to divine beauty, the feelings and consciousness awakened by it reaches a supernatural height. This insight helps to reveal why God would share His glory with the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints. It is not only because such sharing is consistent with His unrestricted goodness and love, but because it is part of His plan to awaken our sense of appreciation, awe, wonder, sacredness, and joy revealed in the beauty of the goodness and love of His Son's Mother and the saints. As we contemplate the life of the Virgin Mary and include her in our prayers – and further contemplate the lives of the saints, in their goodness, holiness and love, we put a prism in front of the light of God's unrestricted glory making it a myriad of interwoven colors and shapes – a veritable symphony of holiness and love. The above miracles not only serve to validate this view of the God of Jesus Christ, but also reveal the same beauty of goodness and love that they validate. Miracles – scientifically and naturally inexplicable events occurring through apparitions and prayer -- are not only real, they validate the truth of God's presence, goodness, and love – and above all, they reveal His beauty, glory, mystery, holiness, and majesty

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<sup>56</sup> Edward T. Oakes and David Moss, eds. 2004, *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p 270.



– they fill us with wonder, awe, fascination, and delight – the very thing lacking in a purely mundane materialistic view of reality. If we are to enjoy their richness to the full, we will also want to practice devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary (through the rosary) and allow ourselves to be moved by lives of the saints who reflect the glory and grandeur of God