



Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age

Ruth Harris

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A magisterial history of the world's greatest Catholic healing shrine: an examination of its incredible flowering, and how it shaped the Church and the faith of millions

In 1858, near the tiny French town of Lourdes in the foothills of the Pyrenees, a young peasant girl, Bernadette Soubirous witnessed the Virgin Mary in a grotto. Since then, millions of pilgrims from all over the world have gone there every year to walk in a procession to a shrine whose waters have made it a synonym for healing.

Oxford historian Ruth Harris traces the history of this mass phenomenon, placing Lourdes at the center of nineteenth-century debates on religion, science, and medicine--debates being revisited today. She examines the pivotal role of women and children as its visionaries, devotees and advocates address issues of mysticism and non-orthodox faith that speak to our own era of spirituality. Above all she explores how, at a moment in French history when the Church was under attack, this place of pilgrimage improbably prospered. She offers a serious challenge to the view that the spirit of modern Europe has been exclusively secular and progressive. *Lourdes* is a major work and sure to become an important history of the greatest of healing shrines.

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