

Two Attitudes: Emile Zola and Alexis Carrel

Since the Marian apparitions took place in Lourdes, we have witnessed many attempts to convince the general public that Bernadette's apparitions were mere figments of her imagination, and that Lourdes is nothing more than the site of a fanatical cult, in which the Catholic clergy peddles its predictable brands of illusion and deceit.



Alexis Carrel

In their bid to ridicule and discredit the apparitions at Lourdes, modern dogmatic atheists, with their insistence on man's absolute autonomy, resorted to the most unscrupulous means, including forgery of documents and distortion of facts. Ironically, these attacks on the apparitions contributed to Lourdes becoming the only religious shrine with its own special Medical Bureau, made up of the world's most renowned doctors. Le Bureau medical de N.D. de Lourdes is a scientific agency dedicated to the study of the inexplicable, miraculous healings taking place at Lourdes. The innumerable spiritual and physical cures occurring there are God's unique way of speaking to modern man.

Like the Gospel miracles, they are visible signs of God's love. God manifests His love in this supernatural way, in order to rouse us from our spiritual lethargy, to bring us to faith, and to prompt us to live the Gospel.

It is not enough to witness a miracle to believe. People of ill will, who **"by their wickedness suppress the truth"** (Rom. 1: 18), will explain away miraculous signs in perverse ways. A sad example of this was the famous French author and positivist, Emile Zola. On August 20, 1892, Zola arrived at Lourdes aboard a train, which also carried a number of sick people. Among these were two women, Marie Lebranche and Marie Lemarchand, who suffered from terminal tuberculosis. As a last resort, they had come to Lourdes, seeking a cure. **Zola, on the other hand, had come with the express purpose of gathering evidence in order to expose the "deceit" practiced by the Catholic clergy at Lourdes. There he actually witnessed the miraculous cure of both women.**



Emile Zola

The writer's reaction to this miracle was inexplicable and shocking by any standard. It staggers belief how a man of such intellectual stature, could, in his book *Lourdes*, not only deny the miraculous cure of both women, but also invent the absurd lie that one of them had actu-

ally died! In point of fact, the woman, who Zola claimed had died, was very much alive and well. Seeking to justify his lies, he paid her a personal visit in Paris. He tried to persuade her to move to Belgium, his purpose being to rid himself of an unwanted witness and to continue spreading a world-view that had no place for God or miracles. "There are no such things as miracles!" ("Le miracle, ça n'existe pas!") – he claimed. Despite repeated public exposure of the falsehoods contained in his book, he never replied to his critics. Only before his death did Emile Zola finally accept the grace of faith, and requested the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist.

In 1895, an article called "The Fruit of Zola's Lies" appeared in *Civita Catholica*. Its author comments on the paradoxical result of Zola's attitude. Like Satan's actions, his lies had the inadvertent effect of causing people to worship God all the more. Freemasonry's exploitation of Zola's actions proved counteractive. It actually led to an increase in the veneration of the Virgin Mary at Lourdes.

After the publication of Zola's infamous book, more and more journalists and correspondents visited the shrine, many of them with a cynical and mocking attitude similar to that of Zola. Frequently, however, on arriving at Lourdes, they learned the true facts and became convinced that the miracles were in fact real. Sometimes the miracles occurred before their very eyes. They returned home, filled with an awareness of the greatness and mystery of God's love. **One such man was Professor Alexis Carrel, a world-famous authority in medicine. Later, he was to receive the Nobel Prize for his contribution to science.** In 1903, he came to Lourdes, accompanied by his patient, Marie Ferrand, who was dying of tubercular peritonitis. He was then a dogmatic atheist. During a benediction of the Blessed Sacrament at the Grotto of the Virgin Mary, the woman was miraculously cured before Carrel's eyes. This was to become the pivotal event of his

life. He understood that God lay beyond scientific ken and comprehension, and that the only ways of reaching Him were through prayer, living the Gospel, and striking out in the darkness in bold faith. **“Struggling to pass through the darkness of the mind – he observed – we can reach Him through desire and love. Only then is it possible to experience God’s love. The experience of God’s love is akin to the experience of artists and lovers”.**

After his conversion, Carrel’s only joy was boundless service to God through prayer and fulfilling His will. The university community at Lyons could not accept such a radical change in their colleague. His supervisors threatened to dismiss him. Carrel, however, remained unshaken in his belief. His faith was his most precious treasure. Resigning his university position, he moved to Canada, and then later to New York City. There, at the Rockefeller Institute, he began a brilliant new scientific career. In 1912 he received the Nobel Prize.

Emile Zola witnessed a miracle but chose not believe in it. Alexis Carrel understood that miracles are a call from God. In an act of devout faith, he opened himself to the mystery of God’s love. Thus, miracles are signs only to people of good will. Those who lack openness to the Truth will never accept and understand it. It is against such people that God warns: *“Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (...) Claiming to be wise, they became fools”.* That is why: *“the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men, who by their wickedness suppress the truth”.* (Rom. 1:20, 22, 18)

Thus, we can better understand the words of Holy Scripture: *“Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?... God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God”* (1 Cor. 1:20, 27-29).

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“Ever since God created the world, his invisible qualities, both his eternal power and his divine nature, have been clearly seen; they are perceived in the things that God has made. So those people have no excuse at all;” Who? “The people whose evil ways prevent the truth from being known”.

(Rom 1:20, 18b)

