

Healing in Lourdes: Qualitative Research with Pilgrims and Their Carers

Authors : Emmylou Rahtz, Sarah Goldingay, Sara Warber, Ann Arbor, Paul Dieppe

Abstract : Introduction: Lourdes is a Catholic, Marian healing venue in South West France. Many miraculous cures have been attributed to visits there. In addition, many visitors seem to experience improvements in health and wellbeing, in the absence of a cure of disease. We wanted to investigate that phenomenon. Methods: We spent 10 days in Lourdes in 2017, carrying out ethnographic research, talking to many visitors, and carrying out formal, recorded interviews with several pilgrims, doctors, nurses, helpers, and priests. Results: Profound experiences and improvements in health and wellbeing were commonly reported. A number of 'noetic' experiences were also described. The paper will illustrate these phenomena. In addition, many participants in the research talked about why being in Lourdes was so beneficial to them. The community spirit, ethos of prayer, flow, synchronicity, and ability to find new meaning for life's ills were cited as likely reasons. Conclusions: We believe that the 'real miracle' of Lourdes is the fact that of the many hundreds of thousands of people who go there each year, many find great benefit in health and wellbeing. It is likely that this is due to the ethos of the place, the community spirit, non-judgmental approach and loving acceptance of all aspects of humanity. Acknowledgments: We thank the BIAL foundation for generous funding of this research, and Dr. Alessandro de Franciscis and his team for facilitating our work, as well as all those who participated.

Keywords : healing, miracles, noetic experiences, wellbeing

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