

Domesticating the Landscape: Water and the Development of a Pilgrimage Shrine

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Nature and Place Pilgrimage

The subjugation of nature by human institutions (religious and secular) to create an ordered, predictable landscape has a long history. Machu Pichu, Stonehenge, Rome, Jerusalem, Mecca and Varanasi are just some of the most famous sacred places where landscapes reveal how the local habitat has been domesticated in the pursuit of institutional interests (political and economic as well as religious). However, in the Christian tradition ‘place pilgrimage’ – travel to and from a sacred place and participation in rituals there – is not the only form of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage could also involve the retreat from human society to the wilderness, i.e. deserts, forests or mountains, or an internal journey towards God (Dyas 2004: 6). While place pilgrimage tended to be a group activity, the two other forms were predominantly individual in character.

While these modes of pilgrimage were differentiated discursively, in practice they could be linked or morph into one another. Hence, the places where hermits or monks settled frequently attracted devotees and they lost their isolated character – place pilgrimage triumphed over this attempt by individuals to escape from society. Since pilgrimage has long been entwined with tourism we see the same process at work in the development of tourist destinations. Places ‘off the beaten track’ attract those seeking to escape their everyday routines but over time these destinations are ‘developed’ and the wilderness becomes domesticated, losing its image as a ‘paradise’ for the pioneers.

Christian pilgrimage encouraged the domestication of the wilderness. Although individual hermits might seek to escape society, the Roman Catholic Church sought to bring

them together into communities and male and female monasteries emerged from the third century CE onwards where members observed a common rule validated by Rome. (The emergence of monasticism in Western Christianity was informed by the monastic movement in the Eastern (Orthodox) Church). The life of Saint Anthony of the Desert (c. 251 – 356 CE) provides a clear example. He ‘initially lived as a hermit:

‘in the desert lands along the Nile’ (Nystrom, 74), but later ‘[h]e came out of his solitude to organize his disciples into a community of hermits living under a rule, though with much less common life than the later religious orders had’ (Livingstone, 29). <https://www.ancient.eu/article/930/the-monastic-movement-origins--purposes/>

Although Jerusalem, Rome and Compostela developed as the primary destinations in the West, a wide array of pilgrimage places emerged and their expansion, combined with the growing network of routes, played an important role in the political and economic life of western and central Europe. During the 16th and 17th centuries pilgrimage became embroiled in the ‘counter-reformation’ strategy employed by Catholic religious and political leaders against Protestant influences. The 19th century saw another wave of Catholic pilgrimage categorised by Victor Turner as ‘modern’ in the sense that the cults, associated with visions of divine figures such as Mary, the mother of Jesus (Our Lady), were promoted by the Vatican in its struggle with secular modernists (Turner and Turner 1978).

Phenomenological and relational approaches towards pilgrimage and landscape

The study of contemporary pilgrimage has expanded rapidly since the 1970s. It has focussed predominantly on a phenomenological approach where the exploration of the meanings and motivations of pilgrims is paramount (see Turner and Turner 1978, Morinis 1985, Eade and Sallnow 1991, Coleman 2000, 2002, Badone 2007, Reader 2007, Lochtefeld 2010, Albera

and Eade 2015, 2017). At the same time some studies have drawn on the ‘material turn’ which has directed attention towards ‘lived religion’ and people’s relationship with the materiality of sacred places (see McDannell 1993 Hall 1997, Tweed 2006, Vasquez 2010, Morgan 2010, Meyer 2012, Hazard 2013, Jansen and Notermans 2016). Robert Orsi’s deeply engaged and illuminating studies of Roman Catholicism in the USA (1985/2010, 2013), for example, show the messy, contested and mobile ways where ‘lived religion’ is expressed through ‘embodied practice and imagination’ (2010: xxxix). He looks away from the construction of meaning towards understanding how people ‘exist and move through their built and found environments’ where ‘the material world is not inert background to cult practice’ but ‘its essential medium’ (2010: xxxix). In terms of landscape the ‘material turn’ has encouraged researchers to explore the ways in which people engage with space through their bodily, kinetic experience (see Maddrell 2011).

People’s sensual engagement with the landscape has also been explored in the context of shrines, which have acquired a reputation as centres of healing. Hence, one of the early explorations of ‘therapeutic landscapes’ by Wilbert Gesler focussed on Lourdes as a healing shrine (Gesler 1992, 1996). Alana Harris has drawn on his work in her recent study of Lourdes ‘as a site for the exploration and negotiation of embodied, communal and holistic aspirations’. She seeks to move away from the focus on ‘the sick, contested medico-miraculous narratives and cures’ (2013), which informed two earlier analyses by Andrea Dahlberg and myself (1991) to explore the growing influence of beliefs and practices concerning ‘well being’, holistic medicine and spirituality. Alana Harris detects the development of ‘a therapeutic spirituality’ at Lourdes ‘augmented by newer forms of “religious thermalism”’ and informed by ‘contemporary spirituality (within and outside religious affiliation)’ of beliefs and practices that prioritise ‘self-realisation, connectivity and embodied well-being’ (2013 ; see also Goldingay, Dieppe and Farias 2014).

The study of landscape in the context of pilgrimage needs to be sensitive to different approaches, therefore, and the following case study will be informed by both the phenomenological and relational approaches. I will draw on my own experience of working as a helper at Lourdes to illustrate the ways in which landscape was domesticated, represented and experienced through water. I first visited in 1967 during my second year at Oxford University and I joined the Oxford Catholic Chaplaincy pilgrimage in 1968 and went each year with the group until 1992. I returned to Lourdes in 2014 when I joined what had become the Oxford and Cambridge Chaplaincy pilgrimage. Like other members of the group I enrolled as a member of the Hospitality of Our Lady of Lourdes, which organises the helpers at the key points of the shrine, such as the grotto, baths and esplanade, as well as at the railway station and airport. Although I have helped at all these sectors, the baths left the deepest impression and when I returned after a twenty one year break I decided to focus on working there in 2014 and 2015.

Lourdes: domesticating the local landscape

In 1858 a young shepherdess, Bernadette Soubirous, experienced a number of visions at a grotto outside the town and the key messages from these séances were the apparition's self-identification as the Immaculate Conception, i.e. the mother of Jesus or 'Our Lady' in popular parlance, her exhortations that people should come and drink the spring water and bathe in it, while the clergy should build a chapel and perform ceremonies.

The message concerning the Immaculate Conception was welcomed by those supporting the Vatican's declaration in 1854 that belief in Mary's freedom from original sin was a dogmatic article of faithⁱ. However, the shrine's rapidly development was largely due to reports of miraculous healing, associated with the spring, and the highly public disputes which ensued over the relationship between science, medicine and religion (see Harris 1999,

Kaufman 2005). A bustling pilgrimage town grew between the sanctuary and the old town, nestling around the castle which stood proudly on its hilly promontory facing southwards to the Pyrenees mountains and the border with Spain. Hotels, restaurants, cafés and shops made Lourdes one of France's most important centres for religious and non-religious pursuits. This development was facilitated initially by the national railway network, and then by an improving road network and a local airport.

The location of the visions was highly significant since the grotto was known locally as a dangerous place where evil spirits could infect humans. When Bernadette confided to the parish priest, Fr Peyremale, her initial vision, his scepticism was fuelled partly by the locality's notoriety and the Church moved quickly to domesticate the grotto and its environs once Bernadette's visions were formally accepted. Between 1858 and 1890 the local landscape changed radically as a rustic, marginal place with a reputation for danger was built up for the performance of highly scripted rituals. The inner sanctum of the grotto was defended from the pilgrim quest for mementoes by high gates (see Kaufman 2005:), the spring was channelled into a small hut and then more imposing stone built baths to one side of the grotto where 'sick' pilgrims (*malades*) were ritually bathed, taps were made available near the baths for 'ordinary' pilgrims, basilicas and chapels were built on the cliff overlooking and visually dominating the grotto, and a large esplanade and avenue was created for the mass blessings of the sick in the afternoon and the nightly torchlight procession. On the wooded hill nearby an imposing Stations of the Cross was built, around which pilgrimage groups solemnly processed.

The organisation of the national pilgrimage in 1874 so the introduction of a ritual structure which did not fundamentally change until after the Second World War:

A fresh set of practices – in which men carried the sick around the shrine, female volunteers bathed them in the pools, doctors examined the cured, and masses of assembled pilgrims participated in spectacular processions – came to define the spiritual life of the shrine. (Kaufman 2005: 107)

These rituals expressed a modern, religiosity which was ‘directed toward and shaped by the idioms of a newly emerging mass culture’, bound up with spectacle and visuality (Ibid: 108).

The domestication of the grotto area went hand in hand with the rapid expansion of the pilgrimage town. Here modern consumerism was vividly expressed through the proliferation of cafes, restaurants, hotels and shops, while technological innovation and the visual were amply demonstrated by the popularity of postcards celebrating the local landscape (views of the old town and pilgrimage town, the grotto, basilicas and nearby mountains) as well as events or people representing the shrine such as the ceremonies, statues, the *malades* and Bernadette herself.

In a mountainous area where streams were long associated with miraculous healing and spas – another expression of modern consumerism – were sprouting up, the sanctuary’s religious leaders ‘sought to eradicate or at least to domesticate the grassroots devotions that emerged at shrines’ (Ibid: 21). They sought to control water and the spring, specifically, so that Lourdes could develop as a conventional religious shrine, rather than a spa or a place for ‘superstitious’, magical practices. Visitors were encouraged to focus on the Church’s teachings concerning Mary. Hence, the disclosure during Bernadette’s séances that the apparition described herself as the Immaculate Conception gave added strength to those supporting the Vatican’s declaration in 1854 that belief in Mary’s freedom from original sin was a dogmatic article of faith. Moves to domesticate the grotto and destroy its reputation as a dangerous place, therefore, also involved the installing of a statue of Our Lady in a niche

overlooking the cave with *Que Soy Era Immaculada Concepciou* (I am the Immaculate Conception) carved on its base. Although the religious leaders welcomed the claims to miraculous cures, it moved quickly to establish their ‘authenticity’ through a well-publicised engagement with medical professionals and secular critics such as the French novelist, Emile Zola (see Harris, Kaufman). Furthermore, the focus on the spring and the grotto was modified by the introduction of the daily ‘blessing of the sick’ ceremony, which used the new esplanade and avenue in front of the basilicas. Here claims to miraculous healing were also made.

The expanding shrine and the changing landscape

The local landscape did not change significantly between the late nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth century. By the 1890s the development of the sanctuary’s physical and ritual structure was complete, while the pilgrimage town catered for an annual influx of visitors which fluctuated between 250,000 and 500,000 before the Second World War with exceptional increases on only two anniversaries – 1,000,000 in 1883, the 25th year after the apparitions and 1,500,000 in 1935 which celebrated Bernadette’s elevation to sainthood.

After the Second World War the number of visitors dramatically increased and so did building within the sanctuary and the pilgrim town. In 1948 1,500,000 arrivals were recorded and this rose to 5,883,595 in 2013, when the most recent official estimate was published. Again there were two massive spikes – in 1958, the centenary of the apparitions, when numbers jumped from 1,740,000 the previous year to almost 5,000,000, and 2008, which marked the visit of Pope John Paul 11, when arrivals jumped from 6,250,000 the previous year to a record of over 9,000,000. (There has been an overall decline since then leading Lauren Moore to question whether Lourdes has reached the end of the cycle discussed by the Turners 1978).

This massive increase in visitors put intense pressure on the pilgrimage town. The only relatively level ground was the small area surrounding the River Gave and this contained the highest concentration of facilities and accommodation including the first hospital for 'sick' pilgrims, which opened in 1874. The river became increasingly contained with the building of a wall along its flanks as well as a weir. The sanctuary was similarly built up with the construction of a massive underground basilica and new baths during the 1950s and the introduction of accommodation for ritual events on the meadow across the river culminating in the 1990s with a massive concrete complex which included a chapel, conference centre and hospital. The walls protecting this increasingly built-up area from the Gave had made the river much deeper and had speeded its flow; Bernadette would not have been able to take her original route from the meadow to the grotto. As Lourdes physically changed so did its environs. The local airport, for example, underwent a similar expansion with the growth of pilgrimage charters in the summer and skiing parties during the winter, while the motorway arrived nearby during the 1990s to facilitate the ever expanding flow of cars, camper vans and coaches.

It was not easy to ignore the town's location within the wider landscape and the influence of the weather. Lourdes' proximity to the Pyrenees meant that the weather was very unpredictable. During late July when I worked at the shrine sunny weather could rapidly give way to cold, overcast days, sudden storms and torrential rain. During the 20th century flooding remained a rare event – only in 1937 did the river Gave break through the boundaries imposed around the grotto. However, a deluge in October 2012 followed by another in June the next year reminded everyone of nature's dangerous power as the Gave burst its banks along the pilgrimage town and the sanctuary. The second flood had the greater impact since it occurred during the main pilgrimage season and hotels, which were

recovering from the October 2012 inundation, were hit once more while the grotto area was put out of action again and the new hospital on the right bank was also affected.

Lourdes provides a vivid illustration of the ways in which traditional Christian ‘place pilgrimage’ could contribute to a reordering of the physical environment and urban ‘development’. While this reordering sought to eliminate ‘wild’ spaces beyond human society, thereby bringing them under human control, the increasing constriction of nature – in this case, a lively river close to the mountains – made the risk of nature ‘biting back’ all the more likely and its impact even more costly. (In the area around Lourdes the cost was not only financial since two people lost their lives during the 2013 disaster). The shrine’s travails reflected a more global threat associated with the impact of human activities on the physical landscape such as increased carbon emissions, deforestation and the changing management of water courses.

Engaging with the landscape through water

The spring attracted particular attention with its rapidly developing national and international reputation as healing, ‘holy water’. The authorities quickly moved to control its flow by initiating a system of subterranean engineering works that enabled the spring water to be collected into a large reservoir behind the cliff. The water was then piped to the baths and the taps near the grotto where the spring has also been made visible through a cleft in the rock, where it is ‘protected’ by an illuminated transparent cover. Visitors can process past it as they walk around the inside of the grotto behind an altar and some leave ex votos in the form of flowers beside the cover. Some also insert petitions in the form of notes into crevices in the grotto wall and even leave them surreptitiously under the cover of the grotto altar (see Jansen and Notermans 2016). Although pilgrims cannot access the spring directly at the grotto, water seeping down the cliff face also attracted pilgrims because of its close association with the

sacred site. As Tomlinson (2015) observed, [o]ccasionally, a drop of water will trickle down and, the power of water drawing the pilgrim to it, this will immediately cause hands to reach out' (2015:28-29).

Direct contact with the spring water is made possible through the nearby taps and this can be a busy place during the height of the pilgrimage season as visitors pour the water into a variety of receptacles for the journey back home. Some wash their face in the water, wipe it over their neck and arms, for example, or cup it into their hands and share it with their companions (personal observation). Small plastic bottles are now made available in two boxes for one euro and these bear various representations of the shrine on the front below a golden crown screw top.

Visitors can also gain direct contact with ' Lourdes water ' by entering the baths. The relocation of the baths to its new premises on the other side of the grotto enabled larger numbers to take a bath. However, despite this improved capacity, only a small minority of visitors actually come to the baths). The baths are divided into male and female sections where bathers queue outside on benches before being invited inside, where they sit on a long bench and then enter inside one of the curtained-off cubicles. Each cubicle is divided into a front section where the bathers undress and the back section where the bath takes centre stage. The first cubicle is allocated for children (and sometimes bishops!), the second and third cubicles cater for those in wheelchairs and stretchers, while the remaining five baths are for able bodied bathers.

The process of male bathing has remained fundamentally unchanged since I started to work as a helper but there have been some significant changes in approach and particular details. Between the 1960s and 1980s the procedure was highly regimented. The Hospitality volunteers were very much in charge. Teams were allocated to each cubicle and a leader

nominated by the head of the baths (*chef de piscines*). The leader ensured that the process of bathing ran smoothly with two volunteers helping bathers to undress, then lining them up before handing them over to another volunteer to one side of the bath, who wrapped a damp towel round the waist after the bather had put his pants on a rail attached to the wall on either side of the bath itself. Two more helpers on other side of the bath then guided the bather down the steps into the bath and up to the end where he read a set formula of prayers from large plastic cards in various European languages. He was then asked by the helpers to cross their arms so that they could hold him securely as they lowered him backwards into the water where he was totally immersed. He was then helped to stand and given a bronze statuette of Our Lady to kiss after saying a short prayer; he then turned round and walked back out of the bath to reclaim his pants while the helper retrieved the wet towel.

When I returned in 2014 the process had been changed to allow for greater individual choice and privacy. Previously, visitors could see how the process of bathing operated since the curtains on either side of the central bath were only used when the towels were put on and retrieved. Now the curtains are kept closed so that bathing can be a more private event and everyone was asked to sit down once they had stripped down to their pants so the line-up with its conveyor belt associations has been eliminated. The shock of entering the very cold water was minimised to some extent by inviting each person to pray before going down the steps and care was taken to keep the bather's head out of the water so total immersion was dispensed with unless asked for. A jug filled with the bath water was kept ready in case the bather wanted water on his head and a helper poured it carefully over his hand held above the bather's head so that the shock of the cold water was minimised. A cup was at hand in case anyone wanted to drink the water which was again dispensed fresh from a beaker. The statuette of Our Lady was available but again the bather had to ask for it, while the prayer cards had been dispensed with.

These modifications in practice reflected changes in religious discourse since the early 1990s when I stopped going to Lourdes. At the same time there was the same emphasis on the symbolic meaning of water and the rejection of any belief in its magical properties. Hence, the June 2017 Hospitality Newsletter reminded helpers the issue of the spring water and bathing was raised yet again. 'We must remember that the water from this spring is a sign, not an object of fetish. It is also a sign of another water: that of Baptism'. Although this statement expressed the Church's denial of the spring's agency, the great care taken to soften the shock of bathing in the intensely cold water emphasised the danger of coming into contact with the spring. The danger came not just from the short time spent in the bath but also from the shock of having a wet towel tied around one's waist and even the possibility of slipping on the wet floor.

Bathing in the spring water – personal reflections

A prime feature of pilgrimage across faiths and time has been the official emphasis on its penitential dimension. Pilgrims have long been encouraged to see their journey and stay at the shrine as a sacrifice for others. As travel to Lourdes has become quicker and easier members of my pilgrimage group have debates whether the pilgrimage was becoming 'too easy'. During the week at Lourdes this debate focused on how demanding the work was. It was generally agreed that all the jobs required endurance, whether it be the boredom of standing for long periods 'on guard', the hours waiting at the airport for delayed planes, the preparing of meals in the hospitals, or the intense physical experience of working inside the baths. Since Lourdes, like other pilgrimages, also involved the ludic there were many opportunities for relaxation after work and some of us joked that late nights and heavy drinking added to the penitential experience!! The party atmosphere in the evenings was fuelled by the large numbers of young volunteers 'off the leash' and veterans like me had the opportunity to meet for a chat over a drink with friends from the other British pilgrimages

which regularly arrived in late July

I have always been fascinated by the intellectual and emotional challenge posed by Lourdes, particularly the apparitions and claims to miraculous healing. I have always believed in the existence of a non-material world and my anthropological career has helped me appreciate how such a belief has been expressed by different religious and spiritual traditions across time and space. Although I was brought up within Protestant traditions and then converted to Roman Catholicism during my twenties, I have become increasingly interested in non-Christian faiths. Furthermore, my involvement in the pilgrimage studies has opened my eyes to the complexity of 'lived religion' and its materiality.

During both periods of working at Lourdes in late July I have helped at different areas, such as the station and airport but I have found the baths the most challenging and intense experience so have chosen to volunteer to work there many times. While the baths provide the most intense relationship with 'Lourdes water', only a small minority of visitors actually take a bath. Among those who do arrive many are not sure what to expect and how to behave once inside the baths. During my first period of working at Lourdes, bathers could observe the entire process of bathing but when I returned the closing of the curtain meant that those waiting could only catch a glimpse of what lay behind the curtain when it was briefly opened to let the bather return to his chair. They could also listen to the sounds of the prayers, the splashing in the water and the occasional gasp as the cold, damp towel was put around the bather's midriff.

The great care taken by the helpers in guiding each visitor through the process shows a keen sense of the risks involved with the water, both inside and outside the bath itself. There is the involuntary frisson when the wet towel as it is put round the waist, the shock on entering the bath and the immersion, the danger of slipping and falling over when retrieving pants and returning to the chair. There is also the fear of being lowered backwards into the

water despite being held securely by the helpers. The volunteers try to help by instructing the bather to sit down but this may be misunderstood, particularly if bather and volunteers do not speak the same language. Sometimes the bather holds on to the sides of the bath and fails to get immersed. Helpers have to be careful not to let the bather slip or launch himself backwards and hit the bottom step.

A balance had to be struck, therefore, between helping the bather through the process but also allowing them some freedom of expression. With the increasing diversity in visitors' religious involvement the head of the bath (*chef des piscines*) reminded all the volunteers at the beginning of each session to be sensitive to the bather's individual wishes and explained changes which had taken place in bathing practice. He periodically checked inside each bath to see what was happening and might remind the helpers about 'correct' procedure. Yet although the bathing process was less mechanical and uniform, the general structure remained the same. Indeed, since bathers usually were coming for the first time and could no longer watch how the bathing process operated, there were moments of ambiguity and confusion.

These moments were particularly evident when someone who identified himself as not a Catholic entered the bath. For example, when I began working in the baths again in 2014 members of a French Tamil pilgrimage group arrived. Since some identified themselves as non-Catholics, there was a certain confusion among the helpers when the bather stood at the top of the steps before entering the bath. Because the team rotated jobs during the session I took over the role of greeting some of the Tamil bathers and tried to avoid possible confusion by inviting them in French to pray and joined my hands in prayer to make the point. Clearly, I was imposing my own order on the process but the bathers appeared grateful for the guidance.

When the bather entered the bath there was again the possibility of confusion about

what to do and I encouraged the bather to ‘do his own thing’. This often involved the Tamil bather sitting or kneeling in the bath and splashing himself all over with the water – a striking contrast to the more restricted immersion performed with Catholic pilgrims. Ending the ritual could also be a moment of confusion and ambiguity. Unless the bather had something else in mind, such as a final prayer or a request to kiss the statue of Our Lady, I allowed for a short pause and then helped the bather to return up the stairs to retrieve his pants.

Although those visiting Lourdes were reminded in various ways about the importance of penance I want to discuss here the physical sensation of bathing and the sense of the water’s agency drawing on both my own experience. At the end of each session like many other members of the team I took the opportunity to bathe. After working hard the tying of the damp towel around the midriff comes as a shock, even if it is anticipated. Although I then say a private prayer it is hard to concentrate and easy to get distracted by the physical sensation of the cold wetness seeping into the body. Walking down to the end of the bath deepens this sensation and then comes a challenge – do I bathe myself or trust my colleagues to lower me back into the water without slipping?

The bath leaves its traces afterwards since everyone is expected to put their clothes back on without using any towel. Many bathers comment on how quickly they dry off, especially when the weather is hot and dry, but on rainy days it is easy to feel the bath’s continuing presence in damp shirts and trousers. Many also mention how refreshed they feel and my own experience suggests that this is not only the physical effect of the water but also the pleasure at completing the process.

Risk, Trust and the Body

The dangers inherent in bathing also seemed to reflect secular considerations. Helpers were reminded of their responsibilities to the bathers – their ‘duty of care’ informed by health and safety legislation and the possibility that any accident might result in litigation. The

authorities' sensitivity also reflected the wider scandals concerning sexual abuse which had rocked the Church since the 1990s. The Hospitality's declaration of a general Code of Conduct in January 2018 vividly reflected this wider context:

In the current context in which the Church carries out its ministry of service and compassion, we must all increase our awareness. The standards set by the Sanctuary and the Hospitalité of Our Lady of Lourdes meet these requirements: first of all to protect children and vulnerable people. At the same time, they also protect the clergy, employees and volunteers as well as the institution.

There were many occasions where helpers were in close physical contact with others so while the following instruction applied to all areas of the sanctuary, it was particularly significant for those working in the baths as the final item in the list below indicated:

Examples of physical contact to be avoided:

- *Signs of affection, usual under other circumstances, are not acceptable inside the Sanctuary. In this way, it is forbidden to kiss anyone, particularly a child or a vulnerable person, or to force him or her to kiss you.*
- Avoid gestures of consolation that might be common elsewhere as customs of other countries, *inter alia*:
 - ✓ *hug someone, even if the person is very well known to you*
 - ✓ *carry or touch a child or vulnerable person, even in the context of games*
 - ✓ *“tickle” anyone*
- It is forbidden to touch someone in a place normally covered by a swimsuit.
- It is forbidden to have someone on your lap (except infants and very young children).
- Exemplary caution must be exercised in the Sanctuary Piscines (Baths).

Although those coming to the baths expressed a high degree of trust in our role as helpers, I was reminded of some people's suspicions concerning our motives in an admittedly isolated instance. I was standing 'on guard' in the empty changing area of the bath during a distinct lull in proceedings. A middle aged Frenchman entered and brusquely rejected the offer of assistance made by the head of the bath, who retreated behind the curtain. The bather's attitude intrigued me and it was hard not to look at him since we were the only two people now in the changing area. After he had bathed and was putting his clothes back on he summoned me and told me that my gaze had made him uncomfortable. I returned to my post duly chastened. After a brief moment of reflection I thought that I go back to him to explain my duty of care. However, to my surprise he explained that he was concerned about the stories of pederasty.

My immediate reaction was to be shocked by the insinuation that I might have been looking at him 'inappropriately' but on reflection I began to see how the scandals around clerical abuse within the Church had influenced people's attitudes towards those offering to assist others. Since Lourdes played such an important role in the Church's global mission its religious and Hospitality leaders were determined to avoid all scandal. The 2018 Code of Conduct cited above was the Hospitality's response to the repeated claims concerning clerical abuse in Europe and the Americas.ⁱⁱ Significantly, these claims within the Church ran in parallel to public debates about sexual harassment and gender inequality more generally, e.g. the charges levied against Harvey Weinstein and other Hollywood male luminaries from late 2017 and the #MeToo movement. Indeed, the Code of Conduct showed how the religious and secular arenas were closely connected since it concluded with a section, 'French Law and Sexual Abuse', which cited articles 222-223 of the state penal code. All Hospitality members were required to sign up to the Code and were made fully aware of the legal implications in doing so.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the domestication of the landscape in the context of one of the Roman Catholic Church's most popular pilgrimage centre – Lourdes near the French border with Spain. The spring, uncovered during Bernadette's visions in 1858, became the focal point of both claims to miraculous healing and a highly organised system of bathing but water, more generally, played a key role in the domestication and sacralisation of the local landscape. As the grotto and its environs were purged of their association with dangerous spirits through a range of construction works that channeled the spring to specific locations, visitors could drink it and wash in it but they could also touch the wet cliff face inside the grotto and gaze at the river over the walls that sought to control its flow.

Yet, the expansion of the shrine led to a more mundane danger. The floods of 2013 and 2014 were vivid reminders of the vulnerability of building so close to a lively mountain river. Admittedly, the inundation was exceptional and the main areas of the shrine were quickly repaired but the financial impact on local businesses was dire. The vulnerability of this reorganized landscape was exposed and added to the unease caused by the decline in visitor numbers evident since the peak of 2008 (see Moore 2014).

The studies by Gesler (1992, 1996 2003), Harris (2010, 2013) and Goldingay, Dieppe and Farias (2014) have provided illuminating discussions of changing discourses and practices drawing on such concepts as therapeutic landscapes, holistic spirituality, religious thermalism and performance, while Jansen and Notermans (2016) have also shown the importance played by ex-votos in the local landscape. However, in the second part of this chapter I explored the role played by water in this domesticated landscape by drawing on my experience of working in the baths over many years. As a helper in the men's section of the baths built during the late 1950s, I had the opportunity to both observe and be intimately involved in the changes of official discourse and practice from the 1960.

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ⁱ Bernadette initially referred to the apparition in local dialect as 'Aquero', the Thing, but later told the priest about the self-identification. Carroll interprets the change as providing evidence that the apparition was prompted by an unconscious desire to gratify a parental figure (Carroll 1985: 56).

ⁱⁱ For a discussion of the issues raised by American scholars concerning the abuse crisis see, for example, Ronan (2008), Petro (2015) and Orsi (2017) .