

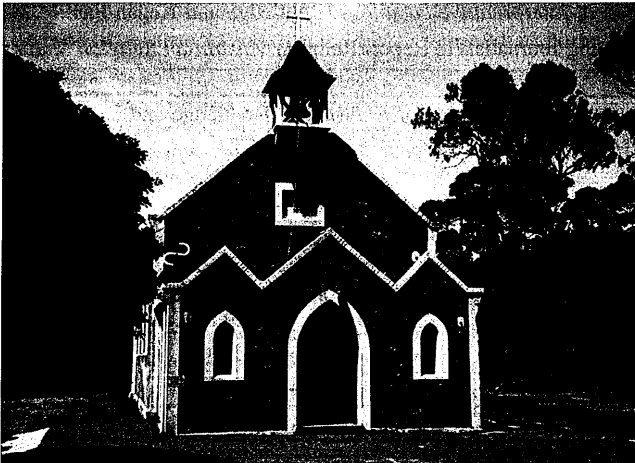
Miracle Image of Mary at Yankalilla, South Australia

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This paper discusses the emergence of a Marian image at a Church in South Australia. The image was first noticed in 1994 and is one of a number of images and apparitions of Mary that have appeared throughout the world, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹ Marian pilgrimage sites are extremely popular due to Mary's role as healer and intercessor and that she has appeared more recently in the new world demonstrates a need for a more local religious experience. The reasons for the image's appearance, its linkage to local history and whether it could be considered authentic are considered in this paper. Observation of the site reveals changes in its popularity, presentation as well as changes in the image itself. This site has a number of motifs that are common to Marian pilgrimage centres including healing miracles, curative powers of water, movement of the image and miraculous photographs. In addition, messages have been received from Mary regarding suffering in the world and are a common motif at Marian shrines and perhaps indicative of the concerns of the twentieth century.

An image of the Virgin Mary, holding the baby Jesus, has appeared in a small, Anglican Church (Christ Church) in August 1994 at Yankalilla in south east South Australia. It has appeared through plaster, on the right hand wall at the front of the church. This site is now known as *The Shrine of Our Lady of Yankalilla*. This image was first noticed by a new parishioner and, finding it strange other parishioners did



not refer to the image, she eventually commented on it to the priest, Father Nutter. The priest and the local bishop waited to see if the image disappeared or spoke to them in some way before taking further action. The image remained and was discussed at a church council. An article was then



prepared for the local diocesan paper which led to media articles in *The Advertiser*, *Who Weekly*, *Aussie Post* and *The Bulletin*².

The Virgin Mary has appeared at many sites as an apparition. At Lourdes and Fatima, for example, visions of Mary were seen by those specially chosen by her. More concrete events are those where images appear or statues weep or bleed and can be witnessed by many. At the site of Our Lady

of Guadalupe in Mexico (1531) an image of Mary appeared on a cape³ and more recently (c 1996) in Florida an image of Mary appeared on an office building “across nine panes of sun-reflecting glass”⁴. The Yankalilla site being discussed in this paper is an image rather than an apparition; however, it is labelled in the press as an apparition.

Marian shrines are one of the most popular of pilgrimage centres because of Mary’s role as healer, compassionate listener, and intercessor with God⁵.



A large number of Marian pilgrimage sites have developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which could be called the "Age of Mary"⁶. These sites can be seen particularly in the "new world", such as North America, Mexico, Nicaragua and Australia. They provide a sense of shared religious experience, spiritually encouragement, a more intense form of worship and demonstrates to the community that Mary listens to, recognises, and cares for, the new, modern country - it is not just a European or Eastern phenomenon. Perhaps this can be demonstrated through Yankalilla's image drawing pilgrims from widely different denominations to Pilgrim masses even though historically most pilgrims attend sites related to their own religion⁷. On the other hand, this attendance could demonstrate curiosity of tourists and locals.

The priest at Yankalilla, Father Nutter, considers Mary has appeared at this particular site to serve her twentieth century role of teaching and calling people back to God. Just as John the Baptist was a forerunner of Jesus, Mary is a forerunner of the coming of a new Christian era and is preparing the way, for a reordering of creation back to God. In addition, Father Nutter considers that Mary's role is changing from when she was the mother of Christ, to a role of prophetess and has appeared to prepare for a rebirth of the church⁸.

Christian pilgrimage shrines can be viewed in terms of local history and current social trends as well as previous religious culture, for example, Jerusalem was a pilgrimage centre before Christ.⁹ The Yankalilla Church is reported to be situated on an Aboriginal corroboree site and where Aboriginal massacres occurred. As a result this pilgrimage centre can be seen to be related to pre-Christian sacredness and connected to the current social trend of Aboriginal reconciliation¹⁰.

New pilgrimage sites are subject to doubts of authenticity by both religious and secular observers. Only a handful are authorised by the Church as bona fide because a site, while demonstrating miraculous events, must still fall within the boundaries of the traditional religion it is associated with¹¹. It has been suggested that the Yankalilla image resulted from salt damp or bad plastering¹². It could be argued, however, that even if it is bad plastering or salt damp God has used that to create a miracle. As Brown, reporting on the Florida image discussed above, wrote: "It's not what the image is that's important; it's what it's become"¹³. The Shrine was officially blessed on 15 December 1996 "with holy water from an Anglican international shrine"¹⁴ by the Bishop of the Diocese of Murray¹⁵. This would indicate official Anglican support and acceptance within religious traditions.

New sites can emerge in a casual, sporadic fashion; indeed, Father Nutter stated that at first many pilgrims had attended these services, the numbers lessened but have since increased. At present, pilgrims attend of their own accord at pilgrim services¹⁶. It would be interesting to view the site's progress and whether there will be a more organised, packaged, attendance in the future and the marking of special Marian feast days.

Two visits to this site in 1996 and 1997 do reveal that changes have occurred

since the image appeared. The imagery in the Church has altered with an emphasis on Mary, for example her picture can be seen near the altar. Since a June 1996 visit a newsletter has been issued to inform visitors about the church and various souvenirs such as postcards, medals and holy water may be purchased. In addition, in 1997 pilgrims have formed a religious community called the Servants of the Humility of Jesus and Mary¹⁷.

The image has apparently changed with a rose appearing at the bottom. Father Nutter is reported as saying an “image of a third person, possibly Mary Magdalene or Mary MacKillop was emerging”¹⁸; however, the appearance of Mary MacKillop could be attributed to the fervour that currently surrounds her since her beatification and whose cottage is nearby. That Catholic Mary MacKillop and the predominantly Catholic Virgin would appear in a non-Catholic Church must be questioned as the “Protestant view tends to limit the communion of saints to the living and does not look favourably on the possibility of supernatural intervention by deceased saints”¹⁹. Father Nutter believes that Mary MacKillop was a radical religious who upset ecclesiastics and such an appearance would do so again and further, Christ Church is high Anglican and thus accepting of the Virgin²⁰. *The Advertiser* concludes that “while veneration of Mary is not as significant to Anglicans as it is to Catholics, a shrine to the Virgin at Walsingham in England is visited by thousands of pilgrims each year”²¹. This could be disputed as Walsingham’s origins are Catholic - it was in the 1920s that the shrine was recreated by the Anglicans²².

Pilgrimage sites dedicated to Mary are often dedicated to healing the sick and Yankalilla, like the Scapular of the Sacred Heart at Pellevoisin, is seen as a site where Mary heals those who believe in such miracles. During 1996 a section of interior Church wall was set aside where pilgrims could pin up prayers for the sick, absent, and those who needed Mary’s care and guidance. On this wall are testaments to Mary’s curative powers, for example, a man’s shoulder was cured. It was reported that “around 100 people have been healed”²³; however, these cures have not been medically proven²⁴. Pilgrim masses to Anoint the Sick are held at Yankalilla on Sundays and “every Sunday for the past year up to 1000 pilgrims have gone to Yankalilla”²⁵.

Water at many pilgrimage sites is believed to have miraculous and curative powers²⁶ and many Marian pilgrimage sites have wells, springs and streams. The most famous and popular of such sites is Lourdes where millions of pilgrims each year visit for personal health reasons or to pray for others. At Yankalilla, through the use of divining rods, 15 streams have been discovered.²⁷ These streams run “under the apparition wall and a number of streams converge under the altar to form three crosses”²⁸. A pump was installed during 1996 and pilgrims may purchase bottles of holy water. A Sydney man, for example, is reported to have “made some recovery from a brain tumour after drinking Yankalilla’s holy water”²⁹.

Miraculous events can add to a site’s mystical nature. The image at Yankalilla, for example, has been reported to move³⁰. This is a phenomenon reported at other

Marian sites including Ballinspittle in Ireland where a “statue of the Virgin . . . was rocking back and forth and lowering its hands”³¹. It could be argued that such images move because of the concentration placed on it; however, while the statue may not move in reality, that it does for the pilgrim believer is a miracle. Photographs where the shape of Mary or the embryo of Christ appeared in clouds, while the Cross was lit miraculously from within are further miraculous events recorded at Marian sites³². A photograph of the front of the Church of Yankalilla shows Jesus holding a baby at a window which Father Nutter considers to be a further miracle at the Shrine of Our Lady of Yankalilla³³.

Increasingly, new Marian pilgrimage sites have been associated with messages for repentance and have taken on an apocalyptic nature³⁴. These warnings regarding earthly suffering are a motif found at pilgrimage sites such as Fatima where Mary warned mankind of God’s punishment - seen as a forewarning of World War Two - and at Garabandal, Spain where messages warning of the future were received³⁵. Aurora Moore, a member of the congregation, has received messages from the Virgin who is concerned there is too much suffering in the world³⁶. It can be conjectured that messages will become increasingly apocalyptic as the twentieth century proceeds and the new millennium is approached. *The Advertiser* has more recently reported that Mary has been sending messages to Aurora regarding Diana, Princess of Wales as “the Princess of Light” and as “someone who had spread Mary’s message of love and compassion throughout the world”³⁷. This could perhaps indicate a need to deal with a rapidly changing society, a desire for a more caring world, as Diana was seen to espouse, and more encouraging messages from Mary.

This pilgrimage centre is an interesting study because it is new and has developed spontaneously and continues to develop. The site carries many of the common Marian pilgrimage motifs, such as miraculous events, healing and messages and appears to have been adopted by the traditional church into its traditional beliefs. It is also a pilgrimage centre that allows Australians to experience their own intensive beliefs not experienced in their home parishes. The site has changed from the time the image appeared to the present (1997), in form and intensity, and it would be interesting to follow the progress of the shrine and whether it develops and pilgrimage becomes increasingly organised. On the other hand, if the enthusiasm subsides the shrine may become peripheral or fade completely.

Notes

1. Victor Turner and Edith Turner, Postindustrial Marian Pilgrimage, in *Mother Worship: Theme and Variations*, ed. James J Preston, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1982, 145.
2. Fr Nutter, Interview on 8 August, 1997 with Janet Kahl.
3. Michael S Durham, *Miracles of Mary: Apparitions, Legends and Miraculous Works of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Harper, San Francisco, 1995, 105.

4. Brown, M, *The Double Glazed Madonna, She*, Hearst/ACP Publishing Pty Ltd., Sydney, August 1997, 64.
5. Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1978, 161.
6. Turner and Turner, *Postindustrial Marian Pilgrimage*, op. cit., 145 and 150.
7. Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, op. cit., 9.
8. Fr Nutter, Interview on 8 August, 1997 with Janet Kahl.
9. Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, op. cit., 33.
10. Nick Smart, Town Marvels at Church Wall Image, *The Advertiser*, Advertiser Newspapers Ltd., Adelaide, July 2, 1996, 6.
11. Turner and Turner, *Postindustrial Marian Pilgrimage*, op. cit., 152.
12. Helen Chrissydes, Visions of Mary, *The Bulletin*, Vol. 116, No. 6087, ACP Publishing, Sydney, September 2, 1997, 16.
13. Brown, op. cit., 64.
14. Nick Smart, Mass Marks Blessing of Yankalilla Shrine, *The Advertiser*, Advertiser Newspapers Ltd., Adelaide, December 16, 1996, 6.
15. Stuart Innes, Interest Grows in Church's 'Healing' Water, *The Advertiser*, Advertiser Newspapers Ltd., Adelaide, December 10, 1996, 4.
16. Fr Nutter, interview on 8 August, 1997 with Janet Kahl.
17. Fr Nutter, 20 January, 1998. Belinda Watson, Nutter's Latest Miracle, *Aussie Post*, Argus and Australasian Limited, Melbourne, August 2, 1997, 5 reports that originally it was to be called "Oasis of Peace".
18. Jill Pengelley, Divine Help Finds 'Holy Water' Under Church, *The Advertiser*, Advertiser Newspapers Ltd., Adelaide, August 21, 1996, 3.
19. Turner and Turner, *Postindustrial Marian Pilgrimage*, op. cit., 146.
20. Fr Nutter, Interview on 8 August, 1997 with Janet Kahl.
21. Nick Smart, Town Marvels at Church Wall Image, op. cit., 6.
22. Durham, op. cit., 99.
23. Paul Connolly, Mary, Mary, On the Wall, *Who Weekly*, No. 284, Time Inc. Magazine Co. Pty. Ltd., Sydney, 29.
24. *Ibid.*, 29.
25. Paul Lloyd, Holy or Hooey?, *The Advertiser*, Advertiser Newspapers Ltd., Adelaide, December 14, 1996, 3.
26. Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 14.
27. Chrissydes, Visions of Mary, op. cit., 16, and Jill Pengelley, Divine Help Finds 'Holy Water' Under Church, op. cit., 3.
28. Chrissydes, Visions of Mary, op. cit., 16.
29. Paul Lloyd, Holy or Hooey?, op. cit., 5.
30. Fr Nutter. Interview on 8 August, 1997 with Janet Kahl.
31. Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary: From La Salette to Medjugorje*, Princeton

University Press, Princeton, 1991, 16.

32. Ann Marie Hancock, *Wake Up America!: The Inspirational Story of Marian Apparitions, Healing, and Faith in Conyers, Georgia*, Hampton Roads Publishing Company, Inc., Norfolk, 1993.

33. Connolly, Mary, Mary, On the Wall, op. cit., 29.

34. Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, op. cit., 149.

35. Durham, op. cit., 164 and 172.

36. Connolly, Mary, Mary, On the Wall, op. cit., 28 and Fr. Nutter. Interview on 8 August, 1997 with Janet Kahl.

37. Diana Claimed as the Princess of Light, *The Advertiser*, Advertiser Newspapers Ltd., Adelaide, September 22, 1997, 8.

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