



# **Bernadette of Lourdes: Her life, death and visions: new anniversary edition**

*Thérèse Taylor*

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Bernadette of Lourdes: her life, death and visions is the first ever scholarly biography of Bernadette Soubirous, either in French or in English. It draws upon many testimonies and archival sources that have never previously been published. Therese Taylor explains who Bernadette was, and how she lived and died but takes no position on whether or not her visions were genuine. This story begins in Bernadette's native country of the Pyrenees, a mountain region haunted by tales of fairies, witches and miraculous groves and springs. It follows Bernadette's astonishing life story, from her family circle, through her years of fame, to her retirement at the convent of St Gildard at Nevers. Her difficult relationships with the historians of Lourdes and her lengthy terminal illness are also considered.

This biography places Bernadette in the context of her time. She was born into a volatile family and her parent's lives were blighted by economic failure and alcoholism. At the age of fourteen Bernadette was an illiterate child-servant, who suddenly experienced a series of visions of a White Lady in the Grotto of Massabielle. Townspeople, government officials, clergy and journalists were all drawn in, and sought out Bernadette in order to assess her story. A chain of events was set off which made her one of the most famous women in France. Bernadette has to be understood not only in religious terms, but also with reference to themes such as tourism, commercialism, mass-representation and the exploitation of female celebrities.

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