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Stigmata, Prophecies, and Politics: Louise Lateau in the German and Belgian Culture Wars of the Late Nineteenth Century*

This article focuses on the political meaning and transnational appeal of the Belgian stigmatic Louise Lateau. It examines the reception and construction of her as a Catholic celebrity in the late nineteenth century and how these changed over time and space. For although Louise Lateau seems to have been a point of reference for European Catholics, this does not mean that her image, or what she represented to the faithful, was the same in the various countries or even within one country. Focus is on her appeal in Belgium, her home country, and in Germany where she seems to have had a special meaning for the beleaguered Catholics. In these countries Louise figured as a symbol of “Catholicism” to the faithful and their anti-Catholic opponents. In a later phase of her life however, her public image changed as she got caught up in intra-Catholic battles and turned into the prophetic type of mystic. She became a point of tension between the liberal and ultramontane Catholics.

Carnival in Brussels 1875

On 7 March 1875, a carnival procession made its way through the streets of Brussels. On one of its wagons, a devil aimed his trident at a life-size doll of a peasant woman in a grey dress with a white bonnet, her hands and feet covered in red paint. She was hanging from a scaffold and had a cauldron at her feet. For anyone who wondered about the identity of the unlucky girl, a sign on the doll spelled the name: “Louise La Peau,” a play on the name of the famous Belgian stigmatic, Louise Lateau (1850–1883). Her body was easily recognizable to the onlookers and sufficiently politically loaded to stir up a reaction from the Catholics.¹ As might have been expected at such a politically tense time, the Catholic inhabitants of Brussels were shocked and filed a complaint that resulted in an investigation of the affair by the captain of police. The episode received

1. “Karnaval te Brussel,” *Handelsblad* (9 March 1875): 2; s.t., *Le Courier de Bruxelles* (12 March 1875): 1–2; (13 March 1875): 2; (21 March 1875): 1 and (27 March 1875): 2.

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abundant coverage in the national press and also featured in publications abroad, where — like every good story — elements were added to the tale, such as the creator of the wagon being rumoured to have met an untimely death.²

Born as the youngest daughter of three into a working-class family in Bois-d'Haine, Louise first displayed stigmata in 1868 when she was eighteen years old. Initially, on 24 April 1868, Louise only bled from the side wound, but in the following weeks visible stigmata on her feet, hands, and forehead (the crown of thorns) appeared as well. The wounds remained visible until her death in 1883.³ Almost from the onset, her corporeal phenomena attracted visitors who wanted to see her wounds and watch her undergo Christ's Passion (on Fridays). Louise's fame reached far beyond Belgium, with visitors arriving from all over Europe and even the United States.⁴ A riddle to modern science, she was studied by no fewer than one hundred doctors and 200 theologians in those first years.⁵ The international press reported on her popularity and covered the medical and other examinations that Louise underwent, which remained inconclusive. Debates about her alleged fraud or hysteria kept interest alive.⁶ Or, as one of her contemporaries remarked: "Books of science and philosophy, official reports, academic discourses, reports of visits, feuilletons, conferences, pamphlets, journal articles, all literary genres were used to inform the public about the stigmatic of Bois-d'Haine."⁷ A year before she was portrayed as hanging from the gallows, *L'Écho du Parlement*, a Brussels liberal newspaper, mocked her popularity in the German region, calling her a "new celebrity" who would make a "tour of the Catholic world."⁸ It is Louise's appeal in Belgium and Germany that is of interest here (although references to France will also be made as a means of comparison). This article will address the questions of how Louise, who did not have any worldly power (in contrast to the more typical "great men," such as the pope or bishops), could become a figure laden with political meaning,⁹ and how her image changed over time.

2. See A. Fox, *Louise Lateau, die wunderbar begnadigte Jungfrau von Bois d'Haine, zur Bekehrung und Erbauung für alle Stände* (Regensburg: Georg Joseph Manz, 1878), 84.

3. S. Lachapelle, "Between Miracle and Sickness: Louise Lateau and the Experience of Stigmata and Ecstasy," *Configurations* 12 no.1 (2004): 77–105, 77. A preliminary study estimates no less than 12,269 visitors on Fridays between 1868 and 1883. Archives of the Seminary of Tournai (AST), Louise Lateau (LL), K4. Box with the names of the visitors.

4. G. Klaniczay, "Louise Lateau et les stigmatisés du XIX^{ème} siècle," in *Discorsi sulle stimmate dal Medioevo all'età contemporanea*, ed. G. Klaniczay, Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà 26 (2013) (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura): 279–319, 288.

5. The diocesan authorities organised an examination in 1868 (calling upon medical expertise). Louise was also the topic of an intense debate at the Royal Academy in 1874–1875. Lachapelle, 84, 88.

6. A sample of the international publications has been preserved in the AST, LL, J.8; for the newspaper articles, see J.10.

7. "Livres de science et de philosophie, rapports officiels, discours académiques, comptes rendus de visites, feuilletons, conférences, pamphlets, feuilletons, conférences, pamphlets, articles de journaux, tous les genres littéraires ont été mis à contribution pour entretenir le public de la stigmatisée de Bois d'Haine." *Louise Lateau devant l'Académie Royale de Médecine de Belgique* (Mouscron/Tourcoing: Boisieux, 1876), 3.

8. "... tour du monde catholique" V.G., "Une nouvelle célébrité," *L'Écho du Parlement* (24 June 1874): 3.

9. Scholars such as Otto Weiss have pointed out that she had a special meaning for German Catholics, but more thorough studies are lacking. O. Weiss, "Seherinnen und Stigmatisierte," in *Wunderbare Erscheinungen. Frauen und katholische Frömmigkeit im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. I. Götz von Olenhusen (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1995), 51–82, 73.

In studying Louise's appeal, this article follows a more recent trend in the study of nineteenth-century Catholic history that encourages scholars to go beyond the national framework, even when adopting a bottom-up approach. Vincent Viaene has suggested various ways to do this, with research on Louise's fame readily fitting into two approaches: (1) we can examine her "as a magnet upon believers beyond borders;" and (2) we can study her as an element of the "symbolic idiom of the revival" and its counter-revolutionary worldview that gained cross-national currency.¹⁰ However, rather than postulating a fixed meaning upon Louise, to which Catholics within different national contexts could refer, the article will draw upon recent work in celebrity studies to advocate the fluidity of the meaning attributed to her. Although Louise Lateau seems to have been a point of reference for European Catholics, this does not mean that her image, or what she represented to the faithful, was the same in each of the various countries, or even within one country. As research on religious celebrities, such as Mother Theresa of Calcutta, has shown, their fame might be global but the way these figures are perceived can differ from one geographical context to another.¹¹

Louise Lateau seems to have appealed to different layers of society. Prints of her bloody wounds circulated on devotional cards (as a sort of relic) among domestic servants¹² and in the royal family, where the Belgian queen Marie-Henriette put them on the body of her sick child.¹³ The alleged thaumaturgic power of these cards illustrates how Louise was a specific kind of Catholic celebrity, and for some Catholics, her stigmata singled her out as mystic, or even a "living saint."¹⁴ Louise is therefore exemplary for the revitalization of corporeal religion in the nineteenth century and the intertwining, as Paula Kane has noted, of ideals of femininity with Catholic ideas on suffering and sacrifice.¹⁵ To understand Louise's meaning and appeal as a mystic, we need to study her case within the turbulent times in which she lived. As scholars such as William Christian, Diethard Sawicki, and Niels Freytag have already pointed out, in times of political and/or economic stress there is

10. V. Viaene, "International History, Religious History, Catholic History: Perspectives for Cross-fertilization (1830–1914)," *European History Quarterly* 38, No. 4 (2008): 578–607, 588.

11. J. Littler, "Celebrity and the Transnational," *Celebrity Studies* 2, No. 1 (2011): 1–5, 1.

12. Introductory letter from Du Rousseaux, 3 August 1883 and letter from Cmtsse de Liminghe, 26 June 1883 added to the Archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (ACDF), Archivum Sancti Officii Romani (SO), Stanza Storica (S.S.), Lateau, C4f 1, report by Du Rousseaux, "Louise Lateau" added to letter 4 August 1883.

13. Kadoc, Archives of the Redemptorist Order, BE/942855/981/1477/: Queen Marie-Henriette (1836–1902), Letters to Dechamps (1867–1882), letter op 28 September 1868. On the devotional revolution and the appeal of devotions across class and political divides, see M. Heimann, "Catholic Revivalism in Worship and Devotion," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity, vol. 8: World Christianities c.1815–c.1914*, eds., S. Gilley and B. Stanley (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 70–83.

14. On the Catholic Church's critical stance on such mystical epiphenomena and their relation to sanctity, see O. Weiss, "Stigmata," in: *'Wahre' und 'falsche' Heiligkeit. Mystik, Macht und Geschlechterrollen im Katholizismus des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. H. Wolf (München: Oldenbourg, 2013), 111–25; W. Pulz, "Vorbemerkung," in: *Zwischen Himmel und Erde. Körperliche Zeichen der Heiligkeit*, ed. W. Pulz (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012), 7–13.

15. P. Kane, "'She Offered Herself Up.' The Victim Soul and Victim Spirituality in Catholicism," *Church History* 71, No. 1 (2002): 80–119. (On Louise's suffering, The meaning of suffering.)

often a conjuncture of “miraculous” events. At these times, people tend to find “wonders” attractive (with a reduced level of scepticism) and such exceptional phenomena also attract the interest of ecclesiastical authorities.¹⁶

“The age of apparitions and wonders,” Friedhelm Jürgensmeier concluded in 1969, “was probably in Germany during the Culture War.”¹⁷ Louise’s fame needs to be set against the backdrop of the German, and even broader, European *culture wars*. As Margaret Lavinia Anderson has remarked, the preferred weapons in these wars were words and images, and until approximately 1879, Louise was an excellent mute canvas upon which ideas could be projected.¹⁸ The notion of “culture war” can be criticized as a somewhat slightly narrow concept, focusing on a war of liberal ideas and ultramontane dogmas concerning the place of religion in the State and society, primarily in the 1860s and 1870s. Scholars such as Manuel Borutta have demonstrated how this was a much longer and transnational process than is suggested by studies in the field that are often nation-focused.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the term is adopted here because it was used at the time²⁰ and the focus is precisely on the era that is most often denoted as the period of the culture wars — the last third of the nineteenth century. At the same time, it is indeed important to go beyond the confines of national borders and study the events as a European phenomenon.

Until now, most scholars who have done so have focused on what the opponents of Catholicism had in common and the media that they used to achieve their goals.²¹ Furthermore, scholars working on medical history have studied the pathologization of mystical phenomena and its potential anti-Catholic agenda in France, Germany, and Belgium.²² Parallel to the work on

16. N. Freytag and D. Sawicki, “Verzauberte Moderne. Kulturgeschichtliche Perspektiven auf das 19. und 20. Jahrhundert,” in *Wunderwelten: religiöse Ekstase und Magie in der Moderne*, eds., N. Freytag and D. Sawicki (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2006), 7–24, 16 and 21; W. Christian, “Afterword: Islands in the Sea: The Public and Private Distribution of Knowledge of Religious Visions,” *Visual Resources* 25, No. 1–2 (2009): 153–65.

17. “Das Zeitalter der Erscheinungen und Wunder war wohl in Deutschland während des Kulturkampfes.” F. Jürgensmeier, *Die katholische Kirche im Spiegel der Karikatur der deutschen satirischen Tendenzzeitschriften von 1848 bis 1900* (Trier: Neu, 1969), 191.

18. Reference to Anderson in C. Clark and W. Kaiser, “Introduction: The European Culture Wars,” in *Culture Wars. Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-century Europe*, eds., C. Clark and W. Kaiser (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1–10. P. Kane, “Stigmatic Cults and Pilgrimage: The Convergence of Private and Public Faith,” in *Christian Homes. Religion, Family and Domesticity in the 19th and 20th centuries*, eds., T. Van Osselaer and P. Pasture (Leuven: University Press, 2014), 104–25.

19. M. Borutta, *Antikatholizismus. Deutschland und Italien im Zeitalter der europäischen Kulturkämpfe* (= Bürgertum. Neue Folge. Studien zur Zivilgesellschaft 7) (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 13–14.

20. For example, “In Folge des preußischen ‘Kulturkampfes;’” Fox, iii.

21. M. Borutta, *Antikatholizismus*; T. Verhoeven, *Transatlantic Anti-Catholicism: France and the United States in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Y.M. Werner and J. Harvard, “European Anti-Catholicism in Comparative and Transnational Perspective. The Role of a Unifying Other: An Introduction,” *European Studies* 31 (2013): 13–22.

22. J. Goldstein, “The Hysteria Diagnosis and the Politics of Anticlericalism in Late Nineteenth-century France,” *The Journal of Modern History* 54, No. 2 (1982): 209–39; M. Borutta, “Das Andere der Moderne. Geschlecht, Sexualität und Krankheit in antikatholischen Diskursen Deutschlands und Italien (1850–1900),” in *Kollektive Identitäten und kulturelle Innovationen. ethnologische, soziologische und historische Studien*, ed. W. Rammert (Leipzig: Universitätsverlag, 2001), 59–75, 66; N. Edelman, *Les métamorphoses de l’hystérique. Du début du XIXe siècle à la Grande Guerre* (Paris: La Découverte, 2003), 208.

the shared liberal political and literary culture, historians such as Christopher Clark have traced the evolution of Catholicism in this period, noting how it became more centralized, uniform, and Rome-oriented.²³ They have studied Romanized reinventions of older cults, such as that of the Sacred Heart (and its political connotations), and pointed to the role of the Catholic press in nourishing a sense of solidarity among Catholics in different countries and its capacity to link conflicts and emphasize common themes.²⁴ Although common themes can be drawn out across the European sphere, the culture wars were fought within specific national settings that influenced the dynamics of the conflict (e.g., legislation, censorship).²⁵ Similarly, the Catholic response to mystics such as Louise was also not uniformly positive. Moreover, while both the “Liberals” and “Catholics” were often presented as homogeneous groups, such a uniform picture is hard to maintain.²⁶ As we shall see, in Louise Lateau’s case, the distinction between the ultramontane and liberal Catholics was of significance to her public image, especially in the Belgian context.

“Culture Wars” and the Politicizing of Popular Devotion

Although the carnival procession of 1875 had triggered a response from the Belgian Catholics, the following year featured similar wagons mocking the clergy, the Zouaves, and the Catholic schools. Devotions and popular mysticism featured that year as well, with the dominant theme on one of the wagons being the apparitions in Lourdes and the water of the sanctuary.²⁷ Organized by the Ligue de l’Enseignement and the Liberal student organization of the Free University of Brussels as a contribution to the *Denier des Écoles* (a movement promoting non-Catholic schools), the Brussels carnival processions can be regarded as characteristic of the rising tensions between Liberals and Catholics in Belgium. While they had been political allies

23. V. Viaene, “International History, Religious History, Catholic History: Perspectives for Cross-Fertilization (1830–1914),” *European History Quarterly* 38, No. 4 (2008): 578–607; C. Clark, “The new Catholicism and the European culture wars,” in *Culture Wars. Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-century Europe*, eds., C. Clark and W. Kaiser (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11–46, 11; C. Clark and W. Kaiser, “Introduction: The European Culture Wars,” in Clark and Kaiser, *Culture Wars*, 1–10; Borutta, *Antikatholizismus*, 47.

24. M. L. Anderson, “The Limits of Secularization: On the Problem of the Catholic Revival in Nineteenth-century Germany,” *The Historical Journal* 38, No. 3 (1995), 647–70, 663; Clark and Kaiser, 4; Clark, 25; G. Korff, “Kulturkampf und Volksfrömmigkeit,” in *Volksreligiosität in der modernen Sozialgeschichte*, ed. W. Schieder (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986): 137–51, 147.

25. Clark, 35; D. Blackburn, “The Catholic Church in Europe since the French Revolution,” *Comparative Studies on Society and History* 33, No. 4 (1991): 778–90, 785.

26. On the increasing differences among Belgian Liberals, see D. Gaublonne, “Doctrinaires en progressisten tijdens de 19de eeuw,” in: *Het Liberalisme in België. Tweehonderd jaar geschiedenis*, eds., A. Verhulst and H. Hasquin (Brussel: Delta, 1989), 201–8. On the different Catholic responses to a British stigmatic, see M. Heimann, “Medical and Mystical Opinion in British Catholicism. The Contentious Case of Teresa Higginson,” in: *Sign or Symptom? Exceptional Corporeal Phenomena in Religion and Medicine, 19th and 20th centuries*, eds., T. Van Osselaer, H. de Smaele, K. Wils (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2017), 75–100.

27. City archives of Brussels, Instruction publique, II.2495, fêtes et cérémonies, 1877–1878, cavalcade 11 March 1877: reports and newspaper cuts.

during the Belgian Revolution and the Unionist period that followed, the will to cooperate had slowly given way to vehement debates about, among other issues, the place of religion in school, the cemeteries, and public support systems.²⁸

The tensions were linked to the increasingly inflexible position of Pius IX. Shocked by the events of 1848 and the *Risorgimento*, the Pope published the encyclical *Quanta cura* and the *Syllabus errorum* in 1864 condemning all political systems that called for a separation of Church and State, a founding principle of the liberal state. The ultramontane tendencies in Belgium were strengthened, as ultramontane bishops succeeded their more liberal Catholic predecessors and ultramontane laypeople attempted to defend the Roman cause through confraternities and the written word, displaying a new found enthusiasm for “popular piety.”²⁹ As Sofie Lachapelle and Gábor Klaniczay have suggested, the Catholic support for Lateau in Belgium can be seen as an attempt to strengthen their position and counter the downward trend in religious practice. Louise thereby functioned ideally as inspiration: “Her devotion, her humility, and her stigmata and ecstasy were potentially useful to the clergy if presented in a manner that could inspire believers and rekindle faith.”³⁰

Tensions between Liberals and Catholics also dominated the political landscape in Germany, but the situation was quite different. While Catholicism was the religion of most Belgians, in Germany, Protestants outnumbered Catholics two to one. Moreover, Germany was still a very young nation and Bismarck wanted to build a modern Protestant and liberal-rationalist nation, “othering” the Catholic element as an outdated, superstitious, *Fremdkörper*. German Catholics responded by becoming politically organized (forming the *Zentrumspartei*) and by emphasizing and revitalizing pilgrimages and devotions that, under the strict control of the clergy, developed from popular to popularized devotions.³¹ This was a clericalized form of devotion aiming to demonstrate the strength of Catholicism through mass mobilization and the reinvention of older devotions, such as the Sacred Heart or the pilgrimage to the Holy shroud of Trier — a very visible and militant form of piety.³² As Gottfried Korff has noted, in the German *Kulturkampf*, Catholic rituals and symbols were used to create a distinction, and were a point of identification as well as a medium for agitation and protest.³³ We might argue that the Catholic references to a

28. On the School War (1878–1884) that resulted: E. Witte, “The Battle for Monasteries, Cemeteries and Schools: Belgium,” in Clark and Kaiser, *Culture Wars*, 102–28.

29. H. De Smaele, *Rechts Vlaanderen. Religie en stemgedrag in negentiende-eeuws België* (Leuven: University Press Leuven, 2009), 199.

30. Lachapelle, 8; Klaniczay, 289.

31. A. Steinhoff, “Christianity and the Creation of Germany,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity. World Christianities c.1815–c.1914*, vol. 8 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 282–300, 294.

32. M.A. Drury, “Anti-Catholicism in Germany, Britain, and the United States: A Review and Critique of Recent Scholarship,” *Church History* 70, No. 1 (2001): 98–131, 111.

33. Korff, 139. On the rediscovery and revitalisation of popular piety, see Clark, 17.

popularized devotional culture were not only a sign of its politicization, but also of their opponents' use of such well-known cases of Catholic devotion (e.g., in a carnival procession). What is interesting in relation to the German context is that, rather than being described as a passive instrument to strengthen the Catholic position and function as inspiration, in this historiography, Louise Lateau features as one of "(t)hese dramatic cases" that "electrified popular sentiment in ways that often proved uncontrollable and difficult to square with recognized cults and devotions . . ." ³⁴

The following pages will show how, for Catholics, Louise could be both a passive instrument *and* a disturbing case. As we will see, for Louise, this dual characterization had political implications and was linked to a change in the type of stigmatic she was seen to represent. It suggests a transformation from her position as "mute icon," as Elke Pahud de Mortanges categorised stigmatics such as Maria von Mörl (1812–1868), to a "visionary seer" like Anna Katharina Emmerick (1774–1824). Stigmatics of the former type did not raise their voice, and could thus be interpreted in many ways and claimed by different causes. Those of the second type had a specific message and claimed to act as mediums for a divine voice. Whether or not the stigmatics were successful depended on the reception and interpretation processes defined by the context and also on the interpretation that was heard (e.g., medicine, legal system, religious fanatics). ³⁵ One caveat should be mentioned here. Even at moments when there is a breach in the carefully constructed public façade of the mute icon, descriptions of the "rebellious," more vocal Louise still do not offer us her voice. This Louise was also mediated (idealised and demonised) and used to achieve a greater goal.

The Meaning of Suffering

In 1874, the year before the carnival procession in Brussels mentioned above, a small booklet was published in the German town of Dülmen entitled, *A Visit to Louise Lateau, the Virgin of Bois-d'Haine Gifted with the Wounds of the Saviour* (*Ein Besuch bei Louise Lateau der mit den Wundmalen des Heilandes begnadigten Jungfrau in Bois d'Haine*). The author wanted it to be "a book of comfort for Catholic Germans" (*Ein Trostbüchlein für das katholische deutsche Volk*), with the main goal being to point out that God revealed his presence on earth in the wounds and suffering of Louise Lateau. ³⁶ Such an "instrumentalization" of Louise's case ³⁷ can also be found

34. Blackburn, "The Catholic Church," 783.

35. E. Pahud de Mortanges, "Irre – Gauklerin – Heilige? Inszenierung und Instrumentalisierung frommer Frauen im Katholizismus des 19. Jahrhunderts," *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte* 100 (2006): 203–25, 208.

36. The book was translated into Dutch as *Een bezoek bij Louise Lateau. De gestigmatiseerde maagd van Bois d'Haine. Een boekje tot troost voor het katholieke volk* (Leiden: Van Leeuwen, 1875).

37. On the term, see Otto Weiss, "Seherinnen" and Nicole Priesching, who situates the comportment of the new female mystics somewhere between emancipation and instrumentalization. N. Priesching, "Mystikerinnen des 19. Jahrhunderts – ein neuer Typus?," in *Zwischen Himmel und Erde. Körperliche Zeichen der Heiligkeit*, ed. W. Pulz (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2012), 79–97, 96–97.

in other publications,³⁸ especially those by Paul Majunke (1848–1891), who was a priest, a Reichstag deputy, and editor-in-chief of the Berlin-based *Germania*, one of the most important (and persecuted) newspapers of the Catholic Centre Party.³⁹

We might wonder why German Catholics needed a Belgian stigmatic to feel comforted. Majunke, for example, had visited the German stigmatic, Viktoria Hecht, in Wolpertswende before he saw Louise Lateau.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, it was the famous Belgian stigmatic — on which he gave a presentation in Trier — to which he devoted a book, and who he believed to have a special meaning in relation to the German Church conflict. Perhaps his preference was related to the fact that German stigmatics who were still “active” at the time — Viktoria Hecht (1840–1890), Beatrix Schuhmann (1823–1887), Elisabeth Flesch (1821–?) and Louise Beck (1822–1879) — were not nearly as famous or well examined as was Louise.⁴¹ Their fame never went beyond the regional level. Louise, in contrast, was at the centre of a public medical debate that continued for years in newspapers across Europe. Moreover, in 1874, she became the centre of attention in the German press when the Berlin professor, Rudolf Virchow (1821–1902), publicly voiced his scepticism in his book *Über Wunder* (and elsewhere) concerning Louise and the medical examination to which she had been subjected.⁴² David Blackburn aptly positions Virchow, the “pope of medicine,” “at the point where medical and scientific gravitas lent legitimacy to liberal anti-clericalism.”⁴³ Majunke responded accordingly.

In numerous articles and presentations, Majunke countered the criticism of the Berlin professor.⁴⁴ According to one of his contemporaries, he had in fact used the time he spent in prison (for a press offense) “solacing his captivity by writing a pamphlet on Louise Lateau, the stigmatic of Bois de Haine.”⁴⁵ In his *Louise Lateau, Her Miraculous Life and Meaning in the German Church Conflict (Louise Lateau Ihr Wunderleben und Bedeutung im deutschen Kirchenconflicte, 1874, 1875²)*, he hinted at the importance of Louise to the German Catholics. For him, as well as for other authors, her suffering was meaningful in the context of the Church conflict because she functioned as a “heroic victim:” through her voluntary physical and

38. A similar book entitled *Anna Katharina Emmerick und Louise Lateau. Ein doppeltes Zeugnis für die Wahrheit der katholischen Kirche. Ein Trostbüchlein für das katholische Volk* was published four years later by Prof. Joseph Rebbert (Paderborn: Bonifacius Druckerei, 1878). See also A. Rohling, *Louise Lateau. Die Stigmatisierte von Bois d'Haine. Nach authentischen Medicinischen und theologischen Documenten für Juden und Christen aller Bekenntnisse* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1874). Fox, 85.

39. H. Neubach, “Majunke, Paul,” *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 15 (1987): 719 ff. <http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd11669131X.html> (accessed 16 November 2016); On *Germania*, see R. Stöber, *Deutsche Pressegeschichte. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: UVK, 2014³), 244–5. Circulation in 1874: 8,600.

40. AST, LL, E.2., 4. text (handwritten) by abbé Majunke, undated.

41. Until 1868 German Catholics also travelled to see Maria von Mörl in Tyrol (1812–1868). Weiss, “Seherinnen,” 62–66.

42. Lachapelle, 96.

43. Blackburn, *Marpingen*, 290. For German scholarly interest in Louise, see N.J. Cornet, *Louise Lateau et la science allemande* (Brussels & Paris: Closson, 1875).

44. Weiss, *Seherinnen*, 76.

45. H. Vizetelly, *Berlin under the New Empire*, vol. 2 (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1879), 397.

emotional suffering and reliving of Christ's Passion she atoned for the sins of others. As well as suffering in accordance with the Catholic calendar, increasing, for example, on the feast of Christ's suffering or on that of the Holy Martyrs, Louise also suffered more intensely whenever the Catholic Church or religion were under attack.

For Paul Majunke, however, Louise's expiatory suffering (*sühnende Leiden*) was not the only reason for her importance to the German *Kirchenconflict*. In his opinion, God also intended her to have a direct impact. She — or rather the exceptional phenomena to which she bore witness — was a warning to the opponents of the Church, who were blinded by their rationalism, and would awaken German Protestants who had not witnessed a similar case among their ranks. Louise was supposed to encourage Christian virtues and strengthen the members of the Church in their faith, especially in Prussia and Baden, where the new Church legislation had put the Catholics in a position that could be found nowhere in the civilised world, and “[as] equally bad or not much better than in China.”⁴⁶

According to Armand Thiéry, the books on Louise by Majunke were quite popular and were reprinted several times.⁴⁷ While there were numerous Belgian publications about her, there were no similar Belgian “books of comfort.” The situation of the Belgian Catholics was quite different. There were no expulsions of the clergy or any similar censorship of the Catholic press.⁴⁸ Moreover, while the Belgian accounts also associated Louise's suffering with political events, they were primarily events on an international scale. For example, Louise's pain was said to have increased during the Piedmontese invasion of the Papal States on 20 September 1870, and also as a result of the profanations in Rome and in Paris (Commune) in the Holy Week of 1871.⁴⁹ Louise's suffering thus perfectly illustrated the idea of solidarity among Catholics on an international scale.

Thus, because of the fluctuations in pain, Louise did not have to speak to become a political symbol. It is important to emphasise that most of the stigmatics who have been studied from this perspective were politically effective because their prophecies could be used as political ammunition (e.g., Marie-Julie Jahenny and her connection to the French intransigent monarchists).⁵⁰

46. “[I]n China gleich übel resp. nicht viel schlimmer” Majunke, 106–9.

47. A. Thiéry, *Nouvelle Biographie de Louise Lateau*, vol. 2 (Louvain: Nova et vetera, 1915), 322.

48. A specific “Belgian” cause for Louise's suffering was formulated (after her death in 1883) by one of her French supporters, Dom Léon Marie Guerrin. In his opinion, it was no coincidence that she lived in the region (between Mons and Charleroi) where the doctrines of the *solidaires* and freethinkers had developed — she was there to function as a counterweight. She also suffered for the sins of the priests and for all of the unfortunate events that took place in the diocese of Tournai. Archives of Jan De Grauwe, Religiosi, Dom Guerrin, copy of letter from Guerrin to Armand Thiéry, 16 December 1910.

49. H. Van Looy, *Biographie de Louise Lateau. La stigmatisée de Bois-D'Haine, d'après les documents authentiques*, seconde édition améliorée et augmentée (Paris/Leipzig/Tournai: Casterman, 1874), 155; Thiéry, *Nouvelle biographie*, vol. 2, 458–461; and vol. 3.2 (1918), 535.

50. L. Sandoni, “Political Mobilizations of Ecstatic Experiences in Late Nineteenth-century Catholic France: The Case of Doctor Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre and his ‘Stigmatisées’ (1868–73),” *Disputatio Philosophica* 16 (2014): 19–41, 24.

Louise's silence did not mean that there were no attempts to make her fit this prophetic profile. Scholars such as Hilaire Multon and Luca Sandoni have pointed to the "prophetic fever" in Italy and France in the 1860s and 1870s, with the spread of apocalyptic messages calling for a *renovatio mundi*. In France, such prophets found a willing ear among Catholics who were shocked by defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, the fall of the second Empire, and the creation of the Third Republic. Prophecies about the restoration of the monarchy were more than welcome to intransigent supporters of the Count de Chambord.⁵¹ They also visited the stigmatic of Bois-d'Haine and hoped to receive divine confirmation of the righteousness of their cause.⁵²

Louise, however, did not fit the prophetic model, as the reports on their visits illustrate. Dr Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre (1818–1912), professor at the École de Médecine of Clermont-Ferrand and author of one of the most extensive overviews on stigmatics, visited her four times between 1868 and 1871. He asked her about the French political situation during his final visit in October 1871.⁵³ He had heard that Louise had suffered more intensely during the profanations in Rome and Paris during the Lent of 1871 and wanted to test her prophetic abilities. The results were minimal: when she went into ecstasy, he mentioned "Belgium," "the pope," "Chambord," and "France." She responded with a smile on hearing the first three, but did not move a muscle in the last case. Imbert-Gourbeyre interpreted this as a bad omen, a sign of God's dissatisfaction with his nation.⁵⁴

A similar reading of corporeal signs is found in an account by the priest Jean-Mari Curicque. In his catalogue of modern prophecies (five editions between 1870 and 1872), he discussed the "social side" (*côté social*) of Louise Lateau. He admitted that she did not seem to have a prophetic gift: "They have frequently told us about prophecies that Louise Lateau allegedly made; there is no truth in it, up until now she does not seem to have had any knowledge of the future." Nevertheless, he believed that her behaviour promised nothing good, for when she was in ecstasy and heard the word "France" she started to "seethe with indignation" (*frémir d'indignation*). His conclusion was that the facts of Bois-d'Haine concerned France in particular, and he encouraged his countrymen to leave the path of the revolution and "regain faith in the altar and the throne of your fathers" (*reprends croyance à l'autel et au trône de tes pères*).⁵⁵

51. H. Multon, "Prophétesses et prophéties dans la seconde moitié du pontificat de Pie IX (1859–78). Entre défense du pouvoir temporel et apocalypse hétérodoxe," *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica* 1 (2003): 131–60, 131.

52. Lachapelle, 86.

53. Sandoni, 28, 30.

54. A. Imbert-Gourbeyre, *Les stigmatisées*, vol. 1 (Paris: Palmé, 1873²), 121–2.

55. "On nous a bien des fois parlé des prophéties qu'aurait faites Louise Lateau; il n'en est rien, du moins jusqu'ici elle n'a paru avoir aucune connaissance de l'avenir." J.-M. Curicque, *Voix prophétiques ou signes, apparitions et prédictions recueillis principalement des Annales de l'Église touchant les grands événements du XIXe siècle et l'approche de la fin des temps* (Paris: V. Palmé, 1872²), 2 vols., vol. 1, 494.

When the bishop of Geneva (Switzerland), Mgr Mermillod, asked Louise in May 1874 if she also had political visions concerning the Church, she told him that she received no illumination (*aucune lumière*) in that respect.⁵⁶ It is interesting that the French visitors attempted to make her fit the visionary type. Perhaps this was because many of their stigmatics were also prophets. However, their experiments could only be called successful if one adopted a very broad definition of “prophecy,” including bodily and facial movements. In a later phase, Louise was also regarded as a prophetic type, as explained further, but in the early 1870s she was still the “mute icon.”

“Othering” Catholicism

Because of her silence, Louise was not only an emblematic figure for different groups of Catholics but could also become the symbol of all that was wrong with Catholicism. When we look at the mockery of Louise and study the points of criticism, we gain an idea of how Catholicism was reduced by its critics to an image that focused on elements of bigotry, archaism, commercialism, and sick minds (through articles and caricatures). Both the German and Belgian images are examined here, as the same themes were addressed in the two countries, confirming the international language of anti-Catholic imagery. Among the Liberals in Belgium, Louise was a point of agreement rather than dissonance between the progressives and the doctrinaires.⁵⁷

Let us return to the carnival of 1875 for a moment. Scholars who have studied the culture wars from a gender perspective have emphasised how, in the context of this anti-Catholic discourse, liberal ideas of femininity were upheld. The *Courrier de Bruxelles*⁵⁸ cited the leaflet of the *Dénier des écoles* (referring to the cavalcade) on 27 March 1875:

With respect to Louise, the Catholic journals claim that it is not permitted to offend an honest girl. But is she really honest, this girl who speculates on public imbecility to carry out the plans of the schemers in soutane? . . . That is a kind of honesty that in other spheres would have scores to settle with the Law.

Thus, while the Belgian Catholics attacked the Liberals for mocking and criticising a “good girl” and turning a “chaste and angelic” creature into a “vile prostitute,”⁵⁹ the latter responded by criticising her abuse of the credibility of the people.

56. Majunke, 17.

57. J. Foubert, “Een mirakel anders bekeken. De beeldvorming en politisering van Louise Lateau in de liberale pers (1869–1883)” (unpublished BA paper, University of Antwerp, 2016). *De qui se moque-t-on? Caricatures d’hier et d’aujourd’hui, de Rops à Kroll* (Morlanwelz: Musée Royal de Mariemont, 2001) (esp. A. Morelli, “Les thèmes de la caricature anticléricale en Belgique en XIXe siècle,” 13–25).

58. S.t., *Courrier de Bruxelles* (27 March 1875), 2.

59. “Pour ce qui est de Louise Lateau, les journaux catholique prétendent qu’il n’est pas permis d’outrager une honnête fille. Mais es elle bien honnête, cette fille qui spécule sur l’imbécilité publique, pour faire les affaires des intrigants en soutane? . . . Voilà une honnêteté qui, dans d’autres milieux, pourrait avoir des comptes à régler avec la justice.” *Sur le fait extraordinaire de Bois d’Haine: extrait de la Gazette de Nivelles. Le fait de Bois d’Haine et la presse du libre examen* (Nivelles: Despret, 1868), 6.

Another central theme of the caricatures was the commercial aspect of Louise's popularity. The German liberal, political-satirical journal, *Kladderadatsch*,⁶⁰ included a caricature of a young girl asking her priest if she could become a stigmatic as she and her fiancé needed the money for their approaching wedding.⁶¹ Criticising bigotry and naïve credulity in Catholicism implied, of course, that the Liberals claimed rationality and sanity as their own. Louise's abuse of people's credulity also featured in the coverage of her alleged fasting (*inedia*). Her ability to go without food inspired cartoons that depicted food hidden under her bed or throwing a bedpan out of the window (Fig. 1).⁶²

As noted, Catholics understood Louise's suffering body as a form of productive pain; it was her way of atoning for the sins of others. This emphasis on voluntary suffering was also a point of mockery. In October 1876, *Kladderadatsch* included in an image entitled, "*Louise Lateau ist todt. Vivat sequens!*" The caricature showed a village priest holding a *Bussgürtel* and asking the ladies of the village if one of them wanted to become a saint.⁶³ Given the central position of the pastor, the picture ridiculed the malleability of saints and the clergy's role in managing them. It was a play upon the age-old theme of the clerical indoctrination of feeble women.⁶⁴ In the press, Abbot Paul Majunke was cast in this "manager" role — especially after the publication of his book on Louise. A particularly telling example is the fictional dialogue published in *L'Écho du Parlement* on 13 October 1874. In this text, a German visitor to Bois-d'Haine meets Louise's parish priest, who is criticising Majunke's actions and concludes, "There is nothing to say here. Majunke is ruining my business. I wanted to do this work quietly and slowly without clatter. I was very content, things were going great and *voilà* he creates an uproar and starts a polemic. It would have been better if he had never come."⁶⁵

Research on the Belgian liberal newspapers in fact suggests a chronological evolution in the way Louise is presented. In the first phase, 1869–1873, she is presented as a "fraud," while from 1874 to 1875 onwards she is described as "ill."⁶⁶ The latter comments referred to the nineteenth-century definition of "hysteria" that, as work on France, Germany, and Italy has

60. A fervent defender of Bismarck's national-liberal politics from around 1866, including more than 300 anti-church caricatures between 1871–1878. Jürgensmeier, 35 and 53.

61. S.t., *Kladderadatsch* (24 December 1874): 236.

62. "Illustrierte Rückblicke." *Kladderadatsch*, (September 1875): 562. "Caricatures." *Le Rasoir*, 28 April 1877, 4. In fact, the discussion eventually led to a public wager. The editor of the *Neue Rheinische Wochenblatt* offered the stigmatic 10,000 thaler if she could go without food for three months. See *L'Écho du Parlement* (17 March 1874), 1.

63. "Louise Lateau ist todt," *Kladderadatsch* (February 1876), 68.

64. On male clerical supporters, see Priesching, 83–84. For their roles as managers and ghost-writers, see P. Kane, *Sister Thorn and Catholic Mysticism in Modern America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 120; Weiss, *Seherinnen*, 96.

65. "– Il n'a rien à dire ici. Majunke est en train de gâter mon affaire. Je voulais faire marcher cela doucement, tranquillement sans éclat. J'étais très content, ça allait bien et voilà qu'il se met à faire du tapage et à ouvrir une polémique. Il aurait mieux fait de ne pas venir." "Un voyage à Bois d'Haine," *L'Écho du Parlement* (13 October 1874): 2.

66. Foubert.

shown, was linked to anti-Catholicism and the establishment of liberal government. The pathological explanation of phenomena such as stigmata implied their “secularisation” and reduced them to mere physiological phenomena.⁶⁷ Caricaturists could easily hint at Louise’s hysterical nature, as the medical debates that explicitly pathologised her condition had been published in the Belgian and German press.⁶⁸ Her ecstatic pose when she relived Christ’s Passion inspired ridicule, with a particularly telling example of this being the caricature of a statue of Louise Lateau. It featured her body in a sort of trance but omitted one of the most central features of her claim to fame: the stigmata.⁶⁹

While references to hysteria continued, in the last phase of her life Louise primarily made headlines because of her involvement in an intra-Catholic affair concerning the bishop of Tournai.

The “Exterior Mission:” Louise’s Messages

Until now, the picture of Louise’s role as a Catholic celebrity has been rather homogeneous. For Liberals, she epitomised all of the features of Catholicism that they criticised: its bigotry, naïve credulity, and hysteria — they linked Catholicism to the “feminisation” of religion.⁷⁰ For many Catholics, Louise was in fact the embodiment of the Catholic Church, suffering through politically challenging times. While initially being a blank canvas on which ideas could be projected, this changed in the late 1870s when Louise seemed to embark on her “exterior mission” and began expressing her opinion, and not about just anything, about the actions of the Pope in relation to her bishop.

While Louise Lateau had also been a point of discussion among Belgian Catholics, these discussions had centred primarily on the nature of her wounds (divine, diabolic, or pathological).⁷¹ In the late 1870s, however, Louise became a point of reference in discussions between ultramontane and liberal Catholics and this time it was a prophetic, vocal Louise who made the headlines. In this regard, Louise is similar to other female mystics who referred to their charismata (often exceptional corporeal phenomena such as stigmata) in order to speak with a certain authority. These women did not claim the messages to be their own, but acted as a mediator of God’s voice. As Monique Scheer has noted, this does not necessarily imply rebellion or

67. Borutta, “Das Andere;” Goldstein.

68. For example, the book by the French neurologist, D.M. Bourneville, *Louise Lateau, ou la stigmatisée belge* (Paris: Progrès Médical, 1875), included a chapter entitled, “Louise is a hysteric.” Moreover, the new definition of hysteria by Charcot delineated the various stages of the disease, recognising Louise’s final “Passion” pose as representative of one of them (the crucifixion). G. Didi-Huberman, *Invention de l’hystérie. Charcot et l’iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (Paris: Macula, 1982), 33. S. Gilman, *Seeing the Insane. A Visual and Cultural History of our Attitude towards the Mentally Ill* (New York: Wiley, 1982), 164.

69. “Tentoonstelling van Schoone Kunsten te Gent,” *Paters en Nonnen* 9 (September 1877): 4.

70. Hinting at the female majority among the faithful and the type of religion considered attractive to them (emotional). T. Van Osselaer and T. Buerman, “Feminisation thesis: A Survey of International Historiography and a Probing of Belgian Grounds,” *Revue d’Histoire Ecclésiastique* 103, No. 2 (2008): 497–544.

71. See, for example, Huchant’s case in Thiéry, *Nouvelle biographie*.

an emancipatory discourse, they often supported ultraconservative ideas and what might be perceived as their own oppression.⁷²

Louise became involved in the battle between ultramontane and liberal Catholics after the death of Pius IX. The former prioritised the defence of the Church's interests and called for State support for the Church, while the latter regarded the Catholic party as a constitutional, moderate centre party that respected the neutrality of the State. During the reign of Pius IX (1846–1878), the ultramontanists had benefitted from the support of the Vatican, but the situation changed under his successor and when the Liberals came into power (1878).⁷³ Leo XIII, ready to come to an agreement with secular authorities, had informed the Belgian government and the Catholic press (February 1879) that he approved of the liberal State and encouraged the Belgian Catholics to defend the constitution.⁷⁴ Louise became involved in one of the last and most vehement battles of the radical ultramontanist faction: the commotion concerning the bishop of Tournai, Mgr Dumont.

Pope Leo XIII removed this ultramontanist bishop from his position on 22 November 1879 after his mental health was put in question.⁷⁵ Louise was generally believed to have sided with the ex-bishop, rather than proffering her obedience to the new Tournai bishop, Isidore-Joseph Du Rousseaux.⁷⁶ Already in June 1879, Dumont claimed to know the names of the “traitors who conspired” to replace him with “a liberal bishop” and added that Louise Lateau had told him their names.⁷⁷ Apart from these “revelations” concerning specific Church policy, Louise made more general prophecies in apocalyptic terms. These were interpreted by some of her supporters as a criticism of the liberal Catholics. In October 1880, for example, her parish priest, pastor Niels, wrote that Louise had received the following revelation on Epiphany 1879, which had been repeated several times since: “[M]y justice is near, because of the sins that are committed.” Niels explained this as follows: “By that, we can see that the Lord’s justice is about to manifest itself, unless one converts; but as the world is not willing to convert, we should expect terrible chastisements, especially meant to convert the opportunists and the liberal Catholics, who are the cause of the miseries in the Catholic Church.”⁷⁸

72. Scheer, M. (2013). “Das Medium hat ein Geschlecht,” in ‘Wahre’ und ‘falsche’ Heiligkeit. *Mystik, Macht und Geschlechterrollen im Katholizismus des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. H. Wolf (München: Oldenbourg), 169–192, 181–82.

73. In 1878, the Liberals won the parliamentary elections and their rule (until June 1884) marked a period of crisis for the Catholics. De Smaele, 202.

74. Clark, 32; De Smaele, 207.

75. ACDF, S.O., S.S., Lateau, C4g, secret dossier, Paul Vriagnault, note 1, 18 January 1884: mission of Louise Lateau.

76. ACDF, S.O., S.S., Lateau, C4f 1, letter of Du Rousseaux, 17 May 1883.

77. ACDF, S.O., S.S., Lateau, C4f 1, statement of canon Delecoeuillerie added to the letter of Mgr Du Rousseaux, 3 August 1883.

78. “*ma justice est à bout, à cause des péchés qui se commettent... Par là on voit que la justice de Dieu est près de s'exercer; à moins que l'on ne se convertisse; mais comme le monde n'est pas disposé à se convertir, nous devons nous attendre à des terribles châtements, surtout pour convertir les opportunistes et les catholiques libéraux qui sont la cause des misères dans l'Église Catholique.*” Archives of the diocese of Nantes, 5F2-100, copy of a letter by pastor Niels, 15 October 1880. The author would like to thank Andrea Graus for this reference.

Again, Louise featured prominently in publications (that were both for and against). Her name was mentioned in the “Dumont dossier,” published by the liberal press from June to December 1880, after the editor-in-chief of *La tribune de Mons* convinced Mgr Dumont to share his private correspondence in the newspaper. The carefully selected letters unveiled the intrigues that had resulted from years of conflict with the liberal Catholics.⁷⁹ On 25 June 1880, Mgr Dumont wrote the following about Louise in a letter to *La Vérité*: “She absolutely did not allot any authority or jurisdiction to Mgr Dourousseau (sic), who, as she has told me and repeated, is not her lord. . . . Louise Lateau sees everything that has been done against her legitimate bishop as a great sin.”⁸⁰ On 3 July 1880, *L’Écho du Parlement* cited two letters by pastor Niels, the parish priest of Bois-d’Haine, explaining the meaning of Louise’s suffering: he had long thought it to be related to the general events of the Church, until he realised that it concerned the priests of the diocese of Tournai exclusively; it was because of them that the Lord was saddened and made Louise suffer.⁸¹ Two days later, letters from Louise herself were cited. Letters to Dumont on 9, 18, and 22 June (after his failed visit) left no doubt about where her loyalty lay: “I have never experienced pain as great as on seeing you yesterday near the window. They even forbade me to answer you. If I had been able to leave my bed, I would quickly have been next to you . . . I have not changed, whatever they might say.”⁸²

Louise was already a Catholic celebrity at this point, but she was primarily considered a representative of a Catholicism that, even in her own diocese, was increasingly challenged by liberal Catholic currents. While in the previous period her fame and political meaning had been based on the exceptional corporeal phenomena that she displayed, in this period it was the divine messages she claimed to receive that made her the centre of attention.⁸³ The Belgian and German anti-Catholic press mocked her sympathies, noting how an “infallible” Pope and Louise, who was “inspired” by the Divine Light, had different opinions concerning Mgr Dumont.

*O rare spectacle! Even the most pious mind
Must be confused by this case.
The two of them have a different opinion,
And neither of them can be wrong!*⁸⁴

79. K. Van Isacker, *Werkelijk en wettelijk land. De katholieke opinie tegenover de rechterzijde 1863–1884* (Antwerp: Standaard, 1955), 250.

80. “Elle ne reconnaît absolument aucune autorité ni juridiction quelconque à Mgr. Dourousseau qui, m’a-t-elle dit et répété, n’est pas son seigneur. (...) Louise Lateau regarde tout ce qui a été fait contre son évêque légitime comme un très-grand péché.” Archives of diocese of Nantes (ADN), 5F2-119 letter from J. Satabin to Imbert-Gourbeyre about Lateau, 10 July 1880.

81. S.t., *L’Écho du Parlement*, 3 July 1880: p. 2; publication of two letters from pastor Niels to Mgr Dumont, 18 December 1879 and 2 January 1880.

82. “Je n’ai jamais éprouvé une peine aussi grande que celle d’hier en vous voyant près de la fenêtre. On me défendait même de vous répondre. Si j’aurais pu sortir de mon lit j’aurais été bien vite près de vous. (...) Je ne suis pas change quoique l’on dise...” “Le dossier de Mgr Dumont,” *L’Écho du Parlement* 5 July 1880: p. 2.

83. See ACDF, S.O., S.S., Lateau, C4g, Secret dossier, Note 2.

84. “O seltsam Schauspiel! Den frommsten Sinn/Muss dieser Fall verwirren./Verschiedener Meinung sind die Zwei/Und keiner doch kann irren!”—“Ein Räthsel,” *Kladderadatsch* 33.26 (6 June 1880): 277. See also “Vertauschte Rollen,” *Ulke* (3 June 1880): 2

Both the anti-Catholic press and the liberal Catholics benefitted from the situation. According to pastor Niels, Louise's revelations concerning Mgr Dumont gave them "the occasion to spread slander against the stigmatic."⁸⁵ The revelations also caused unease among her former supporters. One of them even suggested that these "visions" might be caused by the Devil rather than originating from God. Pastor Niels, however, protested violently, asking why God should not want to warn them in these matters, suggesting it was similar to what had happened in the case of the Italian stigmatic, Anna Maria Taigi (1769–1837), and the German stigmatic, Anna Katharina Emmerick.⁸⁶ The episode also puzzled Dr Imbert-Gourbeyre, a fervent supporter of Louise (as noted above), and several letters have been preserved in which he received confirmation that a letter by Louise had indeed been published in the "bad press" (*mauvais journaux*), one she had written to her former bishop after she had been forbidden to receive him. However, the Jesuit, Father Viart, attempted to console Dr Imbert-Gourbeyre, writing to him that the present did not necessarily have to cast dark shadows on the past. The same soul that had been guided by the good spirit could for a million reasons "become the victim of the deceits of evil."⁸⁷

Louise's new bishop, Mgr Du Rousseaux, a liberal Catholic according to Louise's supporters, was not in favour of her. His rather negative reports of May and August 1883 criticised, among other things, her many visitors and the distribution of cards with her blood on them, along with a few words written by the pastor of Bois-d'Haine or Louise, and signed as a mark of their authenticity.⁸⁸ Du Rousseaux did not know what to do, he thought that the bad press would perceive whatever action he undertook against Louise as an act of vengeance against Mgr Dumont. However, if he did nothing, it was possible that the evil would continue and more scandals would develop.⁸⁹ Louise's supporters indeed interpreted the steps that were taken as a strategy of the liberal Catholics to discredit her and to cast doubt on the supernatural origin of her message. The goal was to isolate the stigmatic, hinder the visitors who wished to make enquiries about her mystical state (and thus her prophecies), and to keep Mgr Dumont from seeing her. Louise, however, convinced that this was God's will, believed in the bishop until her death in 1883.⁹⁰ She remained loyal to her "mission," which Paul Vrignault, one of

85. "ont donné occasion aux catholique libéraux de répandre des calomnies contre la stigmatise. Tant pis pour ceux qui méprisent les avertissements de Dieu!" Letter from pastor Niels to Mme Drion, 12 September 1882 cited in ACDF, S.O., S.S., Lateau, C4F 1, report by Du Rousseaux, "Louise Lateau" added to letter 4 August 1883.

86. Letter from pastor Niels to Mme Drion, 23 August 1882 added to ACDF, S.O., S.S., Lateau, C4F 1, report by Du Rousseaux, "Louise Lateau" added to letter 4 August 1883.

87. "devenir victim des perfidies du mauvais." ADN, 5F2-119, letter from J. Viart to Imbert-Gourbeyre about Lateau, 28 September 1880.

88. Introductory letter from Du Rousseaux, 3 August 1883 and letter from Cmtse de Liminghe, 26 June 1883 added to ACDF, S.O., S.S., Lateau, C4f 1, report by Du Rousseaux, "Louise Lateau" added to letter 4 August 1883.

89. ACDF, S.O., S.S., Lateau, C4f 1, letter bishop of Tournai, 17 May 1883.

90. "... et leur tendance était de metre en doute le surnaturel divin, qui les gênait," ACDF, S.O., S.S., Lateau, C4g, secret dossier, Paul Vrignault, note 12, 16 July 1886, 22.

her most fervent supporters, later described as to “bring down liberal Catholicism, that intimate evil which in our time has taken on such large proportions.”⁹¹

Paul Vrignault was a poet and the former head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris as well as Consul Général of France. Convinced that he had a spiritual relationship with Louise, he attempted to complete Louise’s mission after her death: he told the Pope about it and composed a file on the episode and sent it to Rome.⁹² In this dossier, Vrignault described Louise’s interactions with Rome. She had disapproved of the action taken by the Pope against Mgr Dumont and, even before his official removal from office on 16 November 1879, she claimed to have heard a *locution-intellectuelle* (not a vision) indicating that “[t]he pope transgresses against the Syllabus, and that displeases God; if he continues down that road, he will, after his death, be crossed off the list of sovereign popes.”⁹³

As Vrignault reported, Louise wrote to Rome four more times, with the Pope responding twice: first, in July, suggesting that she might use an intermediary to deliver the message, and the second time in August 1882, asking her to come to Rome after consulting a physician. Louise, however, no longer had the strength to travel to Italy. Her last letter to Rome seems to have been triggered by the trial of canon Bernard (who had run off with money from the diocese and been arrested in Havana). Warning the Pope, she wrote on 25 September 1882 that the whole trial will “blow up” and “affect the Church and Your Holiness.” The Pope should repair “the injustices that were committed in the diocese of Tournai” and then “Mgr Dumont will make all the desired submissions.”⁹⁴

In fact, Vrignault planned a publication on Louise’s mission, as we know from a letter by Dom Léon Marie Guerrin whom Vrignault had asked to evaluate his manuscript, *La vie et la mission de Louise Lateau*. In a letter of June 1889, Guerrin, himself a fervent supporter of Louise, confirmed his sympathy for Louise and Pius IX and his aversion to liberal Catholicism, which he considered the great wound of their our time (“*la grande plaie de notre époque*”). Nevertheless, he did not completely agree on this particular matter and did not think that it was Louise’s mission to destroy liberal Catholicism. He rather thought of her as “a victim, admirably chosen, prepared, formed by God, rendered by him, as perfectly as it is possible for a

91. ACDF, S.O., S.S., Lateau, C4g, secret dossier, Paul Vrignault, note 5: spiritual union of Vrignault and Lateau, see also note 12, p. 19.

92. ACDF, S.O., S.S., Lateau, C4g, secret dossier, Paul Vrignault, note 6, p. 12 and note 1 (18 January 1884). He had two audiences (on 22 September 1883 and 28 January 1884). ACDF, S.O., S.S., Lateau, C4g, secret dossier, 6: Mémoire, 7 March 1884.

93. “*Le Pape transige sur le Syllabus, ce qui déplaît à Dieu, s’il persévère dans cette voie, il sera, après sa mort, rayé de la liste des souverains pontifes.*” ACDF, S.O., S.S., Lateau, C4g, secret dossier, Note 1, 18 February 1884 and 6: Mémoire, 7 March 1884. The note was also read and signed by pastor Niels, 17 September 1885.

94. “*va éclater, et que les conséquences en retomberont sur l’Eglise et sur Votre Sainteté. ... les injustices qui ont été commises dans le diocèse de Tournai. ... Mgr Dumont fera toutes les soumissions désirables*” Letters of 27 or 28 June, 26 July, 16 August, and 25 September 1882. ACDF, S.O., S.S., Lateau, C4g, secret dossier, 6: Mémoire, 7 March 1884, p. 9.



Figure 1 Ill. 1: A stigmatized Paul Majunke standing next to Louise Lateau; food is hidden under her bed (“Wunder über Wunder,” *Kladderadatsch*, no. 31 (5 July 1874), 124 (© Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg Frankfurt am Main).

human creature, similar to the suffering Christ, to expiate . . . the sins that are committed in the diocese of Tournai in a troubled era of its history.” Again, an obedient Louise, suffering in silence, was quite acceptable, while the “exterior mission” was not something that needed to be remembered. In his opinion, the publication of Vrignault’s manuscript would not serve Louise’s cause or that of the Church.⁹⁵

Twenty years after her death, pastor Niels still felt the need to defend Louise in this matter, and published *Louise Lateau et Mgr Dumont. Mémoire justificatif* in 1905. He stated that: “The public was misled on that question,” and that such a response was nothing but an insult invented to hurt her. The newspapers repeated the accusation and Louise was almost condemned as a schismatic. According to Niels, “[t]he press of England and America echoed the sentiments in a complacent fashion, as if the cause of Louise was linked to that of the Catholic Church.”⁹⁶ In this justification of Louise’s actions, Niels even stated that the letters that had been published were apocrypha: they were either falsified or truncated by Dumont. He added that Louise had confirmed that these were not the words she had written to him.⁹⁷ Niels further claimed that Louise had never supported Dumont in his extravagances and acts of madness, and that she had only shown him the respect he deserved as long as he was her bishop. According to Niels, she had also advised him several times to relinquish his office, and she stopped seeing him the moment she had been forbidden to receive him. Therefore, she could in no way be accused of schismatic intentions.

Conclusions

Only five years after personifying Catholicism hanging from a scaffold on a carnival wagon, Louise featured in the Belgian press as a symbol of tensions among Catholics, stubbornly loyal to a bishop who had been discharged by the Pope on the grounds of mental health. That she featured in the press accounts about the bishop, and that her opinion counted for something, was a result of the fame she had built in the previous years as a symbol of Catholicism, which had been cultivated in the press accounts about her.

Louise indeed functioned as one of those disruptive forces for European Catholics — but only at the moment she started to speak and write, when her carefully constructed public image of an obedient, innocent girl could no

95. “. . .victime admirablement choisie, préparée, formée par Dieu, rendue par lui, aussi parfaitement qu’il est possible à une créature humaine, conforme au Christ souffrant, pour expier (...) les péchés qui se commettent dans le diocèse de Tournai à une époque bien troublé de son histoire (...)” Archives of Jan De Grauwe, Religiosi, Dom Guerrin, copy of letter from Guerrin to Vrignault, July 1889 and to Armand Thiéry, 16 December 1910. Jan De Grauwe, “Claude Guerrin, missionnaire et chartreux,” in *Chartreux: hier et aujourd’hui, Analectica Cartusiana* 134 (1996): 91–101, 99.

96. “Le public a été égaré et trompé au sujet de cette question ... La presse d’Angleterre et d’Amérique s’en est faite l’écho complaisant, comme si la cause de Louise était liée à celle de l’Église catholique.” Niels, *Louise Lateau et Mgr Dumont. Mémoire justificatif* (Louvain: Bulletin National Belge de N.D. Lourdes, 1905), 5.

97. Niels, 19 and 30. He based this on his diaries from the time and had interviewed Louise on the matter.

longer be upheld. Beforehand, her patient, voluntary suffering had been a source of comfort and inspiration, inciting religious fervour among those whose faith might have been wavering. That her fame reached beyond borders had much to do with the international orientation of Catholicism, anti-Catholicism, and the medical debates of her time. Nonetheless, the way her public persona was created and the elements emphasised by her supporters differed according to the national context. To German Catholics, who felt beleaguered during the *Kulturkampf*, she had a particularly German political meaning. Majunke, as even the Belgian liberal journals admitted, had done a great job in spreading her fame and presenting her to the German Catholics in a meaningful way.

Ironically, contrary to other religious celebrities who were loaded with political meaning (e.g., prophets or popes), it was her muteness that made her an attractive symbol. For German and Belgian Catholics, she represented the suffering Church and functioned as proof of God's presence on earth. However, things changed when Louise appeared to take sides. Interestingly, it is this moment of conflict between the two faces of Louise that best illustrates the machinations behind her public image. According to two of her supporters, Niels and Guerrin, the whole episode did more harm than good, and its impact needed to be minimised, either by silence or through the denial of certain elements. Niels reconstructed Louise as an obedient girl, but perhaps just a little too loyal. For him, she was and would remain indicative of God's anger against the liberal Catholics, but she was not the symbol of a schismatic Church.

Louise never "made it" as a prophetess, nor did she complete her mission. After her death, her body again became the central focus of attention in the laudatory Catholic accounts, and her prophecies were forgotten. Louise was silenced and, as a result, her case was open to interpretation by all. Thus, she became a symbol for "all" Catholics once again.