

# A Time for Gurus

Many in France look to a highly distinguished, if eccentric, microbiologist who touts a treatment for Covid-19.

by Theodore Dalrymple



**No time is more propitious** for the emergence of gurus, saviors, cranks, and mavericks than during an epidemic. Excessive fear and hope hold reason in abeyance; never are straws clutched at with such avidity. It sometimes seems as if we have returned to the mentality of fourteenth-century Florence or Siena.

France has a new savior—neither its president nor the savior proclaimed as such by its former religion, but Professor Didier Raoult, an eminent microbiologist who works in Marseille. He strongly, indeed loudly, advocates the use of hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin in the treatment of patients with Covid-19. By implication, at least, President Trump believes, or believed, in him.

The professor looks the part of guru or savior. He has been

described as resembling a chieftain from the pages of the Asterix comic strip, or an aging hippie who strums a guitar. His long, dank hair is in the style of a pop singer, circa 1970, and underneath his white clinician's tunic he dresses with the studied, or provocative, casualness of the