

Editorial

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Welcome to the (belated) 2023 issue of the *Journal for the Study of Religious Experience*! This new issue addresses non-ordinary experiences in the tradition of Sir Alister Hardy and presents three approaches to the study of religious experience. The first focuses on the over 6,000 personal accounts of experiences reported by ordinary citizens who donated their written narratives on the non-ordinary to the Religious Experience Research Centre (RERC) archive. The second paper addresses the role of Spiritualism and mediumistic experience on the Women's suffrage movement in the US, and the third paper deals with a famous saint's ecstatic experiences and miraculous associated phenomena. This is followed by a commentary on 'pseudo-skepticism.'

The first article presents the annual Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture from 2022, delivered on October 15th at the Friends Meeting House in Oxford by Marianne Rankin, Director of Communications of the Alister Hardy Trust. It reflects her PhD-research - sponsored by the trust - which delves deep into the archives of the Religious Experience Research Centre at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, to research the thematic "fruits" - or consequences - that follow from religious and spiritual experiences. Notably, Rankin explores the concept of altruism as an underlying characteristic of the varieties of those fruits.

The second paper by Sarah Porch-Lee examines the role of Spiritualism and the mediumistic experience in galvanising both the Women's Suffrage movement in nineteenth century America, and the academic study of religious experience. The three social and cultural phenomena - Spiritualism, Women's Suffrage and the Study of Religious Experience - frequently overlapped and vitalised and reinforced one another in a variety of very interesting ways.

The final two papers focus their attention on what might be considered a 'high strangeness' form of religious experience (Hunter, 2020) - *levitation*, and the controversies that surround it. To begin Bob Rickard - founding editor of the *Fortean Times* - addresses the 'flying saint' of the seventeenth century, Saint Joseph of Copertino (Giuseppa Desa of Copertino, 1603-1663), building on 35 years of eyewitness accounts of his 'flying career' the paper critiques the skeptical dismissal of human levitation, in particular Joe Nickell's

explanation for Joseph's ecstatic flights, published in the *Skeptical Inquirer* magazine (Nickell, 2018). As Bob Rickard points out in his extensive paper, for Saint Joseph, these bouts of levitation were spontaneous, induced by his prayers when raptures occurred, and not as a demonstration of self-centred power to those who witnessed them. Saint Joseph was renowned for his 'spiritual humility' during his life, as Rickard puts it. And here we may find a link with Rankin's research on altruism and spiritual experiences in the previous article. Rickard's paper is a revised and expanded version of an article published in the *Fortean Times* earlier this year (Rickard, 2024).

Following Rickard's extensive discussion, Michael Grosso, author of *The Man Who Could Fly: St. Joseph of Copertino and the Mystery of Levitation* (2016), offers his own thoughts on the content of Joe Nickell's review of the book, which proposes some alternative explanations for Joseph of Copertino's levitations. Grosso suggests that these skeptical explanations fail to account for the huge quantity of eyewitness testimony and documentary evidence that exists for Joseph's miraculous levitations.

Finally, to round out the issue, we have a new call for papers focusing on the fascinating topic of 'AI and Religious Experience,' so if you have any interest in submitting a paper to this forthcoming special issue exploring any aspect of this theme, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us to discuss your ideas. Details can be found on page 78.

We sincerely hope that you enjoy the issue!

References

Grosso, M. (2016). *The Man Who Could Fly: St. Joseph of Copertino and the Mystery of Levitation*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.

Hunter, J. (2021). 'Deep Weird: High Strangeness, Boggle Thresholds and Damned Data in Academic Research on Extraordinary Experience.' *Journal for the Study of Religious Experience*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 5-18.

Nickell, J. (2018). 'Secrets of 'The Flying Friar': Did St. Joseph of Copertino Really Levitate?' *Skeptical Inquirer*, Vol. 42, No.4.

Rickard, B. (2024). 'Flight of Fancy? Can the Levitations of Saint Joseph of Copertino be Explained?' *Fortean Times*, Issue 443.