

To the Editor,

For reasons that are not entirely clear to me, parapsychologists have usually been reluctant to investigate phenomena occurring in a religious context. The following account occurs in a book written by a social anthropologist who set out to investigate allegedly paranormal healings which occurred during missions conducted by the 'charismatic' Christian evangelist John Wimber. This particular phenomenon happened in the presence of a young girl who claimed to be receiving visions of Jesus. Both the girl's pastor and his wife saw . . .

. . . a grey mist that came up . . . arched up along one wall of the room. I knew it covered half a chair, blotted out the dressing table and just a bit of the mirror was poking out of the mist. I looked round the rest of the room and looked back and it gradually went from the top. This was while Jill was worshipping the Lord and his presence was powerful there. So real . . . I couldn't see the furniture through it.

[Lewis, p.18]

Although the author doesn't say so, this presumably occurred in a room with normal lighting. The author connects this "grey mist" with the Shekinah, or cloud of God's presence, which, according to 2 Chronicles 5, vv. 13-14, filled the temple of the Lord "so that the priests could not stand to minister". When I read his account, however, I was immediately reminded of Mollie Goldney's description of the curious 'fog' which she observed at one of the Rudi Schneider sittings. The resemblance between the two accounts, some sixty years apart in time, is astonishing:-

I was lucky enough to witness on one occasion the curious 'fog' which has been described by other investigators; in good red light and from very near, a sort of dense fog which moved . . . On the Braunau occasion it seemed to advance across the small living-room from the side furthest from the tactually controlled medium, much as a Scotch mist advances across a moor, obliterating each object as it passed; and then it seemed to recede in the direction from whence it had come. [Underwood, p.168]

I need hardly point out the extreme difficulty that would be involved in trying to fake such a phenomenon, unless we assume that someone managed to smuggle a large quantity of 'dry ice' into the séance room! The fact that virtually identical phenomena have been reported in totally different settings over long periods of time is, to my mind, one of the principal reasons for thinking that these phenomena may be authentic. But what does it all mean? Once again, as so often in psychical research, we have 'facts in search of a theory'.

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Underwood, P. (1985) *The Ghost Hunters: Who they Are and What they Do.* London: Robert Hale.