

Os textos são da exclusiva responsabilidade dos autores  
*All texts are of the exclusive responsibility of the authors*

## **TRANSCENDENT EXPERIENCES AND HOURISHING EXCHANGES RESULTING FROM VISITS TO LOURDES**

Paul Dieppe, Sarah Goldingay, Sara Warber & Emmylou Rahtz

University of Exeter Medical School, Exeter, UK.

### **Grant 118/16**

**Background:** The Catholic pilgrimage site of Lourdes, in South West France, is best known for reports of miraculous cures of physical disease resulting from pilgrims' visits. Following our previous visits to Lourdes, the authors hypothesised that more common positive outcomes for pilgrims might be improvements in health and wellbeing, facilitated by transcendent (spiritual or noetic) experiences.

**Aims:** We wished to ascertain whether visitors to Lourdes who take part in religious healing rituals would have transcendent experiences, and whether they described positive changes in physical, mental or spiritual health.

**Method:** During a 10-day visit to Lourdes 5 researchers embedded themselves in the culture of Lourdes, taking part in the rituals there, and working closely with three specific pilgrimage groups. We collected data through interviews, pictures, and ethnographic observation. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The data was subjected to thematic analysis.

**Results:** We obtained recorded interviews from 67 visitors, many of whom were sick and who had come in the hope of a cure (ages 15-87, 72% female). Of these 26 described some sort of transcendent, spiritual or noetic experience whilst there - most commonly when alone in the grotto rather than during a religious ritual. These experiences were often intense, resulting in feelings of immense joy, love, peace or a sense of connection with something outside of the self. Some described lasting benefits. The other big theme to emerge from the data was 'positive change': respondents describing a wide variety of personal changes in their physical, mental or spiritual health, and in their identity, facilitated by nourishing exchanges with others in Lourdes.

**Conclusions:** Visits to Lourdes can result in powerful personal 'out-of-the-ordinary' experiences, and changes in health status and identity. How and why this occurs requires further research. We believe that these phenomena are the 'true miracle of Lourdes' rather than the rare cures of physical disease that have attracted most attention and research there.

**Keywords:** Lourdes, Transcendent experiences, Identity change, Healing rituals

### **Publications:**

Dieppe, P., et al. (2021). Many miracles take place each day, in the spirit and in the heart. *Bulletin De L'Association Medicale Internationale de Notre-Dame De Lourdes*, 352, 42-51.

Goldingay, S., Dieppe, P., Warber, S., & Rahtz, E. (2021). Nourishing exchanges: Care, love, and chronicity in Lourdes. In A. Hatala & K. Rouger (Eds), *Spiritual, Religious and faith-based practices in Chronicity* (pp. 100-123). London, UK: Routledge. doi: 10.4324/9781003043508-6

Rahitz, E., Warber, S. L., Goldingay, S., & Dieppe, P. (2021). Transcendent Experiences Among Pilgrims to Lourdes: A Qualitative Investigation. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 60(6), 3788-3806. doi: 10.1007/s10943-021-01306-6

**E-mail contact:** [P.Dieppe@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:P.Dieppe@exeter.ac.uk)