

Cuando Hablan Los Espiritus—Historias del Movimiento Kardeciano en la Argentina [When the Spirits Speak: A History of the Kardecian Movement in Argentina] by Juan Gimeno, Juan Corbetta, and Fabiana Savall. Buenos Aires: Editorial Dunken, 2010. 384 pp. US\$20. ISBN 9789870248163.

Throughout human history, the common necessity to create myths, stories, urban legends, systems of thought, and beliefs associated with the possible survival of one's personality after death has excited all cultures without exception. (p. 17)

This quotation by Dr. Alejandro Parra begins the Prologue that introduces the book *When the Spirits Speak—A History of the Kardecian Movement in Argentina [Cuando Hablan Los Espiritus—Historias del Movimiento Kardeciano en la Argentina]*; it very succinctly summarizes a human need to know what is beyond the worldly life we humans experience here on the earth plane. Is there something more? What happens to the soul essence of the person once the transition known as death occurs? Can spirits return to communicate with those left here on the earth plane?

These are a few of the questions raised and answered by coauthors Juan Gimeno, Juan Corbetta, and Fabiana Savall in this very detailed and well-documented academic book which tackles head-on the idea of life after death and the long and colorful history surrounding the belief systems connected with Spiritism and Modern Spiritualism. Most importantly, the history of Spiritism, as prescribed by Allan Kardec (1804–1869)—a French educator (and later, author) who gained widespread acclaim and notoriety as the founder of Spiritism—is the focus of this book.

It is interesting to note that it was not until Kardec was in his fifties that he became interested in spirituality, and this was only after witnessing some “spirit tapping” (a phenomenon where Spirits make contact with humans by making tapping sounds) which had gained in popularity in the United States with the advent of Modern Spiritualism. Although he was not a professionally trained scientist, he decided to do his own research and subsequently wrote a number of books that are still in circulation today, most notably *The Spirits' Book* and *The Book on Mediums*.

This is the beginning of the Spiritism movement that this book is about. Although Modern Spiritualism and Spiritism are as closely related as a parent and a child, one primary difference in the early years of both movements was the fact that Spiritism openly embraced the idea of reincarnation and Modern Spiritualism was much slower to do so (today, a number of Spiritualists, as well as Spiritists, actively embrace the idea of reincarnation in their spiritual beliefs).

When the Spirits Speak offers readers a very thorough and complete examination of spirit communication from its early beginnings to modern-day times in Argentina. The authors meticulously, and in painstaking detail, research the movement's highs and lows throughout its long history. It is quite obvious that the authors are passionate about this topic because as I read through the book I could feel their devotion and love for the subject. It offers an interesting viewpoint that seems almost nostalgic (similar to what one might encounter in an autobiography) and almost wistful for the golden age of Spiritism.



The authors make some rather grandiose claims at the beginning of the book which purport to prove scientifically the existence of Spirits and subsequently Spiritism's attraction over other mainstream or traditional religions, offering debates between Christian and Catholic orthodox leaders. I would have liked to have read more about the process of these debates, however, in order to come to a more concrete conclusion regarding that which was being debated. The issue, I suppose, is that in any religion "faith" is the cornerstone from which all other beliefs are made. For people who have experienced spirit communication personally, no amount of debate or arguments for or against it will ever be enough to convince them about what they otherwise know internally, from an intuitive vantage point. "Faith," and their experience with this faith, is what make people followers of any religion or movement.

Will science someday prove the existence of spirits inhabiting an "other" worldly realm that can communicate with those left behind? Perhaps. But until it does, people must follow their own personal faith and belief system based on personal experience in the religious tradition which they follow. Spiritism and Modern Spiritualism are no different. For those who have experienced spirit communication personally, it allows them to have an unshakeable faith that is experiential. Who knows? Perhaps science will someday finally catch up with Spiritism and Modern Spiritualism, confirming what many people over the eons have already realized to be true intuitively.

If I were to have a criticism of the book, which I really do not, it would be that I would have appreciated more contrastive information in its historical review of Spiritism in order for the reader to make his or her own conclusions about the movement of Spiritism. This is a minor point, however, when considering all the historical detail which is included, as well as the academic

referencing of primary and secondary sources. Perhaps in the future, should the authors have a followup work to this book, it might be nice if other doctrines were included in order to offer a contrastive review with other belief systems.

Although I am not a native Spanish speaker, I was easily able to read the book, as it is written in a very down-to-earth manner, allowing non-experts to understand and follow without difficulty the information contained within it. Some academic books get bogged down in using technical terms which limit the understanding to specialized experts. Not this book—it allows novices interested in the topic to grasp easily the points and suppositions.

I certainly recommend this book to people who are interested in spirit communication and its history. It would make a nice addition to anyone's existing library as it fills a hole in published materials on the subject of the history of Spiritism in Argentina.

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