

in the past, crossing time and distance barriers between the current practitioner and the ancients. The presence of those who have performed the ritual in the past is felt in the present. Fox takes this idea a step further, defining liturgy, or ritual, as *celebration as education*. Through ritual, he says, we learn about the source of our existence and we experience an inner connectivity. We also learn not only about our past and present, but our future as well. Fox and Sheldrake both call for rituals that employ technology, "Electronic media, including TV screens, could, through their flickering, liquid light, tap into very ancient ritual morphic fields, while being thoroughly modern at the same time." In another sense, Sheldrake says that what scientists do already has a ritual dimension, "Scientists are like priests in an interesting sense insofar as they're reading the oracles of Nature."

In the end, the purpose of these discussions on *Natural Grace* is not to provide conclusive answers. Rather, it's a call for developing a new way of exploring the questions of the universe and then educating the public to this new world view. The separation of science and nature can be turned around by the modern scientist who reclaims the initial, emotional, perhaps even spiritual, sense of curiosity and wonder that drew him or her into a particular field. By remembering their personal journey, scientists can participate in ritual and explore the "meaning of ritual as memory" says Fox.

Much of what science has revealed about Nature has been left in a sterile state, insulated from the world of the spirit. With the riches of Nature that science has opened up come new opportunities for thanksgiving, for praise, and for wonder at the creativity underlying all things. In this fuller context the truth of the mind and the truth of the heart can come together. Effective praise depends on paying attention, and science makes available to us both a new image of the creative, evolving cosmos and an amazing wealth of detail through which our praise can be informed.

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Deceived **by the** Light, by Doug Groothuis. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1995, 203 pp. ISBN 1-56507-301-0.

As someone once remarked, the problem with America is that you can't tell the inmates from the ones walking around the streets. As an example, back in 1968 and thus long before diversity, multi-culturalism and PC were words which inspired conflict, I was attending an evening fireside talk by a US park ranger in one of our national parks. The park ranger spoke glowingly about how we (*i.e.*, middle-class whites) could learn much from the Indians — they became "Native Americans" only many years later — in the way of treating the land, respecting the elderly and so on. After the talk, some of us chatted with the speaker, expressing how much we agreed with what he had to say. One

of the people in the audience said that he was a missionary who had just returned from a long stay with south-sea islanders and he could reaffirm that indigenous people had much we of the West could learn from. Then, rather casually he remarked that the way to heaven is through the hole in Orion's belt.

This was meant entirely literally, exemplifying the danger inherent when judging someone by outward appearance. He looked as sane as any other typical American and perhaps that should have tipped me off. Likewise for the book, *Deceived by the Light*, by Doug Groothuis. With the word *deceived* in the title, I imagined it would be a debunking of all the other *light* books — *Embraced by the Light*, *Saved by the Light*, *Beyond the Light*, and *Closer to the Light* — which deal with near-death experiences (NDEs). Groothuis's picture on the back cover, however, shows him to be a reasonable-looking fellow in a blue shirt, tie and jacket so I should have been wary.

Light plays a ubiquitous role in NDEs, hence its place in the titles. People who have claimed NDEs almost always use this metaphor literally and specifically to represent their feelings of emerging from a physical and/or a spiritual darkness. Almost invariably they see Jesus, some see spirits, some see angels, some have a life-review, some have an out of body experience, some subsequently become psychics and so on. In the appendix, "Is it all in the Brain?" Groothuis presents a summary of the scientific evidence to the contrary, that is, wholly physical explanations such as lack of oxygen, powerful drugs, release of endorphins and so on. He rejects outright any purely scientific exegesis:

The near-death experience proves to be a challenge to the materialism of modern science, just as it challenges those who are spiritually inclined to interpret its meaning properly.

While modern science's failings are reserved for the appendix, the majority of the book is given over to critiquing the spiritual interpretations of NDEs. Groothuis feels that "some NDEs are real experiences of the spiritual world, and that they indicate that the soul can exist apart from the body. However, this does not guarantee that all NDEs reveal the truth about the afterlife."

The truth, according to him is to be found exclusively in the New Testament or at least in his interpretation of what is found in the New Testament. He dismisses Betty J. Eadie's *Embraced by the Light* because of its Mormonism heresy while other NDE participants are seen as bearers of new-age fluff who proclaim "that religious doctrines don't matter" or who deny the existence of hell, a very important place in conventional Christianity according to Groothuis.

In fact, I suspect his real dislike for NDEs is because "The Christian faith is rooted in one who has returned from the dead, not as an NDEr, but as the risen Lord of the universe." In other words, the NDErs have taken on some sort of Christ fixation, a point of view I would have guessed myself without resorting

to a discussion of the putative wavelengths of the various lights, kundalini energy (divine energy coiling at the base of the spine) or the absolute necessity of the literal validity of the resurrection as Groothuis does.

Consequently, just as with that missionary back in 1968 who agreed with the progressive view concerning aboriginal people but had a weird concept of astronomy, Groothuis and I share a skepticism regarding NDEs and the associated mystical prose; but we part company rapidly after that as he seeks a justification for his theological position that Scripture explains all and always.

We further share, as demonstrated by the very opening lines to the first chapter of *Deceived by the Light*, a leaning towards the words of someone who has made a living at poking fun of his need for psychiatric care, Woody Allen. Although Allen is not a scientist, a theologian, a Christian or an NDEr, he may have said it completely with, "I'm not afraid of death. I just don't want to be there when it happens."

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Top Secret/Majic, by Stanton T. Friedman, Marlowe and Company, New York, 1996, 272 pp., \$22.95, ISBN 1-56924-830-3.

This is Stan Friedman's first book authored solely by himself. Although some of the material has appeared in other publications such as the *Mufon Journal* or the *International UFO Reporter*, this book is a unified presentation of the principal documents bearing the code word Majic within them, and includes several previously unpublished new documents, including an alleged 1954 operations manual that gives instructions to various project teams on how to "be able to more expertly deal with Unidentified Flying Objects, Extraterrestrial Technology and Entities, and increase the efficiency of future operations."

Mr. Friedman presents his often stated trademark position that some UFOs are someone else's spacecraft, and introduces with high clarity the documentation that strongly suggests that our government contains agencies which have consistently, successfully and intentionally misled the public by trying to cover up the evidence: the evidence of crashes, the testimony of witnesses, and the existence of a covert UFO investigation program.

Friedman's book begins with a foreword by Whitley Strieber, who speaks to the quality of the book, and does not refer to his own experience or reputation as an abductee. This very readable foreword provides some facts about the bizarre record of federal court judge Gesell's decision to keep 156 classified National Security Agency UFO documents secret, including the majority of the rationale for such a decision.