

From Benthamite to Coleridgean

Eben Alexander. *Proof of Heaven*. New York: Simon, 2012. Print.

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

Hamlet 1.5.187-188

Proof of Heaven is subtitled *A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife*. It was recommended to me by two different people whose opinions and experiences I respect. One is a missionary whom I have known for many years. The other is a Salvation Army counselor whom I have known even longer. They have different reasons for appreciating this book. As an English teacher and, therefore, a *de facto* literary critic, I have my own reasons for enjoying this book. If nothing else, it made me think. My goal with this review is to share some of those thoughts.

There are any number of life after death books out there. Over the years I have read a few. One I read back in the seventies—a long enough time that I cannot remember either the title or author. Two recent books besides *Proof of Heaven* that sold many copies were *Ninety Minutes in Heaven* and *Heaven is for Real*.

All three books do a lot to establish the credibility of the person with the heavenly experience—what Alexander in *Proof of Heaven* calls an NDE, a near death experience. The author of *Ninety Minutes* is a Baptist pastor who was driving a car that collided with a tractor-trailer. He was clinically dead for ninety minutes. Most Christians (at least those who do not consider the author's brand of Baptists to be heretics) accepted his story because of who he was and what he went through physically.

If anything, *Heaven is for Real* bore witness to more people because the testimony belonged to a three year old boy. True, his father was a minister, but the things the boy shared could not be attributed to his imagination. These are things that a boy his age would have little knowledge of and surely would be unable to lie about. And even the strictest religionist (“us four and no more”) would hesitate to say that God would send a three year old kid to hell...

Proof of Heaven is reminiscent of both of those other books because it spends more time describing the author's illness and recovery than his actual experience in heaven. *Proof of Heaven* differs in one significant way, however. Dr. Alexander was fifty-four years old and not especially religious. He admits that he attended church on Christmas and Easter and occasionally in between. He describes a setback in his life nine years earlier that embittered him, and after that he decided that God either did not exist or did not care much about Eben Alexander.

In the tradition of physicians going back at least to Chaucer, Dr. Alexander tended to see everything in material terms. Because he was a neurosurgeon and often worked with people who were dying or whose brains ceased to function for periods of time, he was not

unfamiliar with the concept of the NDE. However, he could always explain them “scientifically” because he believed that consciousness was completely and only a physical function of the brain.

Dr. Alexander confesses that “over the years my scientific worldview gently but steadily undermined my ability to believe in something larger.” (35) This is very similar to the way Nathaniel Hawthorne describes the apostate physician Roger Chillingworth in chapter nine of *The Scarlet Letter*: “[I]t may be that the higher and more subtile faculties of such men were materialized, and that they lost the spiritual view of existence.”

Again Dr. Alexander says: “I knew full well what the brain really is: a machine that produces the phenomenon of consciousness. Sure, scientists hadn’t discovered exactly how the neurons of the brain managed to do this, but it was only a matter of time before they would be.” (36)

This statement is typical of many who claim to look at things scientifically. Any student of logic, though, recognizes this line of reasoning as the fallacy known as *argumentum ad futuram*—the appeal to the future. “We really have not proven this yet, but we will.” If you think about that, such an argument really claims to be prophetic if not supernatural. This is the irony of many supposed scientific beliefs. As Hawthorne noted above, these affirmations are not so much scientific as materialistic.

To sum up Alexander’s testimony, he said, in effect, I really did not believe in the supernatural or life apart from the visible physical reality. Being a brain surgeon, I am smart, and I know how the brain works. Yet, I was completely brain dead for a week, but I never lost consciousness that whole time. I was introduced to a realm that was so remarkable that I hardly know how to express it in words. To me, this is proof of heaven.

Like the other two books, there are only what amount to a handful of short chapters that describe the NDE. Like the other two books, there is much more about the events leading up to the NDE, the medical details, and the recovery afterwards. (*Ninety Minutes* is especially striking in its description of the painful and grueling rehabilitation procedure the author endured in order to be able to move his body again.)

Alexander repeatedly emphasizes that bacterial meningitis caused his cerebral cortex to shut down so that there was no brain function at all, yet he was conscious the entire time, just in another world or worlds.

Some criticized *Heaven is for Real* for its relative vagueness. How is a three-year-old going to remember any experience? The vagueness in that case adds to its authenticity. The boy was not being prepped or prodded by anyone.

Ninety Minutes in Heaven is clearly the most specific of the three books, though only two or three chapters are devoted to the time the author was in Heaven. There are a few things to consider about that testimony. The author of that book is Christian minister who was ushered into the presence of God and other people whom he knew had been believers on

earth. He was also accustomed to preaching and sharing specific insights from his studies. His livelihood depended on effective communication. He also worked with one of the best ghostwriters alive today in Cecil Murphey.

Proof of Heaven is somewhat vague in its descriptions, but unlike *Ninety Minutes*, Alexander had no context to understand much of what was happening. He says that what he experienced was, as the hymn says, “beautiful beyond description,” so he does not do much to describe things, but he tries.

Alexander notes that he spent time going back and forth between or among three different places. He calls the first place the “Earthworm’s-Eye View.” He says that it was as if he were in a dark place with roots growing down all around him and that he could barely make out vague forms in the darkness. He gave it that name because he imagined that if an earthworm were underground with lots of roots around it and could see through the soil to some degree, this is what it would see.

Some NDEs describe some kind of “waiting place” or borderland (the Latin word *limbo* means “border” which has a similar but more specific meaning in Catholic dogma). This is like the way some people describe Sheol (see, for example, Psalm 16:10). That word is often translated *hell* in English Bibles, but may possibly be different from the place of eternal torment. Whatever this place was, it was not a great place to be. On one of his visits back there, Alexander said that he had become very scared because he was afraid he was going to be separated from God. He said that most times there after the first time, as he started thinking about God and how good and great He was, he could feel himself being lifted out of this place.

This reminded me of the experience of a friend of mine. I did not know this man until after he had become a Christian, but in his twenties he had been a biker. Although he was not a member of a specific gang, he worked in a motorcycle repair shop, often rode with different gang members, and identified with them. He was in a motorcycle accident that paralyzed him from the waist down. While he was on the operating table after his accident, he said that he was aware that he was leaving his body. He said that he could look down and see his body on the operating table surrounded by doctors. (The boy in *Heaven is for Real* had a similar experience, but he ended up in a different place.)

Then, he said, a reptilian hand grabbed one of his legs and began pulling him down. It was getting hotter and darker. He said to himself, “I am dying, and I am going to hell.” He said that he did not feel afraid because he understood the justice. He deserved to go to hell because of the life he had led.

He then felt another hand from above pull him back, and he was once again above the operating table and then back into his body. He did not immediately repent in spite of this experience, but it did make him aware that he needed to do something to change the course of his life.

It sounds as if Dr. Alexander was in a place where, like this ex-biker, he could have gone in either direction.

Alexander calls the second place he visited the Gateway. This was a beautiful land above the first place where he first had a sense of eternity. He emphasizes repeatedly that there is little sense of time there. He could not tell whether he had been minutes or weeks in this state. It was here that he was to meet with a beautiful female being in a colorful outfit with wings like a butterfly. She told him three things: “*You are loved and cherished dearly, forever. You have nothing to fear. There is nothing you can do wrong.*” (Italics in original)

There was a beautiful landscape and in the distance what he calls a village. All three books note the sounds of beautiful music in the atmosphere praising God. Alexander said that it sounded like humming as though the voices were saying “Om.” As a result, he uses the words *Om* and *God* interchangeably in the book.

The third place he visited he called the Core. He was more aware here that he was in the presence of God though he could not see Him. He was aware, too, that God was eternal and that He had created everything. He said that above him were angelic “orbs” praising God in what he called a Spinning Melody. He noted that the angelic person who had accompanied him by the Gateway also became one of those orbs while they were in the Core.

Although Alexander repeatedly apologizes for trying to describe things that he has no words for, those orbs do sound like the vision of Ezekiel. He described seeing four creatures with sparkling wheels under them, a “wheel intersecting a wheel.” For the full description, see Ezekiel 1:15-24.

As I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the ground beside each creature with its four faces. This was the appearance and structure of the wheels: They sparkled like chrysolite [topaz], and all four looked alike. Each appeared to be made like a wheel intersecting a wheel. As they moved, they would go in any one of the four directions the creatures faced; the wheels did not turn about [change direction] as the creatures went. Their rims were high and awesome, and all four rims were full of eyes all around.

When the living creatures moved, the wheels beside them moved; and when the living creatures rose from the ground, the wheels also rose. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, and the wheels would rise along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. When the creatures moved, they also moved; when the creatures stood still, they also stood still; and when the creatures rose from the ground, the wheels rose along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked something like an expanse [a vault], sparkling like ice [crystal], and awesome. Under the

vault their wings were stretched out one toward the other, and each had two wings covering its body. When the creatures moved, I heard the sound of their wings, like the roar of rushing waters, like the voice of the Almighty, like the tumult of an army. When they stood still, they lowered their wings. (New International Version, [Revised NIV])

As Ezekiel in this same vision described an expanse “sparkling like ice,” so Dr. Alexander saw a dark expanse with brilliant flashes of lights. He quoted the Christian poet Henry Vaughn (1621-1695) who wrote “There is, some say, in God a deep but dazzling darkness.” (48, from the poem “Night”) Vaughn is classified as one of the metaphysical poets. Dr. Alexander certainly had a metaphysical experience, *literally*—an experience “beyond the physical.”

One curious thing about Alexander’s NDE was that he was completely unconscious of any past life. When the person who met him at the Gateway (he figures out later that she was a human being) tells him he will go back, he accepts it but does not know what she is talking about. “I had not earthly memories whatsoever, and the only pain and heartache I felt was when I had to return to earth.” (79)

Perhaps because Alexander had rejected God and was not in a state of grace on earth, he had no memory of earth while in his state of heavenly grace. We are told that the last words Alexander spoke before he lapsed completely into his coma were “God help me!” (24) Even Don Piper in *Ninety Minutes* said that he really did not think of his life on earth other than in a vague sense when Jesus told him that he would be going back. In his case, this later caused some family friction with his wife because he admitted that he never thought about her during those ninety minutes.

I should note also that while some may question Alexander’s religious commitment before his NDE, we are told that his last words before his coma were a cry out to God for help. I am reminded of the Scripture which says, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Romans 10:13, cf. Joel 2:32)

One observation that Alexander repeats in his testimony is the idea that the Creator is human—“even more human than you or I are. [God] understands and sympathizes with our human situation more profoundly and personally than we can even imagine...” (86)

This sounds a lot like the Christian doctrine of the incarnation. God became a man to sympathize with us and save us. The Messiah had to be God and man. The Jewish understanding was that to be completely just, God would have to let a “son of man” judge mankind in order to be perfectly fair because the Divinity could not empathize with a created being. “Son of man” was the name Jesus most frequently used for Himself in the Gospels. Even the Book of Proverbs says:

Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the

ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?
(30:4)

Scripture reminds us of these things especially in the Book of Hebrews, for example, Hebrews 4:14 and 15:

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

The testimony of Heaven, I believe, is why my missionary friend responded to *Proof of Heaven*. She had an experience of Heaven in her own life. I have not heard the details, so I do not know whether it was a dream, a vision, an ascension into Heaven, or an NDE. She did say that out of the things she has read about heavenly experiences, Alexander's description of Heaven was the closest to what she saw.

Alexander tells us that at one point he was told that there were multiple dimensions and multiple universes. He said that he was told, "Evil was necessary because without it free will is impossible, and that without free will there could be no growth—no forward movement, no chance for what God longed for us to be." (48)

Alexander remembers at one point seeing the earth as a "pale blue dot in the immense blackness of physical space" (83) and being told that even on earth good was greater than evil. He says that "The physical side of the universe is a speck of dust compared to the invisible and spiritual part." (82)

A Christian friend had an ascension experience when he was suddenly taken up to the throne of God. He was told to look out behind him. He saw a vastness and in the middle of this vast space he saw what looked like a speck of dust. The Lord asked him what he thought it was.

My friend replied, "The earth?"

The Lord said, "That is the universe."

The last third of *Proof of Heaven* describes Dr. Alexander trying to make sense of his experience. He understands that most of the people he works with in his academic and hospital settings are like the way he was—philosophically materialists. Most of them have dismissed much of what he has shared the same way that he had dismissed such experiences that patients of his had shared with him.

Of course, what his professor and doctor friends cannot explain is how he could experience all these subjectively as some kind of dream or hallucination if his cerebral cortex was not functioning for a week. I had a friend once whose brain function ceased for a few hours while she was hospitalized. She remembered nothing. The book has an

appendix that covers nine different hypotheses for the subjectivity of his NDE and how none of them could have applied in his case.

Alexander says that those of us in the twenty-first century have to re-think what consciousness is. For over a century science has tried to explain consciousness strictly as an artificial product of complicated neural pathways in the brain. That is what he used to believe.

Now he realizes that the physical neural paths are simply a small part of what contributes to consciousness. He now realizes that our spirit, our soul, or our self-aware identity exists outside the four physical dimensions as well.

In the beginning of the book, Alexander notes that when he was a young man he pursued the hobby of skydiving. Once in a dive he had about a second to avert a deadly collision with another diver as they were falling at a speed of about two hundred miles per hour. He instantly changed his position without thinking and missed the other diver. They would have killed or at least dismembered one another in the air had they made contact. Reactions like that, he says, are beyond consciousness.

What Alexander proposes in the last third of the book is almost exactly like the literary or psychological theory of the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. While Coleridge is best known today as a poet and literary critic, he also wrote about theology. As a young man he was an ordained Unitarian minister and preached widely around England. A little before he reached the age of thirty, he converted to Trinitarian Christianity and often included religion in his poems and writings. Indeed, his most famous poem, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, describes the journey of a sailor who discovers the spiritual side of life and his own need for salvation. He wrote this poem at the time he was leaning away from Unitarianism, so it may have reflected what was happening in Coleridge's own life.

John Stuart Mill, the nineteenth century political philosopher said:

Coleridge used to say that every one is born either a Platonist or an Aristotelian: it may be similarly affirmed, that every Englishman of the present day is by implication either a Benthamite or a Coleridgean.

Bentham took Aristotelian materialism to an extreme with his philosophy of Utilitarianism—that something has value only if it is materially useful. Scientific study, for example, could result in something useful like the steam engine. Art has no value because it serves no material purpose.

Now Coleridge was writing before Freud and modern psychology spoke of the conscious or subconscious. During his era, the philosophical concern was between the rational and the imaginative. Coleridge believed that it was the imagination that not only created beautiful works of art but also made scientific breakthroughs as well. Jacob Bronowski in his famous essay “The Creative Mind” would say something very similar.

Like Plato, Coleridge was philosophically an idealist. *Inspiration* literally means “something breathed into.” He said that true inspiration was a coming together of the objective and the subjective. There were physical and metaphysical things that happened to people or that they observed. If they were able to take the objective influence in subjectively and explain or present it in a way that others could see it, then they were effective as either artists or scientists.

This may be Platonic idealism, but it also reflects a Christian understanding. As II Peter 1:21 says about the writers of the Bible, “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” Each writer in the Bible has his own style and experiences—the subjective—but he was communicating what God—the objective—wanted him to say. C. S. Lewis’s professor in *The Last Battle* says more than once, “It’s all in Plato.”

Alexander stresses that in order to understand what makes people tick, we not only have to have a physical understanding but also a spiritual or metaphysical understanding. Dr. Alexander is no longer a “materialized” Dr. Chillingworth or *Canterbury Tales* Physician. In the recently reviewed [The Double Bind](#), one of the characters is a medical student who believes everything can be explained by chemical reactions in the brain. Yet the reader of the novel sees that there is more involved such as violence, sex, fatherlessness, escape. So now does Alexander.

I believe this is why my counselor friend likes this book. He was trained as a counselor in secular psychology, but he has learned that there is more to restoring mental health than having his clients tell stories, attempt behavior modification exercises, take medications, and exercise their wills. There is a spiritual dimension as well. There is a battle between good and evil (see II Corinthians 10:3,4). The Holy Spirit is a spirit of sound mind or self-control. (II Timothy 1:7) Dr. Alexander understands this now. He wants to share this discovery with others. He will have a tough time convincing many people for the same reason that Coleridge’s views were often dismissed.

A younger contemporary of Coleridge mocked Coleridge in a piece that he wrote about him. That writer was Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson, of course, was a transcendentalist. To put his ideas in simplest form, he believed in pantheism—like the dominant oriental religions, he believed that everything is God. *Objective* and *subjective* were artificial terms. If everything is God, then everything is subjective, there is no objective, no other. This means that *good* and *evil* are also artificial terms. If everything is God, then everything is good. Ironically, Emerson also began his career as a Unitarian minister, but he abandoned that for his pantheism.

Needless to say, Emerson is very popular today. Not only do we see the influence of the Hindu and Buddhist ideas in the West going back at least to the beats of the fifties, but the moral relativism is popular, too. One way to prosper in academia today is to say that you identify with Emerson or subscribe to his world view.

A literary critic half a century ago also tried to dismiss Coleridge’s theories as well. His approach was like that of the pre-NDE Alexander—materialistic and “scientific.” I. A.

Richards' *Coleridge on Imagination* purports to present Coleridge's ideas on the imagination, but, in effect, reduces them to an understanding of stimuli and brain synapses.

This approach is also very popular among the educated and academics. Yes, there is a materialistic reductionism, that like Aristotle or Bentham the physical world is all there is. This, too, leaves much ethical wiggle room. If everything is a matter of chemical reactions and response to stimuli—"Agitations in some physical system," says Richards—then good and evil become subjective or artificial constructs.

What does Dr. Alexander say he wants to communicate by sharing his testimony? If we understand that God is eternal, then we need to understand that there is more to life our short lives in this "nasty, brutish" world. If we understand that God is love (I John 4:8), then we can trust Him to take care of us. We also need to understand that our consciousness is more than just a mass of physical stimuli. Alexander now confesses that there is an "enigma of consciousness" (149), that eternity is an objective reality, and that "*I am more than my physical body.*" (158, his italics)

Will Dr. Alexander's testimony reach his intended audience, people like himself? Perhaps a few. After all, the book includes a short statement by one of the attending physicians that Dr. Alexander's recovery "is truly remarkable." (184)

Still, it is difficult for people who have committed to a particular worldview to change in spite of testimony of witnesses that they would deem to be reliable. I suspect many of them are probably also using that *argumentum ad futuram*, "We can't explain it yet, but there must be a scientific explanation for what happened." If it is indeed true, then they *will* discover it for themselves in the future when they pass away. For them, though, it may be too late.

My own experience is like that. No, I had no NDE. However, I did have a born again experience involving God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit at the age of twenty-five. I was not a doctor at the time, but a military officer. I had been educated at one of the universities where Dr. Alexander had been a faculty member.

Like him, I wanted to share my experience. I wanted to tell people I knew that Jesus is real and that the stuff in the Bible makes sense. Because I was familiar with Coleridge, I knew that what had happened to me was something external, something objective, nothing I would have ever thought of generating on my own. Yes, the experience affected me personally, it was subjective in that sense, but the Holy Spirit was external to me.

I confess, though, that few of my friends or family were that interested. Most have remained my friends, but they had their own lives to live that did not really involve an interest in God. A few enlisted men I knew were genuinely interested as were some street people. As St. Paul wrote: "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." (I Corinthians 1:26)

Ironically, I found that many Christians were suspicious, too, because I was a military officer and a graduate of Harvard. I suspect that a number of Christian reviewers might look at *Proof of Heaven* that way because of Dr. Alexander's lack of context.

I did have more of a religious background than Dr. Alexander claims for himself. I attended church regularly and memorized many Bible verses and the catechism in Sunday School and Confirmation classes. English majors at Harvard had to pass a proficiency test on the King James Bible. Still, after my experience I began to understand what it meant to be born again. I was re-learning and un-learning many things. Like Dr. Alexander, now I had an eternal frame of reference, and, looking back, I have to say that the Lord was very loving and even lenient the first few years of my new life. Such things take time. I am thankful that both God and people were patient with me. So must critics be patient with Dr. Alexander.

Anyway, back to Dr. Alexander's view of consciousness, we know that the Bible has a lot to say about divine inspiration, eternity, the conscience, the heart of man, the Spirit of God, and the spirit of man. Nowhere are some of these ideas expressed more directly than in the Book of Ecclesiastes. Alexander's testimony demonstrates the truth of Ecclesiastes 2:11 that God "has put eternity in the hearts of men."

Alexander was clearly amazed by his experience. He was certainly impressed at the greatness of God. One attribute he emphasizes is God's eternal nature. God is eternal, he says. He emphasizes that in some way when we die we enter eternity. Our consciousness continues past death because an eternal God keeps us conscious.

I am reminded of what may be the oldest existing affirmation of God. There is a turquoise mine in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula that used Hebrew slaves for laborers. There is some Hebrew graffiti on the walls of the mine clearly made for the benefit of the Hebrew slaves. Since the writing is prior to the Exodus, this is to the best of my knowledge the oldest extant example of both written Hebrew and alphabetic writing. There are some instructions to the slave miners about what to do with their buckets when they exit the mine. In addition someone wrote, "The Lord is eternal." As Psalm 90:2 says, "[E]ven from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God."

One thing I really appreciate about *Proof of Heaven* is that Alexander admits he is still trying to make sense of all that happened. He was not educated in theology or the Bible the way that Don Piper of *Ninety Minutes in Heaven* was. And perhaps he did not take things at face value the way the three year old Colton Burpo did in *Heaven is for Real*.

I noted one very prominent contradiction in *Proof of Heaven*. It has nothing to do with the actual testimony, but with the author's attempt to interpret things. At one point Alexander writes, "The universe has no beginning or end..." (156) Yet the very next paragraph speaks of "The Big Bang that created our universe..." (157) So did the universe have a beginning or not?

To be fair to the author, this may be a sign of trying to articulate things he cannot express. Whether or not there was a big bang, it is pretty clear from both science and most religions that the universe had a beginning. Entropy is observable. Everything is gradually losing energy. Since the universe is losing energy, it cannot be eternal or it would have ceased existence already. This is something people can agree on whether they think the universe is 15 billion years old or six thousand years old.

I believe what Alexander was trying to say was that the God who created the universe is eternal, not the creation itself. Because of his academic background, he does attempt to be politically correct and try to include various beliefs. He uses the word Om, though not in the Hindu sense but because it sounded like the humming he heard in Heaven. Since Hinduism and Buddhism are pantheistic, those beliefs affirm that the universe is eternal because it is God.

While Alexander may be trying to reconcile these contradictory ideas, he does tell us directly that God is not the same as His creation. “The pure vastness separating Om and me was, I realized, why I had the Orb as my companion.” (47) The Orb was the angelic person who greeted him at the Gateway.

Indeed, that is one spot in the testimony where Alexander comes across as humbled. He had a sense that he needed some kind of intercessor in order for him to approach God. This is a common refrain in the Jewish and Christian scriptures. My friend who had the ascension experience was accompanied by Jesus. He said over and over, pointing to Christ, “The only reason I am here is because of Him.” It was an experience similar to that of Dr. Alexander.

Perhaps the strongest criticism that an orthodox believer would say about *Proof of Heaven* has to do with its tendency to syncretism. Yes, those oriental religions are “world religions” and academics have to be politically correct. I can joke about that a little because while the author uses the word *Om*, he clearly qualifies what he means, and he expresses a belief in a Creator who is different from His creation.

He does share, though, that while he was in his coma, his family consulted not only an Episcopal priest but also an acquaintance who was a medium. Scripture clearly warns against this practice, notably in Deuteronomy 18:10,11 and in the story of the death of King Saul. It is clear that neither Alexander nor his family had any context to understand such practices before his illness, so one can say God has been merciful.

My understanding is that Romans 12:6-8 lists a number of gifts that are given to individuals by God as their Creator. In other words, such a gift is part of our created makeup regardless whether or not we believe in God. Even in everyday speech we speak of someone who is a born leader or who has a tender heart. One of these gifts is the gift of the prophet (verse 6). While there are certainly phonies and tricksters, some people do have this gift but have not yet followed Romans 12:1 to submit themselves to God. The problem is that without the humble submission to God, such an ability can lead to error and worse.

Yes, we are told specifically that the witch whom Saul consulted was getting her direction from evil spirits, but even Balaam messed up. He was well known for his supernatural gift and even gave some remarkable prophecies about the Israelites (see Numbers 23 and 24). He pronounced a blessing of God upon them. Later, though, he was either pressured or bribed to use his gift to tell how the Israelites could lose the blessing. (See Numbers 25 and 31:16, and compare with II Peter 2:15 and Jude 1:11 for details.) If we are inclined to criticize Dr. Alexander or Susan, “the channel” as he calls her, let us pray that they will use what God has given them for His purposes and His truth.

One experience Dr. Alexander described I could really relate to and gives the reader hope for the direction in which he is going. He said that about a month after his NDE he was still recovering but felt strong enough to attend church for the first time since his illness. It was December 2008.

He said that the music, the stained glass windows, and a painting of Jesus’ Last Supper all reminded him of different aspects of his experience. “At last, I understood what religion was really all about...I didn’t just believe in God; I knew God. As I hobbled to the altar to take Communion, tears streamed down my cheeks.” (148)

I had regularly attended church long before I had my born again experience. One reason I kept going was the Communion. I could not express it, I did not really understand it, but I knew two things about Communion: Jesus told us to do it, and there was something about the blood of Jesus that I needed.

The objective reality of the Creator God needs to enter our subjective experience. We do have the free will to keep to our own subjective selves. But why would we if indeed we are loved and cherished, that we have nothing to fear, and that there is nothing we can do wrong, at least in Heaven? Amen. (See I John 3:1-3; I John 4:16-18; and II Corinthians 5:21 and I John 3:4-6.)

P.S. I gathered an interesting tidbit from reading about this NDE. Nine years before his experience, Dr. Alexander had turned against God out of bitterness because a desire of his was not fulfilled. He had been adopted as a baby and wanted to meet his birth family. Because of the laws in the state where he was adopted, he was not permitted to do this. This is what caused his bitterness. Years later he was finally given permission to meet some of these relatives. One of the things that he learned after his NDE was that the woman he met in the Gateway and who accompanied him into the Core was a biological sister who had died a few years earlier. His NDE actually answered that wish in a remarkable way. He did not openly make the connection in the book, but I did. I hope he sees that. The Lord often takes longer answering our prayers than we like. After all, He is eternal.

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