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# A Catholic Understanding of The Near Death Experience

## Revised Edition

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Dedicated to all persons who will ever live. NDE accounts have them greeted as hero's after their trials in this life.

Also by the author:

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**N**ear Death Experiences are remarkably similar over all cultures since first recorded 2500 years ago. The NDE must not be dismissed as hallucination, as there are often objective verifiable observations made. Nor should they be assumed to be “a trick of the devil”. NDE’s show Heaven to be attained to, and Hell avoided, and the life review informs the NDE patient of the requirements to attain Heaven and avoid Hell. Jesus is the single most frequently encountered person in an NDE.

All the major components of the near death experience are within the boundaries of Catholic dogma. The light tunnel is now part of common culture, and it is no real challenge for any theology. However, a casual reader may not be aware of other NDE elements such as reincarnation, previous lives, and “the contract”. ***These are mislabeled, misunderstood and wrongly presumed, but are also within the bounds of Catholic theology.***

The near death experience is a visit to the afterlife, and is enormous in the information and inspiration which may be extracted from it. Each NDE is unique, and there is no systematic NDE religion or doctrine, but there are major repeating elements. NDE’s are unique, private, post-Biblical revelations which must be individually evaluated.<sup>A</sup>

We shall examine how it occurs that a person shows up at the gates of Heaven *by mistake*, before his time. We will examine

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<sup>A</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church, section 67 defines private revelation, which NDE’s fall under. 1Thes 5:19-22 instructs the Church to be open to private revelations, but evaluate them.

the reasons why Christ makes incarnation in the first place, and why a person with one human life under his or her belt would care to leave Heaven and live another.

The NDE is typically a very positive experience for those who have had one, usually instilling a new or renewed commitment to God, faith and virtue. It is impossible to disregard the thousands of NDE reports as false and unwise to ignore them, as they are a wealth of contemporary, first person knowledge of our most important task.

NDE's are private revelations of God. Private revelations are instances of God or an agent of God, (angel, saint) making some sort of revelation to the individual. Moral conscience, speech, visions, dreams, locutions, and more may all be means of private revelation. Private revelations are binding on the individual, and the most common private revelation is moral conscience. A personal revelation of moral conscience may for example direct a person to become a nun or a mother; to defend one's life or to sacrifice one's life. As a form of private revelation, NDE's are actually part of the Catholic faith.

In the famous private revelation to Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes, France the Virgin Mary gave information about herself that became dogma. To date, no NDE has been evaluated as private revelation, (to the author's knowledge).<sup>B</sup> There are many instances of saints being given visits or visions of Heaven, Hell and Purgatory.

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<sup>B</sup> Within Catholicism exists 2000 years of non-NDE visions or mental revelations of Heaven, beginning with the apostle Paul. Two of the more detailed non-NDE visions are those of St. Suso, and the Irish monk Adamnán. Visions of Purgatory and Hell are also numerous recorded. Those having a NDE seem to be in complete mental control and reason. Their visions do reflect their personal and societal culture overlaid upon the absolutes of Heaven.

Approximately five percent of persons worldwide have had an NDE.<sup>c</sup> Most never see a tunnel of light and even fewer meet the light as a person or experience other components of the NDE. NDE's occur in the hospital where one is declared dead, but also at accident and trauma scenes with no medical staff.

The major components of the NDE which will be examined from the perspective of Catholic teaching are:

- Out of body experience
- Light tunnel
- Light being(s)
- Boundary of Heaven
- God
- Jesus
- Previous lives
- Reincarnation
- Life contract and task
- Consensual incarnation
- Life review
- Heaven: characteristics and citizens
- Ancient NDE's
- Unconditional love
- Salvation
- Religion
- Spiritual level (vibration of spirit)
- Spiritual efficacy
- Omnipresence of God

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<sup>c</sup> Five percent is a maximum figure. A near death experience is a condition such as heart stoppage, which requires resuscitation of the patient. Restarting a heart is not an uncommon medical event, it is not death, but it would qualify as a near death experience. If the heart stoppage continues for some time, the patient may have an out of body experience. An NDE is an out of body experience caused by temporary bodily death. About 150,000 people die each day in our world.

- Purgatory
- Hell
- The Devil in NDE's
- Distressing NDE's
- NDE's and the book of Revelation
- NDE other worlds
- Ketamine induced NDE
- Hypoxia induced NDE
- NDE's, culture and religion
- Verification of the NDE
- After effects of the NDE
- NDE's as dogmatic progression

The NDE need not stand alongside the Catholic Church as either erroneous or valid religious expression; the NDE should be seen as contained within, and confirming Catholic doctrine as private revelation. The Catholic Church has for centuries evaluated private revelations occurring outside of a near death experience. These revelations may be found to be fully, partially, or not at all in conformance with Catholic doctrine.

It will be seen in this book that many NDE elements are mislabeled and mistakenly presumed in their theology. These elements are in fact expressions of Catholic doctrine such as the body of Christ, human incarnation and divine omnipresence. The ideas in this book are out of necessity theological theories, which the author believes will show that the major, repeating elements of the NDE are within the bounds of Catholic theology and doctrine.

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We shall begin with two constructed NDE's, one typically positive and the other containing distressing elements, which must be examined in any meaningful NDE study. Few NDE's have all elements, so constructions are useful and they reference actual NDE's. Most of the referenced NDE stories are available online from three of the major NDE websites.<sup>D</sup> There are also a hundred or more books and studies available, many by those experiencing NDE's first hand. The actual NDE's used are cited as endnotes in the appendix.

### **First NDE construction of Jane Doe.**

"It was midnight and I was walking to my car which was parked on the street. A man emerged from hiding and demanded my wallet and keys. He had a knife. I dug into my purse for the wallet and pulled out my pepper spray, but he stabbed me before I got off an effective spray. He stabbed me once more then ran."

"I started my car and drove towards the hospital which was several miles away. On the way I passed out and hit a telephone pole. The next thing I was aware of was looking down at a woman in an emergency medical clinic.<sup>1</sup> She had been stabbed and the staff had just stopped resuscitation attempts."

"It then occurred to me that the woman might be myself. I was near the ceiling, but I could see the entire area of other rooms. I went down to the woman to examine her ring which looked like my own class ring. As I was beside her, trying to lift her arm the nurses moved right through me, and my hand was likewise unable to grasp the victims' hand.<sup>2</sup> I arrived at the certainty that the victim was me because of a tattoo, scars and dental work."<sup>3</sup>

"I was then aware of being pulled into a tunnel of light, and being propelled toward a singular point of light at the end. I felt no

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<sup>D</sup> "www.near-death.com, notable experiences"; www.nderf.org, exceptional NDE's; www.iands.org.

fear, and was entirely at peace. I arrived at the light, which would be unbearable in intensity, but again I felt only peace.”

“The light then took the form of a man.<sup>4</sup> I recognized him as my brother who had died several years ago.<sup>5</sup> Other people came into view, I did not know their faces, but I felt that we were all family. All the while I felt an intense love from all of them. One held a cat that also projected love to me.”<sup>6</sup>

“My brother spoke to me, telling me how proud everyone was of me. I asked him who were these people and where was I? He pointed to a gate and said it was the entrance to Heaven, but it was not yet my time and I could not enter. He also said that Jesus would be pleased to speak with me.”

“I consented, but all the time we were communicating without words, we used only thought. Someone then said, ‘I am pleased to see you Jane’.”

“It was Jesus.<sup>7</sup> I was not told this, but I knew who he was with certainty. He was of medium height with brown hair and quite beautiful.<sup>E</sup> It was now just Jesus and me, and I wondered how he could run Heaven *and* take time out for me alone.”

“Jesus asked me to look at something. I agreed and immediately I was shown my entire life up to the present. It might be described as an interactive holograph. I not only saw, but felt all the effects, good and bad of all my actions. I alone judged myself, but not against my usual indifference or selfishness, but now compared to my new understanding of love, and its real effects. Jesus made some mild comments, such as ‘What were your other options here?’ We both viewed an event from my childhood. As a girl, I dumped a cooler of ice but made the extra effort to dump it on a tree. We both saw this, and Jesus seemed very impressed with this small act of selfless love.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>E</sup> In NDE's Jesus is the single most frequently encountered person, but any member of the body of Christ may be encountered: guardian angel, deceased family, saints, Moses, Buddha.

“Jesus pointed skyward to rays of light traveling to and from earth, saying that these were prayers and their responses.<sup>9</sup> We walked further and I saw ideal landscapes, joyful, engaged people, bounding animals and I felt as if I were one with all of it, and one with God.<sup>10</sup> I observed a sort of spiritual vibration emanating from all people and all things, and was told that each unique person had a unique spiritual print or vibration that was formed from God’s own spirit, and he was the master spirit who kept all else in existence and gave people their own quality of spirit, based on their life on earth.”<sup>11</sup>

“Jesus then brought me before a council of elders, who explained much to me and then told me I must return to earth.<sup>12</sup> I was told that before birth I was an eternal thought of God, I was internal to God. I became incarnate of my own consent with the goal of spiritual advancement which can only come when dealing with a body and especially with the trials of fallen earthly existence. I agreed to this and it is held as a contract or covenant which I am expected to fulfill.<sup>13</sup> I was told that after my life on earth, I would return to God and become Christ himself, this was the body of Christ that I had so often heard of.”<sup>14</sup>

“I was advised to completely forgive the man who had killed me, and to practice unconditional love to all who were put in my life.<sup>15</sup> I was to detach from the accidents of this life and use my religion to further my love of God and others.”<sup>16</sup>

“With that I regained sight of my body on the table and reentered it to the astonishment of the medical staff. In time I recovered and think often of my life now and to come.”

### **Second NDE construction of John Doe.**

This NDE has distressing elements, and these occur in perhaps a quarter of NDE’s.<sup>F</sup> Catholic teaching includes the idea of

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<sup>F</sup> “The Handbook of Near Death Experiences” reports that of 1369 subjects, in

Purgatory and an eternal Hell, but acknowledges it is unable to say if anyone actually exists in eternal Hell. NDE's are similar in theology and do include visions of Hell, but some NDE's speak of the ultimate reunification with God of all persons, even those now in Hell. The actual NDE's used are cited as endnotes in the appendix.

"...As I lost sight of my body on the operating table, I arrived in what seemed to be a waiting area. As I examined it, other people came to my attention, and one who I sensed was out of place. This man held me alone in his attention and spoke, "John, by the prayers of your mother on earth, you have been given a great grace. I will show you the pains of Hell, which you currently pursue, and I will offer you an alternative."

"I could only follow my guide, and we arrived at different locations on earth. At one location I saw a woman trying desperately to drink alcohol at a bar. She was a spirit and was simply unable to drink it. In other locations I saw a man yelling serial complaints at persons on earth, who likewise could not hear the man who was now a spirit.<sup>17</sup> I was told that these people were in a state of purgatory and were slowly exhausting their compulsions.<sup>18</sup> These compulsions were ingrained in their will and as they eventually saw the futility of it, they would direct their wills toward the better things of Heaven."

"We entered an area where I saw people who had killed themselves. Some were eager to tell my guide that they knew now that they should have lived even the most difficult parts of life.<sup>19</sup> They were being taught this by others who had triumphed over feelings of despair and did stick it out. My guide was quite happy to hear of their progress and promised to pass on news of their progress."

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twelve studies, 23 percent had distressing NDE's. During a positive NDE the patient's soul has acute sensation of peace, love and harmony, but during a distressing NDE the soul senses disorder and evil, to some degree great or small.

“I was shown people being beaten by demons and incredibly told that this was not Hell, but the lowest level of Purgatory. My guide asked me to notice how those being beaten did not strike back. He said that such behavior indicated an ideal higher than self was directing their wills, and that such ideals had their origin and sustaining link to God, whether within religion or without. Those being beaten wanted to strike back, but their refusal to retaliate raised them toward a higher level.”

“Finally, I was shown the lowest level of Hell. There was no real boundary. The difference was those in Purgatory still had an inkling of remorse or virtue and this would eventually release them from Purgatory. My guide told me that the highest levels of Purgatory were more like Heaven, and that anyone who was able to, may move from a lower level to a higher level, and then to Heaven, and with God’s gratitude.”

“I asked if any of these demons can ever be released from Hell? My guide answered, ‘Yes, if they are willing to be released. God does not condemn, nor retain them in Hell, they condemn themselves.’<sup>20</sup> Selfishness is the act of distancing one’s own person from God. One withdraws from God into self, and the virtues of God are directed toward self.”

“They must somehow realize the futility of self pursuit, then make a change of will away from self. Time is on their side, they have forever to do it. Once the universe attains its perfected state, they will have no other real conquests and they will run in circles torturing only each other. If they do see the futility of this with their limited self understanding, they will have taken the first step in repentance.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> NDE's do include Hell in all its horror, but they also allude to, or speak directly of ultimate universal salvation, with Hell being eventually overcome. Christ will overcome not only death, but Hell itself. This eventual victory over Hell itself is not expected by current Catholic doctrine, but it is acknowledged as a possibility. By Catholic theology, God cannot possibly produce Hell, or assign and retain people there, because it is an evil with no possible good outcome, therefore it is

“Finally, my guide returned me to my body on earth after having taught me much and I reentered my life on earth with gratitude for a renewed chance to live a better life.”

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The elements contained within these two constructed NDE's will be examined in light of Catholic theology. Many NDE's have elements which are mislabeled and mispresumed. The following two sections are explanations of spirit and the body of Christ. Both topics are essential to our further discussion of NDEs. This book gives ***theological explanation*** of NDEs and a foundation in these elements are essential in making an evaluation. For instance, many NDE elements conform to the Catholic teaching that the faithful are the literal body of Christ, and the single person of Christ is now all who are members of the body of Christ. This is one element pre-examined.

## **Spirit**

Spirit is the “mechanism” as created by God by which creation operates. Events in creation are not a consequence of God pulling strings from Heaven; they are a consequence of humanity pushing levers on earth. These interconnecting levers are spirit: respect, moderation, reverence, love, hate. Just like matter, spirit is a creation of God. God is not a creation of the spirit world; rather, God creates and what he creates is first of all, spirit.

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within the realm of divine power that Hell itself may be one day destroyed. This would require direct intervention of Christ, those in Hell cannot work themselves out of it. See also the section titled “Hell” in this book.

***Spirit is intangible but as real as matter; and it has real effect. Spirit is immaterial being. Being is anything that exists: a rock, an idea, energy, emotion, logic, a person. Patience, respect, hate, reverence, morality, memory, free will, are all spirit, and all have real effect in our world. Spirit is the underlying framework of all creation, and corruption of the willed moral virtues degrades the operation of all creation.***

Spirit forms matter, spirit forms spirit, spirit forms events. Consider that anything that can be described in terms of logic, will, virtue, act, emotion, mathematics or physical law has these same immaterial spirits or qualities as its foundation. It is commonly known that energy and matter are the same substance in different configurations. Spirit, matter and events, likewise have an equivalence. Gospel accounts of this equivalence are the episodes in which Jesus makes bread, arms, legs (Mt 15:31), from nothing but his will; even events may be formed, the many biblical prophecies by Jesus and others link moral action to distant future events. Immaterial acts are real, and have real effect in our world, beginning with ourselves. Spiritual efficacy is the principle of the real effect of spirit.

Spirit by definition has no finite boundaries, will is the boundary for spirit—God’s will, man’s will. Because of moral free will, virtue may be corrupted into vice. ***God is not the origin of evil; abuse of virtue by moral beings is the origin of evil.*** Deviation from the original perfection of God’s moral design necessarily causes disorder in our world. Any deviation from perfection can only be degradation.

We might observe that the material world is the real and normal order of creation, but before our material world existed, spirit alone was the medium of existence, (as with the community of the angels). This spiritual universe was no less real, and cause and

effect were real within this spiritual realm. Indeed, the world of matter is more like an overlay for the world of spirit. Spirit is the unseen framework of the entire universe, and was created as such by God. The practical consequences of this are that acts of patience, moderation, justice, generosity, chastity are real with real effects. The vices of these virtues are also real with real effect in our world. Spirit forms matter; spirit forms spirit; spirit forms events.

The idea that everything has a spirit is a necessary truth because everything has some immaterial qualities: logical or mathematical descriptions, willed moral virtues, time, emotions. Hundreds of years ago, St. Thomas Aquinas spoke of any *thing* having an underlying spirit that is mineral, vegetable or animal in nature.

Disorder in our world is actually virtue which has become (partially) corrupted due to a lacking or misproportion. This corruption by misproportion comes about by willed mischoice by humanity. We must give correct attention to God, ourselves and others in all our actions. If we fail in this, the resultant act is weighted towards self (usually), at the expense of God or others. Our disordered act then affects the spiritual framework of creation, starting with ourselves.

To take the quality of respect for example; we observe that when we give undue effort to self, respect is corrupted into arrogance. If we fail to give proper moral effort to God, then irreverence results. If we fail to give others their due, then disrespect results. From this we see that moral corruption is a matter of lacking or deficit of virtue that should be present. The results are not theoretical, but take the forms of war, hatred and disease.

Spirit interacts directly with spirit according to common elements. The biblical ideas of a family or a nation sharing in the

effects of virtue or vice are examples. If a virtue is corrupted by a person of ancient Israel (to take a common biblical example), then all who share common virtues will suffer to some degree. Persons who are of the same: family, tribe, nation, world will all feel the effects of another's good or bad action.

This is the basis for the Biblical belief that children benefit or suffer from their parent's virtue or sin. It was true for Adam and Eve, and it is still true today. *This communal nature of spirit was created by God to benefit humanity*, but with the advent of the disorder of sin, disorder was shared in addition to goodness.

God's good judgment is also a factor by which spirit affects other spirit, matter or events. God is incapable of creating evil, but as our parent he does assign the evil of our sin to creation, according to his good judgment. In assigning the evil created by humanity, its disorder must be felt, but God could not assign evil with only an evil outcome possible.

A criticism of monotheism is that God seems to punish people by directing disorder (war, famine) upon them. In reality this evil generated by humanity must be effected within creation (absolute divinity cannot be corrupted). God as our parent directs our evil according to his good judgment, for the highest goal — the salvation of souls. It is not a matter of God punishing our bad behavior, but of God assigning our disorder. 1Cor 5:5 describes our evil being effected in this life, sparing condemnation in the next.

Just as goodness may be mediated into evil, evil may be mediated into goodness. It is a matter of anger being morally mediated into patience, greed mediated into moderation and trust, indifference into piety.

The human soul is a spirit; the soul is a "form", which gives function and purpose to one's body and actions. A human person

might be thought of as a soul to which the property of physicality had been added. One's soul is the totality of one's immaterial attributes, and the operating principle of one's being.

Animals are considered to have a soul (though not immortal as in humans), which governs their operations. The human soul has traditionally been partitioned into that part which governs moral activities (superior partition or spiritual soul), and that part which governs non-moral activities and the body, (inferior partition or material soul).

It is thought that the human soul is created by God using both direct and indirect means. Those faculties of the soul which govern the body are created at conception by biological means. Those faculties of the soul having a moral dimension are thought to be created directly by God.

The human soul is not static, but has the ability to "grow", and change. We may know our soul by observing our will, which in turn governs our thoughts and actions. Intellect, will and memory are properties of our soul.

Injustice and suffering in our world may only be truly eradicated by restoring its damaged spiritual foundation, which is the cause of evil. To give assistance after the fact is good, but even better is to prevent the disorder by avoiding those moral acts that degrade the spiritual foundations of our world and its people. This prevention is difficult to observe, because we are attempting to observe that which is prevented.

There is not a lack of good ideas in our world, but these do not take root in hearts because of moral disorder (sin) which corrupts will, faith, brotherhood and reasoning. War, hatred, greed and even disease, catastrophe and natural disasters are caused by the ongoing damage to the spiritual foundation of our world.

# Christology

## God the Trinity

We cannot speak of God creating any part of himself, but God does progressively reveal himself, to humanity and even to his own self. The Trinity is three divine persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Not three Gods, but three divine persons, the three of which constitute the one God. The Trinity of God is a mystery—not fully understood, and incapable of full understanding by any human. The Son of God is begotten of God the Father, the Holy Spirit proceeds from both, and all three had their first revelation as Godhead.

Godhead is undifferentiated, unexpressed, absolute and singular being. Godhead is the simple, essential, unified, core God. Godhead is the necessarily first and fundamental revelation of God. Every movement of God — every act of thought, will and love further reveals and defines God. “When” Godhead acts in such a way as to reveal the divine Son, Godhead reveals himself to be God the Father. God makes revelation simply by thinking or willing — when God thinks of himself, his image the Son of God is revealed.

The revelation of Godhead as the three distinct persons of the Trinity is thought to be non-optional. “When” Godhead thinks, he “first” thinks of himself, (what else, no creation yet). In doing so, Godhead reveals the trait of intellect, beyond the trait of pure being of the Godhead. When Godhead thinks of himself, he generates the complete image of himself who is the Son of God; and Godhead is now God the Father. The Son of God is the fullest expression of God. The Son of God himself is not yet *fully* revealed; the human children of God are called to be yet more expression of the Son of God, as the body of Christ. Godhead which is the essence of God, necessarily

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