

# Embraced by the Church?

## Betty Eadie, Near-Death Experiences, and Mormonism

*Massimo Introvigne*

IN 1975 PSYCHIATRIST RAYMOND A. MOODY introduced the expression “near-death experience” (NDE) in his bestselling book *Life After Life*. By 1988 more than 3 million copies of the book had been sold (not including foreign translations).<sup>1</sup> Following the early pioneer work by Swiss-born psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (who wrote the foreword to *Life After Life*) on terminally ill patients, Moody described hundreds of experiences he had collected from people who had been clinically “dead” for minutes or hours, had re-entered life, and were able to tell the stories of their NDEs.

According to Moody, NDEs include fifteen elements—although no single NDE Moody collected had all the elements, most had seven or more:

- \* “ineffability,” or extreme difficulty to find words apt to convey the NDE;
- \* “hearing the news,” hearing doctors pronouncing the experiencer “dead”;
- \* initial “feelings of peace and quiet”;
- \* then a strong “noise”: sometimes (but not always) pleasant music;
- \* passing through a “dark tunnel”;
- \* being “out of body” (and able to look at it from “outside”);
- \* “meeting others,” either unknown spirits or deceased loved ones;
- \* meeting, after the human spirits, “a great ‘Being of Light’”;

---

1. Raymond A. Moody, *Life After Life: The Investigation of a Phenomenon—Survival of Bodily Death* (St. Simonds Island, GA: Mockingbird Books, 1975). For the claim of 3 million copies in print, see the paperback edition published in New York by Bantam Books, 1988.

- \* passing through a “review” of the whole life of the experiencer;
- \* meeting a “border or limit” preventing one from advancing farther in the journey;
- \* “coming back” to life (usually regretting that the experience has not lasted);
- \* “telling others”;
- \* experiencing deep “effects on life”;
- \* developing “new views of death” (no longer regarding it as an object of fear); and
- \* obtaining “corroboration” from similar reports by other people and/or from professional NDE researchers.<sup>2</sup>

Moody’s research had a phenomenal success and captured the attention of other psychologists and psychiatrists. In 1978 he and some colleagues established the Association for the Scientific Study of Near-Death Phenomena. In 1980-81 the organization evolved into the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS). Thanks to research by IANDS activists—some of them with impressive academic credentials—an extensive NDE literature developed in the late 1970s and into the 1980s and 1990s. By 1990 there were more than 500 medical and psychological books and articles in print, not to mention journalistic accounts and hostile literature.<sup>3</sup>

Controversies surrounded NDE research from its very beginning. Particularly, two aspects of NDE research were criticized. First, NDE researchers—although initially introducing themselves as open to different solutions of the afterlife problem, and even skeptical—soon started claiming that NDE was indeed evidence (or at least strongly suggested) that there is life after death, and possibly that we could get in touch with our deceased loved ones now residing in the spirit world. Moody himself started mentioning contacts with the dead through the ancient technique of scrying in a mirror. For this purpose, he established what he called the Theatre of the Mind in Anniston, Alabama.<sup>4</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, secular humanists and professional skeptics dismissed the whole NDE literature, explaining away the experiences as hallucinations induced by chemical or pharmacological processes, or as mere frauds.<sup>5</sup> The

---

2. Moody, *Life After Life*, 19-109.

3. Terry K. Basford, *Near-Death Experiences: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1990).

4. See Raymond A. Moody, with Paul Perry, *Reunions: Visionary Encounters With Departed Loved Ones* (New York: Villard Books, 1993).

5. For a summary of the skeptic position, see Gerd H. Hövelmann, “Evidence for Survival from Near-Death Experiences: A Critical Appraisal,” in Paul Kurtz, ed., *A Skeptic’s Handbook of Parapsychology* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1985), 645-84.

participation in the controversy—on the side of NDE enthusiasts—of well-known New Age spokespeople like Stanislav and Christina Grof,<sup>6</sup> and the use of New Age jargon and concepts by leading NDE researchers such as IANDS co-founder Kenneth Ring (a professor of psychology at the University of Connecticut)<sup>7</sup> and NDE experimenter-turned-researcher P. M. H. Atwater,<sup>8</sup> has added fuel to the fire.

A second controversial claim by NDE researchers is that NDEs offer the final, definitive paradigm of all paranormal, spiritual, or visionary experiences and indeed clarify what in early mystical or religious literature was described with a vague and not yet “scientific” approach. Moody himself in *Life After Life* compared NDEs to Daniel’s, Jesus’, and Paul’s experiences in the Bible, to the visions of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), and to the Tibetan *Book of the Dead*,<sup>9</sup> despite the fact that most of these experiences did not occur in situations similar to “clinical” death. A tendency has emerged in recent NDE literature to regard as an NDE virtually any paranormal or mystical experience. As spiritualists had seen Jesus himself as a great medium, and channelling enthusiasts, more recently, have regarded the apostolic Pentecost as a particularly successful channeling experiment, NDE researchers started claiming that many visions and miracles described in the Bible and other scriptures were, in fact, early (and perhaps unrecognized) NDEs. A clear document of this tendency is a scholarly book by Carol Zaleski, published in 1987, where many visionary experiences—from Catholic saints in the Middle Ages to stories of conversion in many religions—were re-interpreted as NDEs.<sup>10</sup> An equally scholarly bibliography on NDEs, published in 1990, has confirmed this trend.<sup>11</sup> Zaleski, on the other hand, recognized that NDE accounts are sacred narratives similar with, but not identical to, other narratives such as visions of heaven and hell, experiences of sudden conversion, sacred dreams, apparitions of heavenly beings. More recent NDE researchers have been less cautious and have admitted that NDEs may occur even when no illness or “death” is involved and that “transcendent

6. Stanislav and Christina Grof, *Beyond Death* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980).

7. Kenneth Ring, *Life at Death: A Scientific Investigation of the Near-Death Experience* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1980); *Heading Toward Omega: In Search of the Meaning of the Near-Death Experience* (New York: Quill William Morrow, 1984); and *The Omega Project: Near Death-Experiences, UFO Encounters, and Mind at Large* (New York: Quill William Morrow, 1992).

8. See P. M. H. Atwater, *Coming Back to Life: The After-Effects of the Near-Death Experience* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1988); *Beyond the Light: What Isn't Being Said about Near-Death Experience* (New York: Birch Lane Press/Carol Publishing Group, 1994).

9. Moody, *Life After Life*, 109–28.

10. Carol Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys: Accounts of Near-Death Experiences in Medieval and Modern Times* (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

11. Basford, *Near-Death Experiences*.

experiences" like NDEs occur in any case of "exposure to otherworld dimensions and scenes beyond the individual's frame of reference."<sup>12</sup>

But what precisely is the *content* of NDE narratives? Despite Moody's early claims that similar patterns may be found in many, if not all, NDEs, in fact the evidence is growing that the religious (or non-religious) content of these narratives is of many different types. Moody had already admitted that the identification of the "Being of Light" in NDEs varies according to the religious background of the person interviewed.<sup>13</sup> It is more common for Roman Catholics to meet the Virgin Mary and the saints, while non-Christians may meet the Buddha or a non-personal "Ocean of Light." Variations are still greater in the more detailed NDEs, where the people involved receive actual teachings. These teachings are also invariably colored by the previous religious experience of those who experienced an NDE. One of the most moving NDE videos, by Reinee Pasarow, a follower of the Baha'i faith, included easily detectable concepts of her own religion.<sup>14</sup> Since for many years NDEs have been particularly popular in the New Age subculture,<sup>15</sup> it is not surprising that a number of famous NDE narratives convey vaguely pantheistic New Age teachings about the world, the sacred, and the afterlife.

The fact that many NDE narratives sound "New Age-y" explains why Evangelical Christians—particularly those involved in the counter-cult movement—exposed NDE literature as "cultic," unchristian, or heretical. Moody's mirror-gazing experiences, and the admitted interest in other occult "transcendent experiences" of many NDE researchers, did little to recommend them to Evangelical Christians.<sup>16</sup> More recently, however, "Christian" NDEs have become common, and counter-cult Evangelical ministries have been more careful in recommending that "if the message and experience of an NDE does not distort or conflict with biblical teachings, then we should be careful not to speak against that which resulted in salvation and may have been a genuine work of God." New Age-like NDEs, on the other hand, are dismissed with the argument that "the Devil apparently has been involved with some NDEs."<sup>17</sup>

Not all churches, however, exhibited an initial hostile reaction to NDEs. No lesser authority than Moody, in his 1988 book *The Light Beyond*,

12. Atwater, *Beyond the Light*, 64.

13. Moody, *Life After Life*, 46.

14. Reinee Pasarow, *Life After Death* (video) (Monterey Park, CA: New Age Industries, n.d.).

15. See J. Gordon Melton, Jerome Clark, and Aidan A. Kelly, *New Age Almanac* (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1990).

16. See, for a typical criticism, J. Isamu Yamamoto, "The Near-Death Experience. Part One: The New Age Connection," *Christian Research Journal* 14 (Spring 1992): 20-23, 30-32; "Part Two: Alternative Explanations," *Christian Research Journal* 15 (Summer 1992): 14-19, 29.

17. *Ibid.*, 29.

noted that there have been

religions around the world that readily accept NDEs as the doorway to the spiritual world. The most prominent of the Western religions to do this is the Church of the Latter Day Saints [sic], more commonly known as the Mormon Church.

The Mormon doctrine supports the NDE as a peek into the spirit world. They believe that the spirit world is a dimension that can't be perceived by the living, but one that is inhabited by those who have left their physical body.

The Mormon *Journal of Discourses*, a commentary on Mormon beliefs written by church elders, says that the spirit body retains the five senses of the physical body (sight, hearing, feeling, taste and smell) while having "enhanced capacities" and the ability to consider many different ideas at the same time. It can also move with lightning speed, see in many different directions at the same time, and communicate in many ways other than speech. And it is free of disability and illness.

Mormon doctrine says that the spirit enters the body at birth and leaves upon death. It defines death "merely a change from one status or sphere of existence to another."

Moody goes on to quote experiences of Jedediah Grant, Heber J. Grant, and other Mormons to conclude that "many of the traits of the NDE are described by Mormon leaders."<sup>18</sup>

While Moody has compared modern NDEs to experiences described in the *Journal of Discourses*, in Mormon circles it has been often taken for granted that contemporary NDE research confirms a number of Mormon views of the afterlife. Special, faith-promoting collections of NDEs with specific Mormon content have even been published.<sup>19</sup> In 1993 the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, a publication of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), printed an enthusiastic article on NDEs, arguing that "Mormons who have reported and collected NDEs take the accounts almost for granted in the context of the faith." The author, Kevin Christensen, also found early occurrences of NDEs in the books of Mosiah and Alma in the Book of Mormon, dismissed New Age elements such as references to reincarnation in the larger "world context" of NDEs as secondary, and concluded that "Mormon spiritual experiences tend to gain validity when considered against the [NDE] world context." Christensen was also interested in comparing "the NDE to various ancient temple mysteries in Greece and Egypt" and commented that

---

18. Raymond A. Moody, with Paul Perry, *The Light Beyond*, 2d ed. (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), 88-89 (1st ed., 1988).

19. See, for example, Brent L. Top and Wendy C. Top, *Beyond Death's Door: Understanding Near-Death Experiences in Light of the Restored Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993).

both the Book of Mormon and early LDS spiritual experiences “anticipate current research in showing the kinship between the NDE and temple mysteries.”<sup>20</sup> Christensen’s article, on the other hand, made no reference to what was becoming the most phenomenal bestseller in the whole field of NDE accounts: *Embraced By The Light*, published in 1992 (one year before the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* article) by Betty J. Eadie. The omission was interesting because Eadie was—and still is—an active LDS.

#### BETTY EADIE’S TESTIMONY

Betty Jean Eadie, then thirty-one, had her (second and most important, after one as a young girl) NDE on 20 November 1973 in a Seattle, Washington, hospital. According to a flyer inserted into the first several thousand copies of her book by the publisher, Eadie and her husband had been baptized in the Mormon church in San Antonio, Texas, before her Seattle NDE. “They did not remain active in the Church long, however, partly because of the transitory nature of the branch they were attending and partly because they were converted more to the missionaries, perhaps, than to the gospel.” However—the flyer continues—“after her death experience, she and her family became active in the Church. She has served since in various auxiliaries, including in the Primary and as Ward Young Women’s president.” The flyer contradicts the information in an early review in the *Salt Lake Tribune* that Eadie’s LDS conversion “apparently took place after the author experienced what the book describes as her death.”<sup>21</sup> In 1993 Eadie confirmed in an interview with the Ogden, Utah, *Standard-Examiner* that “she was an inactive member of the LDS Church at the time [of her NDE] and since then has become active.”<sup>22</sup> In subsequent controversies, Eadie’s extent of “activity” in her ward has been questioned. Richard Abanes, an anti-Eadie (and anti-Mormon) Evangelical critic, claims that in a telephone interview with him, Dan Miller, LDS bishop of Metro Seattle’s Ninth Ward, stated that “Betty is not a real *active* member . . . and this goes back before the book was published . . . Her activity has been sort of lukewarm.”<sup>23</sup> According to a review in the Salt Lake City *Deseret News*, Eadie was “an inactive Mor-

---

20. Kevin Christensen, “Nigh unto Death’: NDE Research and The Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2 (Spring 1993): 1-20.

21. Compare “Of Special Interest To Members Of The Church Of Jesus Christ Of Latter-day Saints,” flyer inserted in the first printings of *Embraced By The Light*, with Paul Swenson, review of *Embraced By The Light* in “Utah Under Cover: Area Books & Authors,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 20 Feb. 1992.

22. Valerie Phillips, “Author Shares Life After Death In An Embrace,” *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 6 Mar. 1993.

23. Richard Abanes, “*Embraced By The Light*” and the Bible: *Betty Eadie and Near-Death Experiences in the Light of Scriptures* (Camp Hill, PA: Horizon Books, 1994).

mon when her 'NDE' occurred" and "hesitatingly spoke of it to her visiting teachers." Interviewed by LDS church-owned *Deseret News*, Eadie explained that she also attended meetings of the Seattle chapter of the International Association of Near-Death Studies. "But I felt so dissatisfied. They talked about the power, the light, but none of them mentioned Jesus." Persuaded that her experience "was profoundly religious," Eadie rather "became active in the LDS faith, finding joy in speaking to many groups about her experience."<sup>24</sup>

Eventually, Eadie also became a licensed hypnotherapist (and later "grief counselor") with offices on Ambaum Boulevard in Seattle. She continued to tell her story to small groups in firesides and other meetings until she found a particularly careful listener in Jane Barfuss, who prepared "a 16-page synopsis and sent it to friends and family in Salt Lake City who, in turn, sent copies to more friends." Barfuss's paper, *Spirit World*, was read with a professional eye by Curtis Taylor, a Mormon and an editor with Aspen Books, an LDS-oriented press based in Murray, Utah. Taylor was prepared to buy the rights to Eadie's story but discovered they had already been sold to another Utah publisher, Cedar Fort, for \$1,000 as advance payment.<sup>25</sup> Taylor and some friends bought the rights from Cedar Fort for \$50,000 and "started Gold Leaf Press in California specifically to publish the book."<sup>26</sup> In an article published in February 1994, *The Wall Street Journal* hailed Gold Leaf as just another American success story. "*Embraced By The Light* [by then a national best-seller] defies virtually every premise of modern publishing—noted the *Journal*—Ms. Eadie had never written a book before and Gold Leaf Press had never published one."<sup>27</sup> In fact, Gold Leaf was—and is—controlled by Aspen Books,<sup>28</sup> which already had a reputation in Utah as a publisher of LDS devotional and missionary books.

*Embraced By The Light*—apparently so rearranged by Taylor that reporter Peggy Fletcher Stack called it in the *Salt Lake Tribune* "ghostwritten" and "actually written by Curtis Taylor"<sup>29</sup>—was launched in Utah with a first printing of 20,000 copies, accompanied by the flyer *Of Special Interest To Members Of The Church Of Jesus Christ Of Latter-day Saints* and promoted by the Salt Lake advertising agency Stilson & Stilson. The first

---

24. Karen Boren, "Is Death Merely The Precipice Of True Birth?" *Deseret News*, 17 Jan. 1993.

25. Jim Jerome, "Heaven Can Wait," *People*, 10 Nov. 1993, 83.

26. Vanessa Ho, "Brush With Death Puts Her In The Publishing Spotlight," *Seattle Times*, 27 June 1993.

27. Meg Cox, "Death Conquers Bestseller Lists As Boomers Age," *Wall Street Journal*, 2 Feb. 1994.

28. See Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Mormon's Book On Afterlife Gains National Response," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 23 Oct. 1993.

29. *Ibid.*

printings had on the cover what the *Tribune* review called “a denatured Jesus” (in contrast with the book’s “simple description of a loving Christ”). The review criticized “the book’s garish, kitschy cover.”<sup>30</sup> In subsequent printings for the national market, the cover was changed. Minor changes were also included in the text of printings intended for the national, non-LDS market. For example, in the first printing humans were described—in familiar LDS terms—as “literally his [God’s] spirit children”; the sentence was modified in successive printings to read simply “his very own children.”<sup>31</sup> Jesus Christ is described in the first printing as “a separate personage from God”; “personage” becomes “being” in subsequent printings.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps the most important change concerns abortion, branded as “an act against that child” where “the spirit feels an immediate and devastating rejection” in the first printing, while in subsequent printings abortion is merely “contrary to that which is natural” and the spirit “feels a sense of rejection and sorrow.” The more recent printings also mention that “the spirit also feels compassion for its mother, knowing that she made a decision based on the knowledge she had,” a remark not included in the first printing.<sup>33</sup> In 1994, when *Embraced By The Light* became a favorite target of anti-Mormons, these changes were easily offered as evidence of deceit and conspiracy.<sup>34</sup>

These changes did not prevent the book from achieving a phenomenal success. By September 1994—according to the dust jacket of the Italian translation<sup>35</sup>—it had sold 5 million copies in the United States (including the paperback edition, whose rights had been sold for a reported \$2 million<sup>36</sup> to Bantam) and had remained for more than seventy weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Eadie was, by that time, an international celebrity and had appeared in talk shows including *20/20* and (twice) *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Apparently, the book was extremely successful in Christian (including Evangelical) small groups. There, it also became, almost immediately, controversial.

#### ANTI-MORMONS, MORMONS, AND BETTY EADIE

Mormon readers in the Intermountain West were the first to vote in favor of Eadie with their feet, when the first printing of 20,000 copies of

30. Swenson, “Utah Under Cover.”

31. Betty Eadie, with Curtis Taylor, *Embraced By The Light* (Placerville, CA: Gold Leaf Press, 1992). Compare p. 47, first printing, with p. 47, subsequent printings.

32. *Ibid.*, 47.

33. *Ibid.*, compare p. 95 in the first and subsequent printings.

34. See Abanes, “*Embraced By The Light*” and the Bible, 215-20.

35. Betty J. Eadie, con Curtis Taylor, *Abbracciata Dalla Luce* (Milan: Sperling & Kupfer, 1994).

36. Fletcher Stack, “Mormon’s Book On Afterlife.” Other sources indicated \$1.5 million.

*Embraced By The Light* sold out in ten days,<sup>37</sup> largely in Utah. The figures, however, show that outside the Intermountain West the reaction was equally favorable. *Embraced By The Light* is, indeed, a moving book. It tells of Eadie's life since her difficult childhood as the seventh of ten children born to a Sioux Indian mother and a Scottish-Irish father. The parents were divorced when Eadie was four. She was placed in a Catholic boarding school, where—according to the book—she was despised by the sisters because of her Native American blood. She eventually developed pneumonia and experienced a first, short NDE. She later attended an Indian training school run by Methodists, who were kind with her but still taught a spirituality centered on the fear of eternal punishment. At age twelve she was already rather curious about religion and visited Lutheran, Baptist, and Salvation Army churches. At fifteen she dropped out of school to live with her mother and ended up marrying a neighbor. She divorced after six years, at age twenty-one, with three children, while a fourth had died at three months. Shortly thereafter she married Joe, her present husband (also divorced). After problems connected with her seventh pregnancy in 1968, she decided to have a hysterectomy in 1973 that eventually led to her famous NDE.

In the hospital—according to the book—Betty left her body and experienced a long visit to the spirit world, meeting a number of celestial beings, including Jesus Christ, and remembered her pre-existence. She was finally told that her time had not yet come and she should return to earth to spread her experience. She emerged transformed. Not only is Eadie's a message of hope, but—unlike other vague NDE accounts of the spirit world—it is full of details about every aspect of life after death. An enthusiastic Melvin Morse, a well-known NDE researcher, wrote in the foreword that he "learned more about near-death experiences from reading *Embraced By The Light* than from any other experience in my life, including ten years of studying near-death experiences and interviewing children and adults who had survived clinical death."<sup>38</sup>

There is, of course, a price to be paid for detailed descriptions of life after death. Sooner or later, they will be measured against the prevailing standards of organized religion. Although *Embraced By The Light* is not a theological treatise, some doctrines, including pre-existence, are clearly taught. "Spirits who had not yet come to earth" are surprisingly active in Eadie's spirit world. We see "one male spirit trying to get a mortal man and woman together on earth—his future parents. He was playing cupid and was having a very difficult time," until "other spirits became concerned as they saw his difficulty, and they took up the cause, several of

---

37. Boren, "Is Death Merely The Precipice Of True Birth?"

38. Melvin Morse, "Foreword," in Eadie, *Embraced By The Light*, vii.

them trying to 'corral' these two young people."<sup>39</sup> Spirits make "preparations to go to earth" and are capable of heroic choices such as "to enter this world mentally handicapped" for the sake "of the growth he [the spirit] and his parents would achieve."<sup>40</sup> While on earth spirits do not remember their pre-mortal existence, which is "purposely blocked by a 'veil' of forgetfulness at . . . birth."<sup>41</sup>

"All people as spirits in the pre-mortal world took part in the creation of the earth," and we all are the "very own children" of God. To Eadie's "surprise" she also learned that "Jesus was a separate being from God" and that the "Protestant" doctrine "that God the Father and Jesus Christ were one being" is not true, although Jesus "himself was also a God."<sup>42</sup> In the afterlife "there are many levels of development," but even the spirits "bonded to the world through great, bodily appetites, or other earthly commitments" are not without hope. "They remain close to the earth for a certain amount of time, but eventually they learn to move on to accept a greater warmth and security of God."<sup>43</sup> Ultimately, "God wants us to become as he is" and "we are capable of doing so."<sup>44</sup> Eadie does not claim to have learned everything about the divine mysteries, although she "saw galaxies and travelled to them . . . , visiting their worlds and meeting more children of our God, all of them our spiritual brothers and sisters," at the same time "remembering . . . that [she] had been to this place before" (i.e., in her pre-mortal life).<sup>45</sup> Eadie also meets in the spirit world with a governing "council" made of twelve males. She "had no reaction to the council being comprised solely of men. I accepted the fact that they had their role and I had mine." "I began to see the difference in the roles between men and women, and I understood the necessity and beauty of those roles."<sup>46</sup>

Eadie's theology of original sin is quite optimistic. She was shown that "Eve did not 'fall' to temptation as much as she made a conscious decision to bring about conditions necessary for her progression."<sup>47</sup> It is important not to direct negative thoughts towards reality. "Positive and negative energies work in opposition to each other. And when we internalize these energies, they become our servants. Positive attracts positive, and negative attracts negative."<sup>48</sup> Energies of humans are also stored in

---

39. Eadie, *Embraced By The Light*, 92.

40. *Ibid.*, 94-95.

41. *Ibid.*, 44.

42. *Ibid.*, 47, 44.

43. *Ibid.*, 83-85.

44. *Ibid.*, 61.

45. *Ibid.*, 88.

46. *Ibid.*, 111.

47. *Ibid.*, 109.

48. *Ibid.*, 57.

the spirit world. Eadie visits a "larger room similar to a library," "a repository of knowledge" but without "any books." She realizes that "this was a library of the mind" (not unlike the "Akashic records" of recent esoteric tradition) including "all knowledge," "about anybody in history—even in the spirit world—in full detail."<sup>49</sup> Animals and plants also have their energy fields and actually have their forms of existence in the spirit world.<sup>50</sup>

There are many other themes running throughout Eadie's description of the spirit world—dominated by a loving and understanding Jesus—and I have focused here on some of the more controversial. Although there have been other hostile reactions (feminists were not pleased to see that "if you scratch the surface of her [Eadie's] pluralistic heaven, underneath are 12 ruling males around a kidney-shaped table"<sup>51</sup>), objections came first from Evangelical anti-Mormons and later from conservative Mormons. Ironically, criticism from the two groups often runs parallel.

Richard Abanes, a full-time minister in "cult evangelism" associated with the anti-Mormon Christian Research Institute (CRI), was among the first sounding the alarm. In early 1994 he published "A Special Report: What Is Betty Eadie Hiding?" in CRI's *Christian Research Journal*,<sup>52</sup> and shortly thereafter alerted the larger Evangelical audience of *Christianity Today*.<sup>53</sup> Later in 1994 Abanes published a book-length criticism of Eadie,<sup>54</sup> and other anti-Mormon ministries followed. Church Ministry Resources of Gadsden, Alabama, published in the same year a book by William Probasco, *The Lie at the End of the Tunnel*; although quickly prepared as a sort of an instant book, it became the source of later anti-Eadie literature.<sup>55</sup> Although more deep in its theological criticism (and somewhat more interested in criticizing the New Age than Mormonism), *Deceived by The Light* published in 1995 by Doug Groothuis, an assistant professor of philosophy at Denver Seminary, relies largely on Abanes and Probasco.<sup>56</sup> The same is true for the section on Eadie of Phil Phillips's *Angels, Angels, Angels*, a book where the Devil is exposed as the primary

49. Ibid., 76.

50. Ibid., 38 (animals), 78-79 (plants).

51. Swenson, "Utah Under Cover."

52. Richard Abanes and Paul Carden, "A Special Report: What Is Betty Eadie Hiding?" *Christian Research Journal* 16 (Winter 1994): 6, 40-41.

53. Richard Abanes, "Readers Embrace The Light," *Christianity Today* 38 (7 Mar. 1994): 53.

54. Abanes, "Embraced By The Light" and the Bible.

55. William L. Probasco, *The Lie at the End of the Tunnel: A Critique of "Embraced by The Light"* (Gadsden, AL: Church Ministry Resources, 1994).

56. Doug Groothuis, *Deceived by The Light* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995).

source of most contemporary NDEs and experiences with “angels.”<sup>57</sup> *The Watchman Expositor*, published by the anti-Mormon Watchman Fellowship of Arlington, Texas, placed Eadie on its cover with the disturbing question: “Embraced by an Angel of Light?”<sup>58</sup> Not unexpectedly Dick Baer, founder of the anti-Mormon organization Ex-Mormon and Christian Alliance of Orangevale, California, was quick to embrace conspiracy theories: “This book is a carefully crafted book of deception—he said of *Embraced By The Light*—crafted to denigrate Christianity and promote doctrines that are mainline Mormon doctrines.”<sup>59</sup> More careful in concluding that Eadie’s conspiracy was sponsored by the LDS church, Abanes devotes two hundred pages to show the Mormon roots of Eadie’s theories on pre-existence, Jesus Christ as “a God,” degrees or levels in heaven, and “worlds without ends.” All Evangelical critics went into considerable detail into Eadie’s and her publisher’s activities to downplay her LDS affiliation, and considered the changes between the first “Utah” printings and the subsequent “national” printings as their smoking gun.<sup>60</sup>

CRI’s *Christian Research Journal* commented that “few of the millions who have seen and heard Eadie know of her religious affiliation because apparently she, her publishing company, and her publicist are now trying to keep that information quiet.” CRI recorded interviews with Eadie, her executive assistant, and LDS officials and evidently obtained conflicting information:

When asked by the JOURNAL, which Church was the truest, she [Eadie] replied: “If I were to tell (people) . . . the Church that I find most rewarding, most fulfilling for me, they might not find that at all . . . I might be misguiding them from what they need to find for themselves . . . I have learned that many of the things that I have written about in the book match with many of these other religions. And I think that there are common threads that run through all churches.”

Evading the fact of her LDS church affiliation, she also commented: “I think it’s . . . pretty much of an assumption . . . I don’t divulge my religious

---

57. Phil Phillips, *Angels, Angels, Angels: Embraced by The Light . . . Or . . . Embraced by The Darkness?* (Lancaster, PA: Starburst Publishers, 1995). Notwithstanding the title, only pages 192-215 are devoted to a criticism of Eadie’s book and her Mormon background.

58. Inside, the article had no question mark: Craig Branch, “Embraced By An Angel Of Light,” *Watchman Expositor* 11 (1994): 4-6, 18-21. Ironically, the article mentioned that among “LDS scholastics” who “have . . . written on the origins and affinity of Eastern mysticism and spiritualism in LDS history” is one “Michael Homes” (sic), author of a 1988 article in *Dialogue* on Spiritualism and Mormonism. In fact, Michael Homer argued the opposite: differences between Spiritualism and Mormonism are more crucial than similarities.

59. Abanes, “Readers Embrace The Light.”

60. Abanes, “*Embraced By The Light*” and *the Bible*, 217-20.

beliefs . . . [or] the churches that I attend now at all. And there is a reason for that, some people have contacted me and said that they would join any church that I belong to. And that is not why I wrote the book."

Eadie repeatedly refused to admit she was a Mormon during the above conversation—even when confronted with a statement the JOURNAL obtained from Don LeFever, Manager of . . . Media Response for the LDS church, that Eadie is an active Mormon. Eadie feigned surprise, asking: "Who is this gentleman? . . . How does *he* know? Why does he think that?"

Two days later, however, the JOURNAL spoke with Tom Britton, Eadie's executive assistant. His story was somewhat different: "Betty doesn't *only* attend the LDS church. Her membership is in that church, but that's not the only church she attends." Hours later Eadie's Mormon bishop, Dan Miller, verified that she and her family have attended the Seattle, Washington 9th Ward for at least 15 years.<sup>61</sup>

Many anti-Mormon critics also had in their files an early interview with Eadie published in the Ogden *Standard-Examiner* where "she said she was told during her after-life experience that the LDS Church is 'the truest Church on the earth.' But her LDS background was not included in the book, she said, because 'the book was meant to go out to the world, not just to LDS members.'"<sup>62</sup>

The two main criticisms by Evangelical anti-Mormons are that Eadie downplays her Mormon affiliation and that her heaven is relativistic, since in her experience she learned that "we have no right to criticize any church or religion in any way" and "they are all precious and important in his [God's] sight."<sup>63</sup> She, however, adds: "There *is* a fullness of the gospel, but most people will not attain it here."<sup>64</sup> Ironically, these same two themes in *Embraced By The Light* have also invited trouble from the opposite end of the spectrum. There are not only book-length criticisms of Eadie by Evangelicals, including the one by the anti-Mormon Abanes; there is at least another by Douglas Beardall, an LDS author of faith-promoting books on missionaries, family matters, and the Three Nephites.<sup>65</sup> The irony of Eadie being attacked at the same time by Evangelical anti-Mormons as a Mormon missionary in disguise and by conservative Mormons as a New Age apostate was noted in an article by Peggy Fletcher Stack in the *Salt Lake Tribune* on 17 June 1995.<sup>66</sup> Beardall's book lacks the journalistic qualities of Abanes's "*Embraced By The Light*" and *the Bible*,

61. Abanes and Carden, "A Special Report: What Is Betty Eadie Hiding?"

62. Phillips, "Author Shares Love Of Life After Death In An Embrace."

63. Eadie, *Embraced By The Light*, 46.

64. *Ibid.*

65. Douglas Beardall, *Embarrassed By The Light* (Provo, UT: LDS Book Publications, 1995).

66. Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Is Mormon Author Embraced or Embarrassed by the Light?" *Salt Lake Tribune*, 17 June 1995.

nor does it make for entertaining reading—Eadie is branded a “heretic” by quoting passages from *Embraced By The Light* and contrasting them with the orthodox teachings of both early and modern LDS general authorities. Some skeptical comments on the lack of evidence for Eadie’s NDE are also included. The word “conspiracy” is prominent on the cover of Beardall’s book, and he is afraid that a cult of “Eadie-ites” is planning to take over the LDS church, if not Christianity as a whole.<sup>67</sup>

Criticism of *Embraced By The Light* by national Mormon science fiction and fantasy writer Orson Scott Card in the August 1994 issue of his conservative newsletter *Vigor* is shorter but more to the point than Beardall’s tirade. Card starts with a general criticism of NDE accounts, noting that after the success of Moody’s books “once the research became popularly known, the power of suggestion would begin to distort all future accounts.” Card’s main interest is, however, to compare the “specific doctrines” of *Embraced By The Light* with “LDS doctrine,” since—while “not inherently opposed to private visions”—he also “believe[s] that the Lord’s house is a house of order.” Only “when the revelation leads people toward the gospel and Church of Jesus Christ,” may one “feel bound to at least admit the possibility that God’s hand was in it.” Measured against these standards Eadie “seems . . . to fail on every count.” Without disagreeing with Evangelical critics, Card recognizes that Eadie’s “vision is overwhelming a collection of LDS doctrines and folk doctrines that have circulated widely in the church. All the important ideas have roots in the LDS community,” although there are also points where Eadie “departs from genuine LDS traditions” and “follows pop psychology or trendy new-age religious ideas.” It is, at any rate, serious, since she is a Mormon, that Eadie “felt no obligations whatsoever to tell her nonmember readers that this gospel can be found in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” and in fact “says the exact opposite,” claiming that all religions upon the earth are necessary. This, Card notes, was not the teaching of Joseph Smith. “By choosing to hide the Mormon source” of her doctrine, Card remarks, Eadie “issued this book already poisoned with deceptiveness and dishonesty. She is not telling the full truth. One can only contrast her behavior with that of Boyd K. Packer, who has recently been excoriated for his very plainness of speech. True prophets do not hide their affiliation with their predecessors.”

Eadie, according to Card, is wrong on at least two accounts. First, she teaches “for doctrine” popular Mormon folk beliefs (particularly on pre-mortal life and angels). Second (and worse), at times she “does not merely amplify or speculate on existing Christian and specifically LDS doctrine, but instead directly contradicts it,” going back to Protestantism

---

67. Beardall, *Embraced By The Light*, 41.

(where she suggests that "God had absolute power on evil") or taking her theology from pop culture and movies like *Back to the Future*. The latter is the likely source, according to Card, for the story of a male spirit struggling to persuade his future parents to get together. If the book were presented as fiction, this would perhaps not really matter. Since it is presented as a genuine spiritual experience, however, Card believes that "Latter-day Saints are not free to accept both the teachings of LDS prophets and those of Betty J. Eadie as having equal authority, for the simple reason that they can't both be true. If Eadie's vision is true in every detail, then Christ has clearly abandoned the Church he restored to Joseph Smith. But I do not believe that he has done so, which leads me inexorably to the conclusion that Betty J. Eadie has abandoned it."<sup>68</sup>

Although Card noted that Eadie's book "has spread like wildfire through the Church, being quoted from in Sacrament meetings and Relief Society," hostile reactions have apparently come from the upper echelon of the LDS hierarchy. Early in 1993 Peggy Fletcher Stack wrote that "in a meeting with male LDS state leaders in Sandy last spring [1993] Apostle Boyd K. Packer called the book 'bunk', a witness said." At that time (October 1993) Eadie told Fletcher that "she had not talked about the book with any LDS general authority" but "said her local leaders are 'behind me 100%."<sup>69</sup> When asked by Ogden's *Standard Examiner* about her relationship with "top LDS authorities," Eadie replied: "I guess I'm not the type that feels like I have to go to somebody about what's right for me. They have not contacted me and I have not contacted them because I don't want to put them in a position to respond." She added, however, that she "merely wants to share her story"; "she is not trying to start another church, espouse new doctrine, or 'become another prophetess."<sup>70</sup>

Ironically, before the Eadie controversy erupted, FARMS-published *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* had commented on the common report in (pre-Eadie) NDEs that "denominations don't matter," arguing that "surprisingly, this thought is a Book of Mormon leitmotif": "all the Mormon Scriptures emphasize that group membership has nothing to do with personal worthiness or righteousness." In the Book of Mormon "Alma insists that judgment occurs in relation to opportunities for improvement (including social and cultural conditioning), not against an absolute standard (see Alma 9:14-24). Those privileged with greater knowledge are reminded that where much is given, much is expected."<sup>71</sup> One may wonder if this openness to ecumenical religious attitudes in

---

68. Orson Scott Card, "A New Age Testament: A Mormon Reader Looks at 'Embraced by the Light,'" *Vigor: Advice & Commentary on Mormon Life* 6 (Aug. 1994): 1, 4-12.

69. Stack, "Mormon's Book on Afterlife Gains National Response."

70. Phillips, "Author Shares Love of Life After Death in an Embrace."

71. Christensen, "Nigh Unto Death," 13-14.

NDE literature will persist in Mormon conservative circles after the Eadie controversy.

#### THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

As mentioned earlier, NDE is not the only kind of extraordinary experience purporting to convey religious truth. Leading NDE researcher Kenneth Ring has devoted an entire book to a comparison of NDEs with the experiences of people claiming to have encountered UFOs and extraterrestrials.<sup>72</sup> A kind of narrative I have discussed elsewhere in a Mormon context—stories of “Satanic” ritual abuse<sup>73</sup>—is also similar to “negative” accounts of NDEs, often (unlike Eadie’s) including a vision of hell. In fact, Eadie wrote in 1995 the foreword to the NDE account by Angie Fenimore, *Beyond The Darkness*. While, Eadie comments, “Hell was not a part of my experience,” other near-death experiencers “were drawn into a place filled with fear and darkness”: “this revealing book by Angie Fenimore is a great example of the struggle with Hell that I have heard others try to describe.”<sup>74</sup> Accounts like Fenimore’s contradict Evangelical objections that NDEs offer a New Age spirituality where hell and sin are never heard of. It is doubtful, however, that Fenimore’s account will please Evangelical readers. Although she does not disclose her present religious affiliation, Fenimore mentions that she attended a Mormon church as a pre-teenager and claims that during her NDE “God the Father told me that He Himself had had a mortal existence on a world like ours and had progressed along a path by choosing good over evil.”<sup>75</sup>

On the controversial issue of Satanic ritual abuse stories, I have proposed a middle ground between treating survivors as pathological liars and accepting their claims at face value. A similar middle ground has been proposed for NDEs by Carol Zaleski in her 1987 book comparing visions of the afterlife in medieval and modern times. Considering both differences and similarities between medieval and modern accounts, Zaleski concludes that “the visionaries of our own age are no more free of cultural influence than those of less pluralistic eras.” NDE narratives—not unlike medieval visions of heaven and hell—are works “of the socially conditioned religious imagination”; each of these stories “is formed in conversation with society,” even if each experience “takes place in the

---

72. Ring, *The Omega Project*.

73. See my “A Rumor of Devils: Satanic Ritual Abuse and Mormonism,” presented at the Mormon History Association conference, May 1995, and in a revised version at the American Academy of Religion annual conference in Chicago, November 1995.

74. Betty J. Eadie, “Foreword,” to Angie Fenimore, *Beyond The Darkness: My Near-Death Journey To The Edge Of Hell* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), vii-viii.

75. *Ibid.*, 126.

solitude of the deathbed and in the private chamber of inner experience." Once we recognize this, we can no longer claim that NDE accounts and other visionary experiences "paint a true picture" of the afterlife. Still, Zaleski wishes to avoid not only "naive affirmation" but also "shallow relativism." She is pessimistic about the skeptical literature on NDE that dissects NDE narratives into "component parts" and explains away each of them through medical, pharmacological, or psychological reductionism. NDEs—like other significant human experiences—are "meaning wholes," not entirely "reducible to their origin or cause." In the act of telling and retelling, "near-death experience takes shape as a unified and unifying whole. Once this narrative integrity is achieved, no amount of analytical dissection can destroy it." Zaleski, however, does not believe—contrary to what Moody and other NDE researchers may claim—that NDE narratives can be stripped of culturally conditioned "labels" and reduced to a hard core, supposedly common to all NDEs, that accurately describes what experiencers "really" saw. "We will not," Zaleski insists, "make the assumption that the visionary who sees Christ or Krishna is only 'labeling' an underlying experience which can be described more accurately and directly as encounter with a 'being of light' or the 'higher self.' . . . Such modern expressions may seem more palatable, but they are no less culturally determined or mythically cultivated."<sup>76</sup> The idea that a "pure," culture-free narrative of spiritual experience may be reconstructed by the interpreter (who, in turn, operates within a culture) does not make sense for the modern social scientist. But that does not necessarily mean that narratives of the afterlife do not make sense at all. According to Zaleski, "we can appropriate the messages of near-death literature only in an indirect fashion; and yet that may prove to be no insignificant thing."<sup>77</sup>

NDEs are, first of all, calls to conversion and offers of orientation in this life: "the maps of death and afterlife that these accounts contain are meant to help us get our bearings, right now, in relation to the cosmos in which we dwell, or wish to dwell." As socially constructed as they are, NDE narratives may make a "significant contribution" because they put "in experiential terms questions about life and death which are so urgent as to call not for answers but for vital response." NDE narratives may even carry "prophetic value" and "evidential weight," as far as they communicate "insights capable of being verified—not in medical charts, but in our own experiences." And this is precisely the "way in which the religious imagination mediates the search for ultimate truth."<sup>78</sup>

76. Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys*, 190-95.

77. *Ibid.*, 199.

78. *Ibid.*, 202-205. In this context, Zaleski notes, it is not particularly important whether the experiencer really "died" or is simply using death as a spiritual metaphor.

Critics of Eadie—both Evangelicals and conservative Mormons—take for granted that NDE narratives convey factual, empirically verifiable information about the afterlife or the spirit world, not unlike a travel account. Their criticism is in fact reinforced by Eadie's and her supporters' own interpretation of her NDE. This is, of course, the interpretation most visionaries give of their visions. It is not, however, the only interpretation. Zaleski's exploration of medieval afterlife accounts makes clear that theologians in the Middle Ages were aware that visionary experiences of the afterlife were normally edited by scholars or religious authorities, and at any rate—even when not edited—reflected the personal theological preferences (and occasionally affiliation with a particular religious order) of the visionary. Medieval theologians did not wait for modern social science to recognize that narratives of visions and mystical experiences are culturally conditioned (even if they, of course, did not use this exact term). They maintained that visionary experiences could still be "true," but contrasted their rather subjective "truth" with the objective truth of the scriptures validated by tradition and the church.

Visionary experiences in the form of apparitions and visions of the Virgin Mary or Jesus Christ are, by the way, still common in the Roman Catholic church. The Catholic church reserves the right to "validate" these experiences as genuine but is careful to emphasize that validation means only that nothing in the experience is "unorthodox," that it does not engage the church's infallibility or is binding on church members. Out of more than one thousand incidents in this century, less than twenty have been "validated" by the church hierarchy. Additionally, the validated visions remain "private revelations," not to be confused with the "public revelation" of the scriptures. This distinction between "visions" and "revelations" may be applicable outside Catholic apparitions.<sup>79</sup>

Of course, NDE narratives differ from usual accounts of apparitions of the Virgin Mary by Catholics. The latter, after all, operate within a given denomination or church and take for granted its theology. NDEs—with the exception of some explicitly Evangelical (and some explicitly Mormon) narratives—are normally non-denominational, and experiencers do not emphasize their religious affiliation when they mention it at all. This circumstance gives NDE accounts a certain ambiguity. Eadie's narrative is, from this point of view, not exceptional. Her story has, first

---

79. On the current Catholic position on visions and private revelations, see Pietro Cantoni, "Rivelazione, rivelazioni private, nuove rivelazioni: criteri e problemi teologici cattolici per un discernimento," in Massimo Introvigne, ed., *Le nuove rivelazioni* (Leumann, Torino: Elle Di Ci, 1991), 251-73. See also, for a balanced treatment of what is today a heated subject of discussion in the Catholic church, Benedict J. Groeschel, *A Still, Small Voice: A Practical Guide On Reported Revelations* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993).

of all, evolved in nearly twenty years from a simple oral narrative to Jane Barfuss's 16-page synopsis—*Spirit World*—and finally to the book written in its final form by Curtis Taylor. This is not uncommon in visionary experiences, and most NDEs have been narrated to an NDE professional researcher who has heavily edited them before publication. In his criticism of *Embraced By The Light*, Orson Scott Card notes that Eadie's "is an oftentold tale, and it would be remarkable indeed if it had not grown in the retelling. . . . Innocence was gone by the time this book appeared."<sup>80</sup> Coming from an experienced storyteller like Card, the argument deserves attention but should not be carried too far. After all, religious experiences in all churches (including accounts of the first vision by Joseph Smith) have reached us through a whole story of different versions, editions, and publications.

Eadie and her editors seem to have been conditioned by two different traditions: LDS doctrine (both official and folk) and the rich, already existing NDE literature which should in turn be placed within the context of the spiritual beliefs (conveniently summarized by the expression "New Age") to which most authoritative NDE researchers subscribe. Suspicious Evangelical critics have noted that Eadie attended a Catholic school in her childhood and have included "a dab of Roman Catholicism" among the influences shaping Eadie's NDE,<sup>81</sup> but the Catholic influence is not particularly apparent except perhaps in the three monks who meet Eadie when she has just left her body. As we have seen, Evangelical critics suspect a Mormon conspiracy to infiltrate Evangelical Christianity behind *Embraced By The Light*, and some conservative Mormons suspect in turn a New Age conspiracy to take over Mormonism. The fact that Eadie (or her editors) decided to downplay her LDS religious affiliation has added fuel to the fire of the controversy. Ultimately, however, such criticism could only mean what is obvious even to the more enthusiastic NDE researchers: NDEs are culturally conditioned, and that among the conditioning elements there is now the literature itself resulting from twenty years of NDE research.

Zaleski makes a good case that there is little purpose in dissecting Eadie's book or other NDE narratives to distinguish between what has "really" been experienced and what should have been added at a later stage, and between the genuine "hard core" and the culturally conditioned LDS or "New Age" elements. In fact, these distinctions are impossible. Eadie's narrative could only be evaluated as a whole and as a socially constructed product of religious imagination (where "imagination" should not be confused with "fiction," much less with "fraud"). If

---

80. Card, "A New Age Testament," 11.

81. Branch, "Embraced By An Angel Of Light," 6.

we assume that Eadie has given us a definitive map of the afterlife or the spirit world, superseding all previous maps, we could only regard her as the potential founder of a new religious movement, since her map—when taken at face value—includes LDS, mainline Christian, and “New Age” elements but may not be entirely reduced to each one of these religious traditions. It is not entirely inconceivable that someone may start a religious movement taking *Embraced By The Light* as a binding revelation. Although Eadie has repeatedly claimed that this is not her intention, her authorization will not be needed to start a new religious movement based on her book. After all, small religious movements based on Tolkien’s saga or Robert Heinlein’s *Stranger in a Strange Land* have been established, with no sponsorship or support by these two famous authors.

The attitude of the LDS church could become a factor in the development, if any, of a new religious movement among Eadie’s followers. It may be tempting to compare Eadie to the late Annalee Skarin (1899–1988), a Mormon housewife who obtained significant success in the 1950s with books describing her revelatory experiences combining Mormonism and popular occult-metaphysical themes. Due to action taken by Apostle Mark Petersen, Skarin was excommunicated in 1952 and her followers eventually formed a still existing, loosely affiliated religious movement or network, best known for its claim that Skarin did not die but was “translated” into Heaven “such as Enoch in Biblical days.”<sup>82</sup> Skarin’s case suggests that action against Eadie by the LDS church could become a catalyst for the birth of a new religious movement. Ultimately, however, whether *Embraced By The Light* is or will be considered a public, objective, binding “revelation” rather than a subjective account of a private visionary experience does not depend on the LDS church’s or even Eadie’s attitude but on her readers’. To put it in Zaleski’s words, “in the end, a revelation is binding only if it binds.” Sociologically, “it must create or serve a community, something no NDE narrative—nor the whole of NDE literature—has ever attempted to do to this date.”<sup>83</sup> For the faithful follower of a religious tradition, a “revelation” is binding because it has been validated or canonized by the divinely ordained and guaranteed authority of a church. For the social scientist, a vision becomes a binding “revelation” when it is accepted as mandatory by a relevant community.<sup>84</sup>

---

82. See Samuel W. Taylor, “The Puzzle of Annalee Skarin: Was She Translated Correctly?” *Sunstone* 15 (Apr. 1991): 42–46. See also “Rumors of Author’s Translation Put to Rest,” *Sunstone* 18 (Apr. 1995): 87.

83. Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys*, 204. See, on the creation of new religious networks based on NDEs, Michael Grosso, *Millennium Myth: Love and Death at the End of Time* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1995).

84. See Introvigne, *Le nuove rivelazioni*.

There is no evidence that the 5 million Americans who purchased a copy of *Embraced By The Light* are ready to start a new denomination. Nor have they left their churches to follow Betty Eadie as a new source of religious authority. *Embraced By The Light* seems, by all accounts, to have been widely accepted as a non-binding vision. Since visions are, by definition, subjective, it is not surprising that Eadie's have been received with mixed feelings by different audiences. Her experience is indeed moving, and well told. One could agree with Card that its success among Mormons "may be a symptom of how hungry the Saints are for vivid spiritual experiences"<sup>85</sup> in a time when visions and revelations are no longer as commonplace as they were in Kirtland or Nauvoo. As a revelation, it is true that *Embraced By The Light* could not be accepted by an orthodox LDS, or Roman Catholic, or Evangelical Protestant. If her vision, on the other hand, is regarded just as a vision, as a call expressed in symbols to conversion and re-orientation—as well as a social product of religious imagination—no one should feel threatened in his or her orthodoxy. That this may be the attitude of the average reader of *Embraced By The Light* is proved, perhaps, by the success itself of the book. Observers of contemporary LDS life may, in turn, conclude that Eadie's book is evidence that Mormon religious imagination is still capable of creating powerful visions at the end of the twentieth century.

---

85. Card, "A New Age Testament," 12.