



Encountering Mystery: Religious Experience in a Secular Age

Dale C. Allison Jr.

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Dale C. Allison Jr.'s *Encountering Mystery* is a stimulating, thoughtful examination of the power and relevance of personal spiritual experiences that are often dismissed in the secular world.

The work cites hundreds of accounts in which everyday people encountered the transcendent, including visions, prayers, angelic visits, miraculous events, and near-death experiences. Often, these narratives are uplifting and inspiring, “extraordinary experiences that [altered] lives.” While some may be illusory, the incidents are so frequent and consistent across cultures and spiritual views that they suggest that grace is “built into the structure of things” and that there is a powerful mystery “behind, beneath, and beyond the mundane face of the world.”

Drawn from firsthand accounts and dozens of sources, these stories are recounted with convincing detail, as when a flatlined patient had the sensation of rising above his body, and later described events in the operating room with uncanny precision; and with cases wherein multiple witnesses saw the same luminous presence. The book argues that, instead of being ignored, these experiences should be acknowledged and valued.

In addition to challenging secular materialists who believe there's nothing beyond physical reality, the book targets mainstream theologians and pastors who fear that elevating individual experiences undermines traditional church doctrines and biblical authority. Allison suggests that clergy who are apathetic about the “visions, voices, dreams, and mystical experiences” of people today miss an essential opportunity to engage in a meaningful spiritual discussions. The book contends, with conviction and strength, that “[w]e should not shrink experience to fit our understanding, but enlarge our understanding to take in experience.”

Scholarly and accessible, *Encountering Mystery* dares to address spiritual phenomena that many experience, but that few are willing to discuss. It opens for consideration the many ways that the divine intervenes in the lives of ordinary people.

KRISTEN RABE (July / August 2022)

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