

## Provonsha on Death as a Barrier to Pride

Jack W. Provonsha. *Is Death for Real?* 79 pp. Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1981. \$3.95 (paper).

by Albert P. Thompson

Popular fascination with death and near-death experiences long have challenged both Christians and skeptical scientists. In the introductory pages of *Is Death for Real?*, Jack W. Provonsha, chairman of the department of ethics at Loma Linda University, illustrates the impressive other-worldly implications of near-death experiences with several anecdotes from the recent works of Raymond Moody, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, and others.

Leaning on his wide exposure to psychedelic literature during graduate studies and his medical background as a practicing physician, Provonsha suggests that such other-worldly encounters are not unique to near-death experiences. The characteristics of the dissociative states produced by hallucinogenic drugs, certain conventional medications, and various disease states are virtually in every respect identical to the accounts of near-death experiences. Moreover, the private nature of these experiences makes the higher reality suggested by them inaccessible to scientific testing, requiring alternative methods of evaluation. For Provonsha, this means testing the experience by comparison with previously established truths, especially those in the Scriptures.

In a brief historical review of the subject, Provonsha discusses the Neo-Platonizing of Christianity and points out that recent developments in biblical scholarship substantiate a holistic concept of man. This concept of man as a "multi-dimensional

unity" and its current, wholesome impact on sociology and medicine contrasts sharply with the influence of dualism in earlier centuries.

In his last two chapters, Provonsha compares death denial to that most fundamental sin, self-sufficiency. As a hedge against this error, the first death is God's reminder of our "creatureliness" and the final blow to "hubris—arrogant human pride." "Death is the one basic fact of human existence over which man has no control." Provonsha briefly discusses the nature of sin, arguing that death denial becomes another fig leaf by which humans attempt to deal with their "existential nakedness." Death anxiety has a counterpart in guilt anxiety, which Provonsha describes, in words familiar to readers of his previous publications, as "self disesteem, anxiety, aloneness, and meaninglessness."

The solution to the morass in which humans find themselves is to "look at it squarely and put it in the hands of God." This death to self is followed by a resurrection to a new life of "buoyant, responsible, released living"—a creative life of celebration that offers a foretaste of the future bodily resurrection. We shall live again "because He lives and because He graciously remembers" us.

As a Redwood Paperback, the book is not written in technical language and is directed to the general, Christian reader. However, the style is probably above the heads of the usual "literature-evangelized audience." For the thoughtful Adventist and the well-read Christian, the book offers a refreshingly sensible and consistent approach to death, and for those with a particular interest in near-death experiences, the bibliographies of the first four chapters alone make the book immensely valuable.

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