

BOOK REVIEW

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The Division of Consciousness: The Secret Afterlife of the Human Psyche, by Peter Novak. Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing Company, 1997, 258 pp, \$14.95, pb.

A very personal theology can emerge as a result of an individual's deepest grief. Experiencing despair, hopelessness, or anger enables a person to delve into those inner emotions we sometimes neglect when life appears to be going well.

Just such an emotionally shattering experience caused Peter Novak to write *The Division of Consciousness*. Novak's young wife died just a few months after the birth of their daughter, and he was gripped by a devastating grief. Three dreams of his wife's seeming "progression" in the afterlife helped him adjust to losing her. The last dream, occurring years after her death, was the impetus for him to investigate the concepts of death and life after death.

Not satisfied with what he regarded as the two traditional views of life after death—the heaven/hell duality and reincarnation—he began a serious search into the sacred writings of various world religions past and present, Freudian and Jungian psychology, Swedenborgianism, near-death experiences, past-life regressions, contemporary science, and the recent discoveries at Nag Hammadi and an increased understanding of Christian Gnosticism. After he collected and sifted extensive data from these studies, his theory of the division of consciousness emerged. Taking his cue from the Native American *ni* and *nagi*, the Egyptian *ba* and *ka*, and the ancient Chinese *hun* and *p'o* concepts, and finding what he believes to be an understanding of "division" in ancient Zoroastrianism, classical Greek writings, Swedenborg's visions, and various

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philosophers and psychologists, he concluded that at death there is a "division" of the individual, which results in the separating of the tripartite nature of the individual: body, soul, spirit. These arguments are succinct and, except for a few instances of debatable data interpretation, easily support his tenet.

For many in the West, the difference between the soul and the spirit is not clearly delineated. In fact, many use the terms interchangeably. Novak understands the soul to be the unconscious, the seat of the instincts, the feeling, subjective part of the individual; while he sees the spirit as the conscious, the seat of the "free mind," the thinking, objective part of the individual. Prior to this "division," he concludes, humanity "would have possessed a complete and unbroken mental record going all the way back to its very beginnings" (p. 66). There existed a Primordial Unity of the soul, which divided when the spirit asserted a dominance over the soul, causing the soul to be sublimated and "unconscious." Thus, the original separation of humanity from the divine would have been that time when the soul was unable or unwilling to provide the necessary negative inputs, a process of free will that resulted in the soul submerging to the unconscious. The varied myths of a deity or deities struggling over chaos were attempts at explaining this split.

From this understanding, Novak expands his theory to include the classic Christian concepts of the Fall, Original Sin, Redemption, theodicy, the Resurrection of Jesus, and the Resurrection of the physical body. In his explanation as to how the division theory helps to explain, and in some cases even simplify, traditional Christian theological tenets, he maintains a consistent point of view. It is at this point that many of the more conservative readers might find objections. Whether or not one agrees with his basic premise, his approach of delineating and defending the division of consciousness is logical and consistent.

Novak writes not only from the heart but also from extensive research into areas not normally conquered by laypeople or a nonacademic student of religion. Though his research emerged as a result of personal experience, his scholarship is evident, as he interprets data from an eclectic, widely varied wealth of information. His book is an exhaustive compilation of the thoughts of many, throughout the world and throughout the ages, upon the timeless questions of life and death and the mysteries of the next life.

Is his division theory a true picture of humanity? That, of course, must be answered by the individual. Even Novak admits that his conclusions do not come from a vision from God or other heavenly source. Whether

or not one agrees with Novak's conclusions, the reader will find a wealth of information to supplement and challenge old concepts and theories.

Any seeker of truth should read *The Division of Consciousness*. This book will help the beginning researcher to form a basis for deeper study and will challenge the advanced researcher to go beyond personal biases as the search for truth continues.