

ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 156

“Readiness for the Second Advent”

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“The Resurrection of the Body”

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This newsletter consists of two major Bible studies and three update reports. The first Bible study is by Prof. Jon Paulien, who is familiar to most of our readers, having contributed several insightful essays to our newsletter. For the past 20 years Prof. Paulien has been serving as the chairman of the NT Department of Andrews University Theological Seminary. His books, articles, and lectures have been a blessing to thousand of people in many countries.

Paulien’s essay is entitled “Readiness for the Second Advent.” In a most perceptive way, he highlights both the “healthy” and “unhealthy” ways to live in the expectancy of Christ’s soon-Coming. This Bible study is excerpted from his book, *The Millennium Bug*, published by Pacific Press. Most likely this essay will wet your appetite to read the whole book available at your ABCs.

The second Bible study, entitled “The Resurrection of the Body,” is excerpted from my own book *Immortality or Resurrection?* For the sake of brevity, I have excerpted only 10 pages of the 50 pages chapter. This short essay addresses the fundamental question of the nature of the resurrected body. In Paul’s day the notion of the resurrection of the body was absurd to the dualistic thinking of most people who viewed the body as the prison house of the soul to be discarded at death. Even today, most Christians think of salvation in terms of ascension of the the soul to heaven, rather than in terms of the resurrection of the body. Yet Scripture explicitly teaches the resurrection of the body at Christ’s Coming.

The question is: What does Paul mean when he speaks of the resurrection of the body? And, What will the resurrection body be like? Will it be a physical or a spiritual body? Will it be similar to or radically different from the present one? How will our personal identity be preserved? Will I look 70 years old with a shining top like now, or 25 years

old with the nice wavy hair I used to have? Will you recognize me by my look or by my common expression “MAMMA MIA”? In what sense will we be “like the angels”? These are some of the questions that I am addressing. I anticipate that some of you may not agree with everything I wrote. That is to be expected. The aim of my short essay is to stimulate our thinking. If we end up disagreeing on some points, let us be mature enough to disagree without becoming disagreeable to one another.

If you like this Bible study, you may wish to order the book *Immortality or Resurrection?* The book has been favorably reviewed by dozen of scholars of different persuasions and has been adopted as a text book by some theological seminaries. It provides a much needed response to the widespread deception of conscious life after death. You can order your copy online at http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/books/immortality_resurrection/ or by calling us at 269-471-2915.

Besides the two major essays, you will find in this newsletter a report on the video recording of the lecture *CRACKING THE DA VINCI CODE*, and a brief analysis of the controversial lecture delivered by Pope Benedict XVI on September 12, 2006, at the University of Regensburg in Germany. As you well know a quote from the lecture about Islam, has generated violent reactions in Muslim countries.

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UPDATE ON *CRACKING THE DA VINCI CODE*

This newsletter comes to you with considerable delay, not because I was secretly “raptured” away (as someone suggested), but because I devoted the past three weeks to complete the powerpoint lecture entitled *CRACKING THE DA VINCI CODE*. This has been a major project on which I have worked on and off for the past 5 months. Last Monday evening, September 25, 2006, the project came to a successful completion, when Leonard Brown, Prof. of Filming at Andrews University, video-taped the two hours lecture in the media studio of the university.

I am looking forward with eager anticipation to see the edited version of the lecture. The reason is that the setting of the lecture is a very modern virtual studio with a wide screen surrounded by several TV monitors. It looks as if I am delivering the lecture from a multi-million dollars modern studio, when in reality the taping was done in the modest studio of Andrews University. Prof. Brown reassures me that this will be the best-looking recording that I have ever done. He will drop manually each of the 135 slides that I have used for the powerpoint presentation. The slides will appear in an impressive wide virtual screen. The editing process should be completed in about 10 days. By October 10, 2006 we should be ready to mail this DVD album with the live lecture on *CRACKING THE DA VINCI CODE*. In a couple of days you will be able to view a three minutes trailer of the lecture by clicking here:

It is hard to describe the deep sense of relief I experienced at the end of the video-taping session. For the past five months I have been reading and reflecting (even while sleeping at night) on the significance of Dan Brown's best selling novel, *The Da Vinci Code* (Henceforth *DVC*). As of May 2006 more than 60.5 million copies have been sold in 45 languages.

Why I Examined *The Da Vinci Code*

You may be wondering, why would a Church Historian like me, invest much time and money in examining a novel? The answer is simple. The *DVC* is much more than a novel. It is a social phenomenon that is shattering the faith of millions of Christians by blatantly attacking the fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith. In many ways this is a blasphemous and sacrelegious novel that insults God, Christ, the Gospels, the Bible, and fundamental Christian teachings.

The problem with the *DVC* is that it is fiction presented as fact. On page 1, called the "FACT" page, Dan Brown, states: "All descriptions of art work, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate" (*DVC* 1). On several interviews, Dan Brown repeated the same claim. When asked by Matt Lauer in the *Today Show* how much of the book was based on actual events, Dan Brown replied, "*Absolutely all of it.*"

Surprisingly, the *DVC* has been favorably reviewed in several newspapers and journals. The *New York Daily News* says: “The research impeccable.” The *Library Journal* writes: “This masterpiece should be mandatory reading.” The *Washington Post* states: “Read the book and be enlightened.”

I read the book but I was not enlightened at all. On the contrary, I was greatly distressed by the sheer absurdity of the following false claims:

- Christ married Mary Magdalene and they had a daughter Sarah.
- Christ chose Mary Magdalene to lead His church, not the twelve apostles as the Gospels tell us.
- Constantine chose our 4 Gospels out of 80, because they promote Christ’s divinity. He rejected the Gnostic Gospels because they stress the human traits of Christ.
- The early Christians worshipped the “sacred feminine” with ritual sex in order to experience the knowledge of God.
- The Catholic Church has conspired to suppress the secret of Christ’s marriage by using murderous organizations like *Opus Dei*.

As an Early Church historian, I can assure you that there is not a shred of historical evidence for any of these absurd claims. Yet million of gullible Christians are accepting as truth Dan Brown’s false claims about the origin of Christianity. The reason is that they are biblically and historically illiterate.

***The Da Vinci Code* Undermines the Faith**

Polls conducted in different countries clearly indicate that *DVC* is undermining the faith of million of people. For example, a British poll conducted by *Opinion Research Business* found that that 60% of people who read the *DVC*, believe that Jesus had children by Mary Magdalene—compared with 30% of those who had not read the book.

A French survey conducted by *IPSOS*, shows that 48% of the readers of *DVC* believe that Jesus was a mere man who married Mary Magdalene—compared to 29% of those who had not read the book. A survey of 1005 Canadian conducted by *Decima Research* shows that 32% of those who have read the *DVC* believe that the book offers a factual presentation of the origin of Christianity.

The devastating impact of the *DVC* upon the fundamental Christian beliefs of millions of people, calls for an examination of its false claims. To ignore Dan Brown's deceptive attempts to discredit the Christian faith, means to fail to help the million of confused Christians, who are unable to distinguish between the *DVC*'s facts and the fiction.

The Aim of the Lecture

The aim of the lecture is to expose, not the UNREAL Catholic conspiracy to cover up Christ's marital status, but the REAL conspiracy of Dan Brown himself, that is, the deceptive methods he uses to discredit Christianity, in order to promote his neo-pagan forms of worship.

The ultimate aim is to seek to understand how the neo-pagan false worship promoted by the *DVC*, fulfills the prophetic scenario of the endtime showdown between true and false worship, as predicted by Jesus, Paul, and expanded in Revelation.

The numerous books that I have read on the *DVC* and the 20 plus powerpoint presentations that I have reviewed, largely ignore the prophetic significance of the neo-pagan false worship promoted by Dan Brown. This is true even of the Adventist powerpoint presentations that I have seen. The primary concern of these authors is to respond to such false allegations as: Constantine chose and manipulated the Four Gospels in order to prove Christ's divinity; Constantine rejected 80 Gnostic Gospels because they stress Christ's humanity; the Council of Nicaea in AD 325 voted on the divinity of Christ; Leonardo Da Vinci knew the secret of Christ's marriage to Mary Magdalene and left clues in *The Last Supper*, the Catholic Church has attempted during the past 17 centuries to conduct a massive cover up the secret of Christ's marriage to Mary Magdalene, through murderous organizations like *Opus Dei*.

In my lecture I do briefly examine these absurd allegations, but my concern is to understand where is Dan Brown leading people? What is his secret agenda? What are his strategies to lead many people away from the true worship of God into his neo-pagan forms of worship?

Dan Brown Uses Two Strategies to Promote His Neo-pagan Worship

Simply stated, I found that Dan Brown uses two major strategies. On the one hand, he attack all the fundamental beliefs of Christianity, and on the other hand, he promotes his neo-pagan forms of worship. Let us briefly summarize each of these strategies.

First, Dan Brown promotes false worship by attacking such fundamental Christian beliefs as these:

- 1) Jesus was not the Son of God, but a mortal man.
- 2) Emperor Constantine declared Jesus to be God at the Council of Nicaea in 325, by rejecting 80 Gospels and rewriting the four Gospels of the NT.
- 3) Jesus married Mary Magdalene and had a child Sarah, whose royal bloodline survives to this very day.
- 4) “The Bible is the product of man ... not of God ... and it has evolved through countless translations, additions and revisions” (DVC 312).
- 5) Salvation is not through Christ’s atoning death, but through the worship of the “sacred feminine” with ritual sex.

Second, Dan Brown promotes false worship by teachings such heresies as these:

- 1) We need to liberate ourselves from the monotheistic worship of one God– the male God of the Bible.
- 2) We are free to worship several Gods and Goddesses on any day, because the Sabbath is Jewish and Sunday is pagan.
- 3) We need to liberate ourselves from the worship of Jesus as the Son of God, because He was a mere mortal man, who was declared divine by Constantine in AD 325 at the Council of Nicaea.
- 4) We need to liberate ourselves from the ignorant belief that the Bible is inspired and authoritative, because it has evolved through countless revisions done by men.
- 5) Ritual sex “is not a perversion. It is a deeply sacrosanct ceremony” practiced by early Christians (DVC 309).
- 6) We can become “spiritually complete” and achieve knowledge of God through ritual sex (DVC 308).
- 7) We must worship the “Sacred Feminine” because Goddesses have unusual powers to give wisdom and saving knowledge.

Prophetic Significance of *The Da Vinci Code*

Dan Brown's neo-pagan false worship is popular because it appeals to our secular, postmodern, humanistic, new age culture which rejects moral absolutes—such as the Ten Commandments, creation, no sex outside marriage—accepting instead moral relativism. Truth, as Dan Brown puts it, is “whatever you believe it to be.”

Surprisingly, the prophetic significance of Dan Brown's neo-pagan false worship, is largely ignored in the critical reviews and powerpoint presentations that I have read and seen. The major concern is to expose the flaws of Dan Brown's allegations. This seems to be true even for the Adventist reviews and powerpoint presentations that I have seen. But as Adventists who claim to have a prophetic understanding of the endtime showdown over worship, we can hardly ignore the prophetic significance of *The Da Vinci Code*. Our past tendency to place all our eggs in the basket of the papacy, may blind us to the fact that Satan is using a variety of agencies to lead the world into idolatrous forms of worship.

The false worship being promoted by the *DVC* represents in my view a key player in the prophetic endtime battle between true and false worship. God's final appeal in Revelation is to come out of the false worship promoted by spiritual Babylon: “Come out of her my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues” (Rev 18:4).

Revelation portrays Satan like a monster with many tentacles, using different strategies (beasts) to win the battle over worship. The *DVC* is one of the significant strategies. Our calling is to proclaim to the world God's final warning message: “Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountain of the water” (Rev 14:7).

You will find the DVD recording of *CRACKING THE DA VINCI CODE*, intriguing, informative and challenging. It addresses a host of questions, including the alleged role of Constantine in changing the Sabbath to Sunday. Since we live in a visual society, I invested a lot of time and efforts looking for pictures related to each topic discussed.

To make it possible for many to benefit from this timely visual lecture, we are offering the DVD album on *CRACKING THE DA VINCI*

CODE at the pre-publication price of only \$35.00, airmailing expenses included even overseas, instead of the regular price of \$100.00. This special price is extended until October 31, 2006. The album includes also a separate file with the 135 powerpoint slides that I used for the lecture. You are free to use the slides for your own presentations. We guarantee to process your order as soon as the DVD album is released, by October 10, 2006.

You can order the **DVD album on *CRACKING THE DA VINCI CODE* at the special pre-publication price of \$35.00, instead of \$100.00**, in four different ways:

(1) **Online:** By clicking here: http://www.biblicalpherspectives.com/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Store_Code=bookstore&Product_Code=AV-DaVinci&Category_Code=audio_video

(2) **Phone:** By calling us at (269) 471-2915 to give us your credit card number and postal address.

(3) **Email:** By emailing your order to <sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com>. Be sure to provide your postal address, credit card number, and expiration date.

(4) **Regular Mail:** By mailing a check for \$35.00 to BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 4990, USA. We guarantee to process your order immediately.

SEPTEMBER 30, 2006: ORLANDO: LIVE LECTURE ON *CRACKING THE DA VINCI CODE*.

If you live in Orlando, FL, you are welcome to attend my live lecture on *Cracking the Da Vinci Code* this coming Sabbath afternoon (5:00 p. m.), September 30, 2006, at the ALTAMONTE SPRINGS SDA CHURCH. The church is located at 455 Mailand Avenue, Altamonte Springs, Florida 32701. For directions call Pastor Ron Bentzinger at (407) 767-7522. My seminar begins on Friday evening, September 29, at 7:30 p. m. It will continue on Sabbath morning at 11:00 a. m., with the final lecture scheduled for Sabbath afternoon at 5:00 p. m. Thank you for informing your friends about this special rally.

POPE BENEDICT XVI'S CONTROVERSIAL LECTURE

On 12 September 2006, Pope Benedict XVI delivered a lecture titled "Faith, Reason and the University — Memories and Reflections,"

at the University of Regensburg in Germany, where he was previously a professor of theology.

The lecture has caused Muslim demonstrations, riots, and even the shooting of a Catholic nun in Somalia. Many Islamic politicians and religious leaders registered their protest against what they believe was an insulting mischaracterization of Islam, in Pope Benedict's quotation, "Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached."

The quote is taken from a 1391 dialogue between the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Paleologus and an educated Persian, on such issues as forced conversion, holy war, and the relationship between faith and reason. The Pope used Emperor Manuel II's argument in order to draw a distinction between the Christian view that "not acting reasonably is contrary to God's nature", and an Islamic view, as explained by Theodore Khoury and Ibn Hazm, that God transcends rationality, and his will is not constrained by any principle, including rationality.

Some of the Adventist reactions to the Pope's lecture emailed to me, tend to be very negative. It almost seems that to be a loyal Adventist you must always find something wrong with the Pope. I do not share this view. There are times when I condemn the pope for actively promoting the idolatrous worship of Mary, but there are also times when I commend pope for addressing the socio-political issues of our time in a responsible way.

Three Crucial Points Made by Benedict XVI

I read the full text of the Benedict's lecture and I find that he makes three crucial points that have been overshadowed by the controversy about his alleged offensive comments about Islam.

The pope's first point is that the way we envision God determines how we define what is good or evil and the methods we use for advancing truth. For example, if we imagine that God is a remote, transcendent majesty with whom our only possible relationship is one of blind *submission* (Islam=Submission), then we must accept even what seems to be irrational, like the murder of innocents.

Benedict contends that the God of Biblical revelation is a rational God, who does not cancel out or abrogate human reason. Christianity has taught that human beings can build decent societies by following the light of reason. By contrast, the Koranic God is a transcendent God who is not subject to the logic of reason.

The pope's second point flows from the first, namely, that irrational violence aimed at innocent men, women and children "is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the [human] soul." Muslim believers who insist that the suicide bombing of innocents is an act pleasing to God, must be told that they are mistaken in their understanding of God, of His purposes, and His moral commands.

Furthermore, Islamic leaders have a responsibility to correct these distorted views of God, but too few of them, the pope seemed to suggest, have the courage to undertake a cleansing of Islam's conscience, as Pope John Paul II taught the Catholic Church to cleanse its historical conscience. (Crusades, inquisition).

Honest Muslim and honest Christians have the right to disagree on their respective beliefs, but they do not have the right to force the choice imposed to the two Fox News employees by their captors in Palestine: convert or die. There is a serious asymmetry which Benedict has criticized before. The Saudis can build multi-million dollar mosques in Western Europe and the USA, yet Christians can be arrested in Saudi Arabia for giving out Bibles.

The Danger of Postmodern Relativism

The pope's third point, which has largely been ignored in the heat of the controversy, is directed toward the West. The pope warns that the postmodern relativism (which I discuss in my lecture *Cracking The Da Vinci Code*) and irrationalism, which reduces truth to subjective beliefs or feelings, undermines the ability of the West to defend itself. "Why? Because the West won't be able to give reasons why its commitments to civility, tolerance, human rights and the rule of law are worth defending. A Western world stripped of convictions about the truths that make Western civilization possible, cannot make a useful contribution to a genuine dialogue of civilizations, for any such dialogue must be based on a shared understanding that human beings can, however imperfectly, come to know the truth of things" (*Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 20, 2006).

Frankly, I find Benedict XVI speech very compelling. I especially appreciate his distinction between the Christian view of God as a Being who acts according to reason, and the Muslim view of God as a Being who is utterly transcendent, not bound to the rule of reason. To support this point, Benedict cites “the noted French Islamist R. Arnaldez, who points out that Ibn Hazn went so far as to state that God is not bound even by his own word, and that nothing would oblige him to reveal the truth to us. Were it God’s will, we would even have to practice idolatry.”

Such a view of a universe ruled by an irrational God, can only results in a lawless society where good is evil, godliness is mass murder, and everything is permitted. All wars, in such a world, are just wars.

In a world dominated by relativism and political correctness, Benedict XVI must be commended for inviting Moslem leaders to engage in an open dialogue on RELIGION AND VIOLENCE. Perhaps, he is the only religious leader who commands sufficient authority to organize such a dialogue.

But the question is: Can moderate Muslim leaders be self-critical? Can they condemn and marginalize its extremists, or are Muslim today condemned to be held hostage to the passions of those who believe that murdering innocent people is pleasing to the Koranic God? Is the West prepared to encourage such a dialogue and support Islamic reformers?

A Problem with Benedict’s Lecture

The positive aspects of Benedict’s lecture, must not overshadow what I consider a major flaw, namely, his condemnation of the Reformers for rejecting the synthesis between faith and reason which had been worked out by such influential theologians like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. By adopting the principle of *Sola Scriptura*, the Reformers sought to define faith as found in the biblical Word, not in the philosophical speculation of scholastics like Thomas Aquinas.

For Aquinas there are two channels through which God reveals truth: *via naturalis* (human reason) and *via supernaturalis* (Scripture). For the Reformers there is only one channel: *Sola Scriptura*. They rejected human reason as a channel of divine revelation, because historically the

Catholic church developed a host of heresies on the basis of reason, rather than Scripture.

What Benedict ignores is that the Reformers were not against the use of reason per se, but against the way reason had been used by the Scholastics to develop Catholic teachings and practices contrary to biblical teachings. A good example is Thomas Aquinas' teaching on the extermination of heretics. Aquinas is rightly regarded as the most influential Catholic theologian, largely responsible for developing the scaffolding of Catholic theology. His rationale for the extermination of heretics is strictly based on reason, not Scripture, and closely resembles the teaching of the Koran on the killing of the infidels.

Aquinas writes: "With regard to heretics two points must be observed: one, on their own side; the other, on the side of the Church. On their own side there is the sin, whereby they deserve not only to be separated from the Church by excommunication, but also to be severed from the world by death. For it is a much graver matter to corrupt the faith which quickens the soul, than to forge money, which supports temporal life. Wherefore if forgers of money and other evil-doers are forthwith condemned to death by the secular authority, much more reason is there for heretics, as soon as they are convicted of heresy, to be not only excommunicated but even put to death" (SMT SS Q[11] A[3] Body Para. 1/2).

Aquinas continues saying: "On the part of the Church, however, there is mercy which looks to the conversion of the wanderer, wherefore she condemns not at once, but 'after the first and second admonition,' as the Apostle directs: after that, if he is yet stubborn, the Church no longer hoping for his conversion, looks to the salvation of others, by excommunicating him and separating him from the Church, and furthermore delivers him to the secular tribunal to be exterminated thereby from the world by death" (SMT SS Q[11] A[3] Body Para. 2/2).

The above statements clearly show how Aquinas used reason, rather than Scripture, to justify the extermination of so-called "heretics." It is evident that the Catholic historic reason for the extermination of the heretics, is just as irrational as the Koranic texts which command offensive warfare to kill the pagans, Jews, and Christians. For example, Sura 9:5 says: "When the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay

the pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war). But if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity [become Moslem], then open the way for them.” The best way for people to save their lives, was by renouncing their religion and adopting the Islam faith.

Had Benedict XVI chosen to compare the irrational historical Catholic teachings on the extermination of heretics with the irrational Koranic teachings on the killing of the infidels, there would not have been much of an uproar, because he would simply acknowledged the need on the part of both Christians and Muslim to reject violence as a means to advance one’s faith, because it is against the reasonable nature of God. On this basis Muslim may be more likely to engage in a dialogue.

FORTHCOMING VISIT TO SYDNEY AND BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

Our Australian subscribers living in Sydney or Brisbane, will be pleased to learn about my forthcoming visit to their cities. The details of my itinerary are as follows:

November 17-18: PARRAMATTA SDA CHURCH, SYDNEY

Location: 77-81 Hammers Road, Old Toongabbie, Sydney NSW 2146
For information feel free to contact Pastor Rein Muhlberg at (02) 9620 5382 or (02) 9896 3158. I look forward to a great rally. Pastor Muhlberg is a fine pastor who invited me many years ago in Auckland, NZ.

November 20: Monday 9:00 a. m. – SYDNEY WORKERS’ MEETING

Location: Greater Sydney Conference, 4 Cambridge Street, Epping, NSW 2121, Sydney. For information call the Ministerial Secretary, Pastor Garth Bainbridge at (02) 9868 6522. The meeting is primarily for our GSC workers, but Pastor Bainbridge may be willing to grant you admission, if you first make public confession of all your past sins (Please laugh!).

The plan is for me to present two lectures. The first is entitled “From Sabbath to Sunday: How It Came About.” In this powerpoint presentation I will share the highlights of my research on the change of the Sabbath, done in Rome at the Pontifical Gregorian University. The second lecture is entitled “The Mark and Number of the Beast.” This powerpoint study examines the various past and present interpretations of the mark and number of the Beast. It is designed to help our pastors and members

understand why our Adventist church has moved from the numeric to the symbolic interpretation of 666.

November 22: WEDNESDAY EVENING: NO INVITATION YET

If your church is located in Sydney and is interested to invite me to speak on Wednesday evening, November 22, 2006, feel free to contact me by email <sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com> or by phone 1-269-471-2915. I will be glad to accept your invitation.

November 24-26: BRISBANE: SABBATH CONFERENCE

Location: Brisbane Adventist College, 303A Broadwater Road, Mansfield, QLD 4122. The Sabbath Conference is co-sponsored by the South Queensland Conference and several sabbatarian churches in the Brisbane area. For information feel free to contact Pastor Mark Pierce at 0417625884.

November 27: Monday 9:00 a. m. – BRISBANE WORKERS' MEETING

Location: 19 Eagle Terrace, Brisbane, QLD 4000. For information call the Conference office at (7) 3218-777.

The plan is for me to present the same two powerpoint lectures that I will deliver at the workers' meeting in Sydney. If you are not a pastor, ask the Conference office for permission to attend.

FREE CD AND DVD ALBUM OF PROF. GRAEME BRADFORD

Several pastors have reported to me that after showing to their congregation Prof. Bradford's live DVD lecture on Ellen White, most members were very eager to purchase a copy of the book *MORE THAN A PROPHET* at the special offer of \$5.00 per copy, instead of the regular price of \$25.00.

To make it possible for every Adventist family to benefit from Prof. Bradford's timely book *MORE THAN A PROPHET*, I decided to offer until October 31, 2006, one FREE CD/DVD album of Prof. Bradford, with any order of 2 or more copies of the book *MORE THAN A PROPHET*. The regular price of the CD/DVD album is \$100.00. You will receive this album free with your order of 2 or more copies of the book. The reason for this offer is the conviction that when your church members and friends

view Prof. Bradford's DVD lecture, they will be eager to purchase a copy of his book. For more details and order information, click here:

<http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/BradfordOffer/offer.htm>

More than a Prophet is the fruit of twenty years of Prof. Bradford's painstaking research on the prophetic ministry of Ellen White. It is a long-overdue book that clears the air of prevailing misconceptions about Ellen White which have caused thousands of Adventists to leave church.

A dozen of Conferences have donated a copy of *More than a Prophet* to each of their workers. For example, the Texas Conference ordered 200 copies. Other conferences have ordered less copies because of their smaller number of workers. Overseas conference like the South African Union, ordered 300 copies. Your personal effort to promote this timely book in your church is greatly appreciated.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AT THE END OF THE NEWSLETTERS

A detailed description of the special offers on goods and services is provided at the end of this newsletter. Here is a brief listing of the announcements that are expanded at the end of this newsletter.

1. CALENDAR OF FORTHCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS for the months of September, October, and November 2006. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

2. DR. BACCHIOCCHI'S NEW DVD ALBUM ON *CRACKING THE DA VINCI CODE*, scheduled to be released on October 10, 2006. Details give above.

3. PROF. BRADFORD NEWLY RELEASED BOOK *MORE THAN A PROPHET*, AND HIS CD/DVD ALBUM. The CD/DVD album is offered free at this time with the purchase of two or more books. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

4. DR. BACCHIOCCHI'S NEW DVD ALBUM ON THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

5. DR. BACCHIOCCHI'S PACKAGE OF ALL HIS RECORDINGS.

The package consists of 5 albums which are offered for only \$100.00, instead of the regular price of \$500.00. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

6. PROF. JON PAULIEN PUBLICATIONS IN ONE CD ALBUM.

The album contains more than a dozen of books and scores of articles written during the past 20 years of research. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

7. PROF. JON PAULIEN'S 60 CD DISKS containing 120 lectures that explain verse by verse the book of Revelation. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

8. TAGNET SPECIAL NEW WEB HOSTING OFFER for Adventist churches and members. TAGnet provides an incredible number of web-hosting services to our churches and members. This newsletter comes to you through their gracious and efficient service. For detail information, visit their website at <http://www.netadventist.org> or <http://home.tagnet.org/> You may also call their office 800 - 9TAGNET. They are ready and eager to help you.

9. SPECIAL OFFER ON HITACHI PROJECTORS: HITACHI has offered an additional discount to help especially our churches and schools in developing countries. For examples, the special offer for the new 2000 LUMENS PROJECTOR CP-X250 IS ONLY \$1095.00, instead of the previous SDA price of \$1995.00. See the details at the end of this newsletter or call me at 269-471-2915

10. SPECIAL OFFER ON NEW TOSHIBA LAPTOP TECRA A8 with dual processor and finger-print security. See details at the end.

11. REMOTE PRESENTER: Special offer on the smallest and most powerful REMOTE powerpoint presenter by Honeywell. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

12. BED & BREAKFAST FACILITIES IN LONDON, ENGLAND

If your travel plans call for a stop in London, will be pleased to learn about

a most gracious Adventist couple that offer the best accommodation and breakfast I have ever enjoyed. See details at: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/BED&BREAKFAST.htm>

“Readiness for the Second Advent”

John Paulien, Ph. D.,

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When as Adventists we think about the End, we tend to do so more with the head than with the heart. We find it much easier to discuss current events in general than our own personal hopes and fears. We find it easier to expound on details of prophecy and history than to have a living relationship with God. We find it much easier to speculate on the nature and timing of the events of the End Time than to give people a practical path toward readiness for those events. Talk is cheap. Genuine life change is challenging.

What does it really mean to get ready for Jesus’ return? How can I get ready in the midst of the rough and tumble busyness of the Information Age? These are questions that we will address briefly in this essay. But before we talk about how to get ready, let me explore some dead ends along the path to readiness. In my experience with Adventist audiences on six continents, I have learned that there are four unhealthy ways that Adventists approach the issue of getting ready for Jesus’ return.

Overplaying the Nearness of the End

The first type of unhealthy approach to the End is a tendency to overplay the nearness of the End, to set dates and seek to build people’s excitement about the absolute nearness of End-Time events. While hard date setting has thankfully diminished since the turn of the millennium, it is not necessary to set an exact date in order to “hype” the End. General statements such as “this is the final generation” are vegetarian versions of date-setting, but they can be just as distracting from genuine readiness as the real thing. And one day, someone will set a date that seems near, but turns out to be too far in the future and many will rest in false security until it is too late.

What we desperately need is the clarity and certainty of His soon coming without the time factor. The coming of Jesus is truly near for all of

us, even if He does not come within our lifetime. My Uncle Gunther, for example, always lived in the full confidence that he would be alive to see Jesus come. A few years ago he spent three delightful weeks with my family around Thanksgiving time. On the Saturday night before his return from Andrews to Lincoln, Nebraska, I invited him over to my house for some “one on one” time. Since he was a retired college professor, I suggested we watch the video Mr. Holland’s Opus, a magnificent portrayal of the long-term effects of lifelong, self-sacrificial teaching. The moving story stimulated a couple of hours of deep sharing that lasted until midnight. He was lucid, peaceful and seemingly in perfect health.

The next morning he got into his famous beat-up VW bus and headed home. Around the middle of the day we received a call from an Illinois state trooper. Uncle Gunther had suffered a stroke, pulled over to the side of the road and died quietly in the trooper’s car on the way to the hospital. He had believed that the coming of Jesus was very soon. But in terms of his awareness and experience the coming of Jesus was even sooner than he expected. You see, from a Seventh-day Adventist perspective, unconsciousness in death means that the next thing a believer experiences after death is the coming of Jesus!

So even hyping the nearness of the End just isn’t soon enough for those who die suddenly. The final events will take some time, anywhere from a few months to a couple of years. But many of us will not live that long. We need to be ready now, for none of us knows if our lives will finish out the day. A student once approached a rabbi and asked, “When should I get right with God?” The rabbi answered, “The day before you die.” The student responded, “But when am I going to die?” The rabbi replied, “No one knows, therefore the Scriptures say, ‘Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.’” Overplaying the End is not a healthy way to be ready for Jesus’ return. Not only that, it is the major culprit in the second unhealthy way that Adventists tend to approach the issue of getting ready for Jesus’ return.

Ignoring the End

The rejection of date-setting and speculation about the End has its own darker side. As people become disgusted with the excesses of “true believers” there is the strong temptation to swing the pendulum to its opposite extreme and give up all interest in final events and often even in the faith itself. Many Adventists today are fed up with teaching and preaching about the End. They don’t want to hear sermons or seminars on the subject. They don’t want to read essays like this. They say, “We have heard that the End is near for forty years, over and over, on and on, and nothing has happened. I’m sick of hearing about it.” Others are sickened by events like those that happened a decade ago in Waco, Texas. Christians who have derived energy from a constant anticipation of the End eventually grow weary. When the End does not come and time moves on, people become more and more cynical about discussions of the End, and lethargy is the result.

Worse yet, more and more Adventist thinkers, in settings where they feel safe enough to be totally candid, are willing to raise the question of whether or not there will ever be a second coming. The ongoing delay (from our perspective) has finally raised, even among Adventists, the figurative cry, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” (2 Pet 3:4).

Many other Adventists still believe in the reality of Jesus’ coming, but just want to hear about practical Christianity and living for Jesus in today’s world. These are very important themes, but in themselves they do not constitute the full witness of Scripture. The Bible is full of teaching about the second coming of Jesus. Nearly a quarter of the New Testament is concerned with events related to the second coming in one form or another. No matter how painful it may be for some to talk about the End, ignoring the End is not an option for New Testament Christians. The New Testament is truly an Adventist book. Ignoring the End will certainly not achieve the goal of readiness for Jesus’ return.

But what of those who have begun to doubt that there will ever be a literal coming of Jesus along with a literal End to history? They are not the first Christians to doubt, Paul faced a similar issue in Corinth. His answer then is no less relevant today. “But if it is preached that Christ

has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, Then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. . . . If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.” (1 Cor 15:12-14, 19-20, 22-23).

In this text Paul takes direct issue with those who would argue for both a “spiritualized” resurrection and second coming of Jesus, or even for the absence of that blessed hope. If we claim to be Adventists, yet doubt the reality of the second coming, Paul argues that our faith and our preaching are useless (1 Cor 15:12-14). We are even worse off than pagans and atheists, who have tasted nothing better than this life and therefore hope for nothing better. According to Paul, to have tasted the gospel without hope of Jesus’ return is to be in a most pitiable condition. To preach the reality of the second coming is not to preach some pie in the sky by and by. Belief in a real and literal second coming has a profound impact on the way we live today. To deny the reality of the second coming is to give up the essence of what it means to be an Adventist.

For Paul the reality of the second coming is not grounded in calculations of its nearness, or in evidence from recent events. For Paul the reality of the second coming is grounded in the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. If Jesus was raised from the dead back in A.D. 31, our own resurrection at the return of Jesus is guaranteed. To doubt the second coming is to doubt the resurrection of Jesus. And if Jesus is not raised from the dead, then the gospel is an empty promise of good things.

It is understandable that the passage of time, and repeated speculations regarding the timing of the End, might cause many to question whether the coming of Jesus is truly near. But we must never allow our discouragement over the timing of the End to undermine our faith in the reality of the End. The gospel and the second coming should be distinguished as two acts of God, but they should never be separated in terms of reality. If the one is real, so is the other.

Shaming to the End

Another unhealthy way that many Adventists approach the issue of getting ready for Jesus' return is to try and figure out who is to blame for the delay of the End. People read statements like "Christ could have come ere this" if His people had only been ready, or "Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of himself in the church." They sometimes take the next step and seek to identify who is unready so they can shame them into action.

"If only those young people would stop bringing all that rock music into the worship service, then Jesus would come." "If only people would keep the Sabbath the way they used to, Jesus would come." "If only people would discover the true teaching about the human nature of Christ, the world would listen and Jesus could come." Many find it necessary to graphically and repeatedly portray the sins in the church and the world that might delay the Lord's return. They seem to believe that by thundering against the sins of the church they can shame many to wake up and take their Christian duties more seriously.

The Bible, on the other hand, teaches that God is in control of events at the End (2 Thess 2:11; Rev 17:17). He is fully qualified to reform the church or discipline it as needed (Rev 3:19). The visible separation between faithful and unfaithful takes place only at the End, the Second Coming (Matt 13:37-43; cf. 13:47-50; 25:31-33). We should not expect to attain an absolutely pure, visible body of believers on this earth before then. Until the Second Coming, believers may have a certain level of discernment, but only God will be fully able to judge. Until then there will always be cases in which believers must leave the judgment up to God.

The biggest problem is that shame and blame theology doesn't work. It feels effective but accomplishes little. It doesn't get anybody ready to meet Jesus. Those who dwell continually on their own shortcomings tend to get worse rather than better. On the other hand, those who focus on the sins of others find it easy to live in comfortable denial of their own shortcomings. When we spend our time examining the faults of others, we lose sight of the One who appears at the End.

"The closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes; for your vision will be clearer, and your imperfections

will be seen in broad and distinct contrast to his perfect nature. This is evidence that Satan's delusions have lost their power; that the vivifying influence of the Spirit of God is arousing you.

“No deep-seated love for Jesus can dwell in the heart that does not realize its own sinfulness. The soul that is transformed by the grace of Christ will admire his divine character; but if we do not see our own moral deformity, it is unmistakable evidence that we have not had a view of the beauty and excellence of Christ.” (*Steps to Christ*, pp. 64-65).

The closer you come to Jesus, the more clearly you see the defects in your own character, and the less-inclined you become to blame the delay of the Advent on the shortcomings of others. There is a better way to promote readiness for the End than to shame and blame those who are not as far along the spiritual path as you or I may perceive ourselves to be.

Fearing the End

Perhaps the most common unhealthy approach to getting ready for Jesus' return is fear. Many Adventists worry about the persecution and martyrdom that the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy seem to predict for the final days of earth's history. Recently a ten-year-old girl said to me, “I used to want Jesus to come back real soon, but now I don't want Him to come back soon, because I'm afraid of the things that will happen before He comes.”

Where did she learn that? I know in that particular case that she didn't get that message at home. Did she learn about it from her friends? In church school? In Sabbath School? Does it really matter? Let's face it, reading the Book of Revelation and the book *Great Controversy* can be scary business. Hiding in the mountains to escape prison, torture and death is no one's idea of fun. Life is better for most people when the action and the adventure happen to someone else. No one wants to be hunted and despised. No one wants to be rejected by friends and family. No one wants to be imprisoned and tortured. Only the suicidal and certain terrorists want to die.

Is it possible to face the End without fear? Is there a healthy

approach to the more frightening events that lie just ahead of us? A helpful starting point is to remember the message of 1 Cor 10:13: “No temptation has seized you, except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”

The message of this text needs to be burned into Adventist hearts. If you can't handle the events of the End, God won't ask you to go through them. Ellen White goes so far as to say that God will lay some people to rest before the End-Time because He knew they couldn't handle what was coming. God is in control of the events of the End. If you commit yourself to Him, He will see you through. God knows what you can take and what you can't. You are safe trusting in Him.

I have another idea about the End that not everyone will agree with, but I base it on the history of some of the martyrs from the past. Servetus was condemned by Calvin to be burned at the stake for his heretic teachings. Now I don't agree with what Calvin did, but the part of the story that interests me here is that Servetus screamed in pain for thirty minutes as he burned. By way of contrast, the godly reformer Huss sang hymns throughout his burning, right up to his last breath. He apparently never felt the flames.

What I get from this is that among the spiritual gifts there seems to be a gift of martyrdom. It is a gift that you can only exercise once! But if God should decide to allow you to witness for Him unto death, there is nothing to fear in the ultimate sense. You will not receive more than you can bear. God will be with you and give you whatever it takes to make it through. If God should choose you to be one of His ultimate heroes, He will give you all the courage and all the pain control that you will need.

On the positive side of End-Time persecution we need to remember that Jesus is worth whatever we have to go through to get to Him. The time of trouble is nothing more than a passageway to Jesus.

I remember a video I saw a long time ago called Princess Bride. In the story a young man falls in love with a princess, but he is not allowed to have her. She is kidnaped and moved far away. The young man follows.

He crosses a passage in rough sea. Then he climbs a thousand-foot high cliff by rope. Then he faces the world's best swordsman. After defeating him he must face a giant hurling boulders at him and then engaging him in a wrestling match. After defeating the giant he outsmarts a wizard who tries to trick him into drinking poison. He then tumbles down a steep hill, passes through a valley where fire belches up out of the ground, takes on rodents of unusual size, and is finally captured and tortured nearly to death.

Unable to walk and barely able to move, he must now engineer the storming of a heavily defended castle with a force of only three men (including the swordsman and the giant who have come over onto his side). After desperate battle he finally gains his bride. And at the end of the video it is clear from the look on his face that it was worth it all in order to be with her.

So it is with the troubles of the End-Time. Surely what you may have to go through in the time of trouble will not be much worse than what that young man went through to attain his bride. And the prize will be all the greater, for Jesus is the greatest person you could ever know or ever want to know. If you know Him, the troubles of the End-Time will be a short interruption on your way to Him. It will be worth going through because at the End you will see Him face to face and carrying on a living, breathing, talking, listening and doing relationship with Him. When you attain eternity, the troubles of the End-Time will appear as nothing by way of contrast.

How to Get Ready

Now that we have looked at some unhealthy approaches to readiness for the coming of Jesus, we come to the matter that transcends all others as we approach the End. We have noticed earlier that the End is about Jesus more than it is about events or ideas. The following text is illustrative. "Now this is eternal life, that they might know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3).

In his message to the last-day church, Laodicea, Jesus says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev 3:20).

The tragedy of the lost at the End is not the quality of their theology, or the lack of good deeds; rather Jesus laments, “I never knew you.” (Matt 7:21-23; 25:13) The climax of the End-Time is not the battle of Armageddon, but the “glorious appearing of our great God and Savior; Jesus Christ.” (Titus 2:13)

Ellen White emphatically agrees that knowing Jesus is the key factor in a healthy approach to the End: “The shortness of time is urged as an incentive for us to seek righteousness and to make Christ our friend. This is not the great motive. It savors of selfishness. Is it necessary that the terrors of the day of God be held before us to compel us through fear to right action? This ought not to be. *Jesus is attractive*. He is full of love, mercy, and compassion. *He proposes to be our friend*, to walk with us through all the rough pathways of life. He says to you, I am the Lord thy God; walk with me, and I will fill thy path with light. Jesus, the Majesty of Heaven, *proposes to elevate to companionship with himself those who come to him* with their burdens, their weaknesses, and their cares. He will make them his dear children, and finally give them an inheritance of more value than the empires of kings, a crown of glory richer than has ever decked the brow of the most exalted earthly monarch” (*Review and Herald*, August 2, 1881, p. 89; Emphasis supplied).

What a beautiful summary of the centrality of a relationship with Jesus in a healthy anticipation of the End! It is the daily walk, the daily companionship that sets the stage for our expectation of an eternity with the same person!

And who is Jesus after all? Why would anyone wait for Him? Why would anyone want to be in relationship with Him? Because He is far greater than any sports figure, greater than any movie star, greater than any earthly ruler. Jesus is the ruler of the entire universe. Most earthly rulers have enough trouble ruling themselves. To know Jesus is to know the greatest there is. He made everything there is, everything worth having or talking about. He is the ultimate superstar.

But better than this, He knows all about you. Very few people who admire Michael Jordan, Tom Cruise, Hillary Clinton, Jackie Chan

or Nelson Mandela have ever met them, much less become known by them. But the King of the universe knows all about you, everything you have ever done, thought, or said. “Uh, Oh,” you are saying to yourself right now, “I’m in really big trouble!” That’s just it. Not only does Jesus know all about you, He loves you just the way you are. No matter what you have done, what you have said, or where you have gone, you are infinitely precious to Him.

A beautiful thing about this is that your relationship with Jesus doesn’t require secrets. There is nothing He could find out about you that he doesn’t already know. You needn’t worry that He will come up with something you did a long time ago, or even something you’re thinking right now, and say, “Oh, if that’s the way you are, I won’t have anything more to do with you!” There is no reason to fear confessing the truth about yourself to Him. He already knows! Nothing you could reveal about yourself could cause Him to leave you or change His mind about you. Your relationship with Him is secure as long as you are willing.

But best of all, He lives forever. He will never abandon you through death. Your relationship with Him is totally secure. These four special qualities (the King of the universe, who knows all about you, yet loves you just the same, and will never die) make Jesus the greatest possible companion any human being could have. A relationship with Him is worth more than any movie star, more than the whole world, more than the universe, more than life itself. A living relationship with Jesus is so precious that thousands have willingly gone to their deaths rather than renounce their relationship with Jesus.

How to Know Jesus

The concept of a living and vibrant relationship with Jesus, however, raises a problem. How do you have that kind of relationship with Him? How do you get so close to Him that you know that you are ready for whatever the End-Time could bring? How do you get so close to Jesus that the second coming becomes your longing desire? How do you overcome the greatest obstacle to a relationship with Jesus? What obstacle? The obstacle of distance. How do you have a relationship with someone you cannot see, hear or touch? How do you have a relationship with someone who is not physically there?

When I first wrote these lines we had just come through the great craze over the movie Titanic. Titanic earned twice as much money from theater admissions as any other movie of all time. What was the reason for this “titanic” excitement? One major factor was the apocalyptic interests of the director, James Cameron. An avid student of Biblical apocalyptic (an earlier movie unabashedly copied the basic plot of the Book of Revelation), he turned a movie about an 85-year-old disaster into a parable of our times. In the sinking ship many in the audience sensed a prophetic pronouncement about the fragility of human technology and even the future of the human race itself.

But there was another, more trivial, reason for the popularity of the film. Millions of teen-age girls in North America became smitten with the handsome young male lead, Leonardo DiCaprio. Many went back to see the movie several times, some claim to have seen it over forty times! They were developing a relationship with someone they couldn’t see, hear, or touch! Few of them have ever seen him in person.

But wait a minute! Couldn’t they see and hear him in the movies he has made? Yes, in a sense. But the movies are not Leonardo. The movies are only a witness to the reality that is Leonardo. How do you know Leonardo DiCaprio even exists if you’ve never met him, heard him, or touched him? You have millions of people testifying to his existence. You hear about him on radio or TV, you read about him in magazines and newspapers. No one doubts his existence, even though few have met him.

The existence of Jesus is even more secure. Where millions will testify to the existence of Leonardo DiCaprio and the influence he may have had in their lives, billions over the centuries have testified to the existence of Jesus, including the testimonies found in the sacred and inspired pages of Scripture. The craze over Leonardo DiCaprio testifies how you can have a real relationship with someone you cannot see, hear or touch. You develop that relationship by spending time with the witness about that person. You read about him, you listen to others who know him, you sample his own testimony about himself on TV, radio, or in a magazine. And for some young women in today’s world, their relationship with Leonardo was the most significant thing that has ever happened to

them, even though they have never met him in person.

So it is with Jesus. If you want to have a living and vital relationship with Him, you need to spend time with the Witness about Him in His Word. You need to invest serious time in Bible study. You need to talk to other people who know Him, and hear their testimonies about His impact in their lives. You need to get involved in the mission that He left for His disciples (Matt 28:20) to accomplish.

Can you imagine what it would be like for a young woman, who has spent weeks of her life getting to know Leonardo through film, TV, and magazines, to suddenly have the opportunity to meet him in person? Or to become his companion? To know him and be known by him? Would she be willing to pass through all kinds of difficulties in order to be with him? Of course she would.

Yet Leonardo is nothing compared with Jesus. Jesus is the King of the whole universe, Leonardo has enough trouble ruling his own emotions. Jesus knows all about you, Leonardo could care less whether you or I exist. Jesus loves you as you are, Leonardo cares only about a small circle of family and friends. And Jesus will be looking great throughout eternity. Will Leonardo look nearly as cute when he is 87 (I'm trying to get a spiritual point across here, I'm not trying to offend octogenarians)? A relationship with Jesus is the greatest thing a person could ever pursue.

More than a decade ago I taught a couple of classes at Helderberg College in South Africa. I spent five whole weeks away from my wife for the first time. It was not an easy experience. What do you think? As the "delay" in our relationship grew longer and longer did I begin to forget her? Did I get tired of waiting and begin setting imaginary dates for my return? No! I spent those five weeks thinking about her more than I had ever thought of her before. In fact she was never sweeter, never more beautiful to me than she was during that period of absence. The longer the time went the more eagerly I anticipated our eventual reunion. I "tasted" our relationship over and over in my mind's eye, and my longing for her grew and grew.

So it is with the return of Jesus. He is worth all the time and energy we could possibly expend in getting to know Him. He is worth going through all the troubles of the End-Time and then some. He is worth at least a thoughtful hour every day, reviewing His character in our minds' eye. As our relationship with Him is renewed every day, our desire to be

closer grows. Getting face to face with Jesus is what anticipation of the End is all about. And when our attention is constantly fixed on Him no amount of delay will spoil our eagerness to see, hear, and touch Him.

So what is the bottom line for today? If you are spending more time with the Leonardos of this world than you are with Jesus, you have made an important choice in terms of your priorities. And I can assure that Leonardo will not be there for you when the End-Time comes! If you are spending more time with Titanic and other media productions, or in listening to secular music, than you are with your Bible, Jesus cannot be the all-in-all priority that you need Him to be in your life. Getting to know Jesus means spending time with the great Witness about Him in Scripture. It means talking to other people who know Him, and hearing their testimonies about their own relationship with Him. It means getting involved in His mission to the world.

As we approach the End-Time, life confronts us with two great witnesses to individuals with whom one can have a real relationship even though at a distance. These witnesses are the Bible and the movie Titanic. Which is worth more investment of your time? Titanic may be a real attention-grabber, but one day it will be forgotten (to some young people it is already ancient history). The Bible, on the other hand, will always be there. The male lead of Titanic can never compare with Jesus. Jesus is the Greatest. So the choice is really a simple one. Remember, the Word of God will last forever. Titanic, on the other hand, is going down!

“The Resurrection of the Body”

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What kind of body will believers receive at the resurrection or translation? Will the resurrected body be reattached to the souls of those who have died? Will it be a physical or a spiritual body? Will it be similar to or radically different from the present one? How will our personal identity be preserved? Will my father be 83 years old and my mother 89? Before we attempt to answer these questions about the nature of the resurrection body, we must mention briefly the two main objections

that have been raised against the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. These stem, on one hand, from philosophical dualism and, on the other hand, from “scientific” materialism.

Objections to the Resurrection of the Body

Greek philosophical dualism viewed material existence as evil and, thus, to be done away with. Salvation was seen as the liberation of the soul from the prison-house of the body. Apparently this dualistic view of human nature influenced some Corinthian Christians to reject the belief in the resurrection of the body. This is indicated by Paul’s question: “How can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” (1 Cor 15:12).

“We can only surmise,” writes Anthony Hoekema, “that this was done under the influence of Greek thought, which taught the immortality of the soul but denied the resurrection of the body. Paul replies to this error by indicating that if one believes in the resurrection of Christ, one cannot very well deny the resurrection of believers.”

Philosophical dualism has greatly influenced Christian thought. In early Christianity, the Gnostics denied the resurrection of the body because, as J. N. D. Kelly puts it, “Matter being intrinsically evil, the flesh could not participate in salvation, which must therefore be the prerogative of the soul; and so, if the resurrection is a fact, it must be an exclusively spiritual one, consisting in the illumination of the mind by the truth.”

In our time, dualism has led many Christians to reject the notion of the physical resurrection of the body because it would perpetrate the present material existence which is viewed as evil. Thus, many believe that at the resurrection the redeemed will receive non-physical, spiritual bodies.

The fallacy of this view is that it is based on the false dualistic assumption that matter is evil and must be destroyed. This view is clearly discredited by Scriptural passages which teach that matter, including the human body, is God’s good creation (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). The Psalmist declares: “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps 139:13-14, NIV). The resurrection body is called “spiritual” by Paul, not because of its supposed non-physical nature, but

because it is ruled by the Holy Spirit.

“Scientific” Materialism. “Scientific” materialism views matter as the only ultimate reality. Since we live in a material body which is viewed as the product of chance rather than of choice, when we die it is the end. Those Christians who are influenced by this view reject any notion of the resurrection of the body. They believe that the only immortality is the influence we have exerted on others and the hereditary characteristics we have transmitted to our posterity.

This view negates not only the teaching of the Bible but also the basic longing of the human heart. In our age of subatomic science, it is not incredible to believe that the same God who brought our world into existence still continues to control its infinitesimal particles. To believe in the resurrection of the body means to believe that God is still in control of all things, including our total being.

The Fact of the Resurrection

The Christian belief in the resurrection of the body did not arise from philosophical speculations or wishful thinking like the notion of the immortality of the soul. It arose from the conviction that such an event had actually already taken place with the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Since the Son of Man is the representative of *all* mankind, what happened to Him is a clue to what is going to happen to every believer. Because Christ rose bodily from the grave, we have every reason to believe that we, too, shall rise in a similar fashion.

Jesus is rightly called “the first-born from the dead” (Col 1:18) because, as George Eldon Ladd expresses it, “he stands, at the head of a new order of existence—resurrection life.” The fact of Christ’s resurrection has made the believers’ resurrection a certainty because Christ has proved His victory over death. The eschatological character of Jesus’ resurrection is evident in Paul’s statement that His resurrection was “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:20).

The expression “first fruits” has little meaning for today’s urban dwellers. In Bible times it had a rich meaning because it referred to the first produce of the harvest, which was offered in sacrifice to God to express gratitude for granting a new harvest. Thus, the first fruits which were brought to the Temple were seen not as mere hope of a new harvest

but as its actual beginning. Christ's resurrection, then, is "the first fruits" in the sense that it has made the resurrection of believers not a mere possibility, but a certainty.

1 Corinthians 15 offers the fullest treatment of the resurrection of the body to be found anywhere in the Bible. Here Paul emphatically explains how much our resurrection depends upon that of Christ. "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, . . . If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished" (1 Cor 15:14, 17-18). This is an astonishing statement. To deny Christ's resurrection means to destroy our faith in God and in His promise to raise us at Christ's return. The reason for this is simple. It is through His resurrection that Christ proved to have vanquished death for all his followers.

Characteristics of the Resurrection Body

What kind of body will Christ give at His return to the sleeping and living saints? We are rather fortunate to have Paul's discussion of this very question which had been raised by the Corinthians: "But some one will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body" (1 Cor 15:35-38).

By means of analogy of the seed, Paul explains the continuity and discontinuity that exist between our present physical body and the future resurrection/translation body. The continuity is established by the connection between the seed and the new plant that sprouts out of it. The discontinuity is seen in the difference between the seed that is sown and the new plant that comes from it. What Paul is saying here is that as God gives a body to each kind of seed that is sown, so He will give a body to each person who is buried. The fact that deceased bodies are buried like the seed in the ground may have suggested to Paul the analogy of the seed.

Paul develops further the analogy of sowing and reaping to give the nearest thing to a description of the resurrection body to be found in the Bible: "So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is

perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:42-44).

Four Contrasts

In 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, Paul explains the difference between our present body and the resurrection body by means of four contrasts. These contrasts are equally applicable to the bodies of the living saints who will be transformed and translated at Christ’s return without seeing death.

First, our present bodies are *perishable* (*phthora*)—subject to sickness and death—but our resurrection bodies will be *imperishable* (*aphtharsia*)—no longer liable to sickness and death.

Second, our present bodies experience the *dishonor* of being lowered into a grave, but our resurrection bodies will experience the *glory* of an inner and outward transformation.

Third, our present bodies are *weak*, as they easily become tired and exhausted, but our resurrection bodies will be full of *power*, with boundless energy to accomplish all our goals.

Fourth, our present bodies are *physical* (*soma psychikon*), but our resurrection bodies will be *spiritual* (*soma pneumatikon*). This last contrast has led many to believe that our resurrection/translation bodies will be “spiritual” in the sense that they will be devoid of the present physical substance. “Spiritual” is understood as the opposite of physical. Thus the resurrection/translation bodies allegedly consist of a nonphysical, nonmaterial substance, whatever that may be.

A “Spiritual” Resurrected Body

Did Paul believe, and does the Bible teach, that at the Second Advent living and dead believers will receive nonmaterial and nonphysical bodies, totally devoid of physical substance? This is indeed the view of some scholars. They define “spiritual body—*soma pneumatikon*” as meaning “composed of spirit,” as though “spirit were some ethereal, heavenly substance.¹⁵ According to this view, “spirit” would be the substance and “body” would be the form of the resurrection body.

In his book *Raised Immortal: Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament*, Murray Harris defines the spiritual body as follows: “The

spiritual body is the organ of the resurrected person's communication with the heavenly world. It is a somatic form fully responsive to the Christian's perfected spirit and perfectly adapted to its heavenly environment."

Harris' definition of the "spiritual body" as an organ suitable for a "heavenly environment" is largely based on the popular assumption that the redeemed will spend eternity in heaven and not on this earth. Since heaven is supposed to be a "spiritual" place, the redeemed must be fitted with a "spiritual body" suitable for the spiritual environment of heaven.

This popular belief rests on the assumption that God will condemn this earth to eternal desolation and create, instead, a new "heavenly" world for the habitation of the saints. Such an assumption raises serious questions about the wisdom of God in creating this planet to sustain human and subhuman life, only to discover later that it is not the ideal place for the eternal habitation of the redeemed. To remedy the problem, God eventually would create a "heavenly planet" and equip the resurrected saints with a "spiritual bodies" suitable for such a heavenly environment. Such a vision is inspired by Greek dualism rather than by Biblical realism.

It must be admitted that Paul's language in this passage, if not examined in the larger context of his writings, can lead a reader to a nonmaterial view of the resurrection body. Such a view is discredited first of all by the comparison which Paul himself makes between Christ's resurrection and that of the believer (Col 1:18; 1 Cor 15:20).

If Christ is the "first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:20), then resurrected believers will have bodies similar to that of Christ. The comparison cannot be pressed too far in view of the fact that at His resurrection Christ resumed also those divine qualities which He had temporarily laid aside during His Incarnation (Phil 2:7). Yet the fact remains that Christ's resurrection body was certainly physical, since He was touched (John 20:17, 27), and He ate food (Luke 24:38-43).

Spirit Led

More telling is Paul's use of the same two words (physical-*psychikos*/spiritual-*pneumatikos*) in the same epistle: "The *unspiritual* [physical-*psychikos*] man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The *spiritual* [*pneumatikos*] man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one" (1 Cor 2:14-15).

It is obvious that the spiritual man in this passage is not a non-physical person. Rather, it is someone who is guided by the Holy Spirit, in contradistinction from someone who is guided by natural impulses. Similarly, the present physical body described in 1 Corinthians 15:44 is one which is subject to the law of sin and death, while the future resurrection body is one which will be directed by the Holy Spirit. The resurrection body is called “spiritual” because it is ruled not by carnal impulses but by the Holy Spirit. This is not an anthropological dualism between “physical-*psyche*” and “spiritual-*pneuma*,” but a moral distinction between a life led by the Holy Spirit and one controlled by sinful desires.

Anthony Hoekema clearly brings out this point: “*Spiritual (pneumatikos)* here does not mean nonphysical. Rather, it means someone who is guided by the Holy Spirit, at least in principle, in distinction from someone who is guided only by his natural impulses. In a similar fashion, the natural body described in 1 Corinthians 15:44 is one which is part of this present, sin-cursed existence; but the spiritual body of the resurrection is one which will be totally, not just partially, dominated and directed by the Holy Spirit.”

This insight helps us also to understand Paul’s statement a few verses later: “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (1 Cor 15:50). It is evident here Paul is not saying that the resurrection body will be nonphysical, because, writing to the Romans, he says: “But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you” (Rom 8:9).

By the phrase “not in the flesh” Paul obviously did not mean that Christians who were led by the Holy Spirit already had discarded their physical bodies. Rather, he means that already in the present life they were guided by spiritual and not worldly values (Rom 8:4-8). If Paul could speak of Christians as not being “in the flesh,” already in the present life, his reference to the absence of “flesh and blood” in the Kingdom of God cannot mean the absence of physical bodies. It simply means the absence of the natural, carnal limitations and sinful inclinations of the present life because the redeemed will be led fully by the Spirit.

G. C. Berkouwer insightfully explains that “the ‘spiritual body’ does not have to do with what we sometimes call ‘spiritualizing.’ ‘Spiritualizing’ always presupposes a dualism, which in turns carries with it a devaluation of the body, which is nowhere to be found in Paul’s teachings.

He speaks of the body as ‘controlled by the *pneuma* [Spirit].’ This Spirit is already at work within man’s body, but only in the resurrection will it completely rule man’s life. . . . This transition does not disqualify the body, but it does indicate a break. This break is not between the lostness of the body and the soul’s liberation from it, for the Spirit of God already lives within man’s concrete earthly existence.”¹⁸ Berkouwer continues explaining that the break will be between perishable and imperishable bodies.¹⁹

Physical Body Is Not Evil

If God at the Second Advent were to change our present physical bodies into bodies consisting of nonphysical and nonmaterial substance, then, as Anthony A. Hoekema perceptively points out, “the devil would have won a great victory since God would then have been compelled to change human beings with physical bodies such as he had created into creatures of a different sort, without physical bodies (like the angels). Then it would indeed seem that matter had become intrinsically evil so that it had to be banished. And then, in a sense, the Greek philosophers would have been proved right. But matter is not evil; it is part of God’s good creation.”

In the creation story, God seven times expresses His satisfaction over the perfection of His material creation by saying “it was good” (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Then on the seventh day He rested to celebrate the completion of His perfect creation (Gen 2:1-3). To celebrate the good news of His perfect creation, complete redemption, and final restoration of this world, God gave the Sabbath to the human family (Ex 20:11; Deut 5:15; Luke 4:16-21; 13:10-13; Heb 4:9). As a Seventh-day Sabbathkeeper who celebrates these marvelous glad tidings on and through the Sabbath, I find it impossible to conceive that ultimately God will change the structure and composition of the human body.

If the resurrection/translation body were to be radically different from the original creation body, then God would be admitting that His original design of the human body had some flaws; it was not really perfect, after all. He would be admitting that His original model of male and female physical beings did not adequately reflect “his [God’s] own image” (Gen 1:27). To remedy the problem, God would then be compelled to create a new type of human beings, presumably “unisex,” so they would not get into trouble anymore. This reasoning is absurd, to say the least, for anyone who believes in the omniscience and immutability of God.

Changing models and structures is normal for human beings who learn by mistakes, but it would be abnormal and inconsistent for a God who knows the end from the beginning.

Like Angels

Some retort, Did not Jesus say that “in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Matt 22:30)? Does this passage not indicate that at the resurrection all gender distinctions will be abolished and our bodies will no longer be physical? This conclusion cannot be drawn legitimately from Jesus’ statement. Here He refers to the angels, not in order to teach the nonphysical nature of the resurrection body or the absence of gender differences in the new world, but simply to explain that the procreational function of marriage will no longer exist, since there will be no need to bring new children into the world.

The reason why the six brothers of the hypothetical situation created by the Sadducees married in succession their brother’s widow was to “raise up children for [their] brother” (Matt 22:24). It seems legitimate to assume that in His reply, Jesus refers to the angels to explain that in the new world marriage for the purpose of procreation will no longer exist. It is obvious that if no new children are brought into this world, marrying or giving daughters in marriage is no longer possible.

The termination of the human reproductive capacity could be seen as a change in God’s original design of the physiological human structure. This is not necessarily true. The Scripture suggests that God had already contemplated such a change in His original plan, when He said, “Be fruitful and multiply, and *fill the earth*” (Gen 1:28). By this statement, presumably God meant that the process of reproduction and multiplication of human beings would have continued *until the earth was filled* with an adequate number of people for this planet to support.

In a perfect world, without the presence of death, the optimum balance between people and land would have been reached much sooner than after the entrance of sin and death. It is feasible to assume that the resurrected and translated saints constitute the fulfillment of God’s original plan for the “filling of the earth” since they represent the optimum number of inhabitants this renewed earth can support adequately. In that case, God will carry out His original plan to terminate the human reproductive cycle in order to prevent the disruption of the ecological balance of this planet once it is restored to its original perfection.

This conclusion is also supported by the references to *names* “written before the foundation of the world in the book of life” (Rev 13:8; cf. 17:8, 21:27; Dan 12:1; Phil 4:3). Such names suggest an original divine plan for an optimum number of righteous people to inhabit this earth. It also suggests that once this optimum number has been reached, Christ will come to gather the righteous, as well as to cleanse and restore this earth to its original perfection. In the new earth, God will terminate the human reproductive cycle since the earth will already be filled by an ideal number of people. The termination of the procreative function of marriage does not necessitate the termination of the relational function of marriage.

Permanence of Relationships

Nowhere does the Scripture suggest that the angels are “unisex” beings who are unable to enter into some type of relationship comparable to the one to be found in marriage. It is noteworthy that God has revealed Himself as a triune Being, consisting of three Persons who are so intimately united that we worship Them as one God. If the Godhead lives in a most intimate, eternal fellowship among the three Persons, there is no reason to believe that God will ultimately abolish the intimate marital relationship He Himself established at creation.

Genesis 1:27 suggests that the image of God is found not in the male gender per se, but in the fact that “male and female he created them.” If God’s image was reflected at creation in the combined characteristics of the maleness and femaleness of the first human couple, we have reason to believe that such a combination will be preserved by God at His ultimate recreation. Simply put, if God declared the gender distinctions of maleness and femaleness “very good” at the beginning, there is no reason to believe that God would find them to be “very bad” at the end. Creation is presented in Scripture as a prototype of the final recreation. The goal of God’s redemption is not the destruction of His first creation but its restoration to its original perfection. This is why the Scripture speaks of the resurrection of the body rather than of the creation of new beings.

The doctrine of first things (etiology) must illuminate the doctrine of last things (eschatology). Surprisingly, many people wrongly assume that there is no correlation between creation and ultimate restoration. Shortly, we shall notice that the Biblical vision of the original perfect creation provides the basis for envisioning the ultimate restoration of this earth. It is unfortunate that dualists have been so conditioned by the

notion that this material world, including our physical body, is evil, that they are seeking for an eternal home *up in heaven* and not *down on this planet earth*.

The Meaning of the Resurrection of the Body

What does “the resurrection of the body” mean? Biblical writers knew as well as we do that it could not possibly mean the rehabilitation of our present physical bodies. First, because many bodies are sick or deformed, and second, because at death they decompose and return to dust: “When thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust” (Ps 104:29; cf. Eccl 3:20; Gen 3:19). In spite of this Biblical witness, many Christians have believed through the centuries in the resurrection of the very same particles composing the dead body. This belief is expressed in the earliest forms of the Apostles’ Creed which states: “I believe in . . . the resurrection of the flesh,” rather than “of the body.”

Tertullian (c.160 -c. 225), who is regarded as the Father of Latin Christianity, argues at great length in his treatise *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* that God will resurrect the very “flesh which has been consigned to the ground.” He appeals to Jesus’ words, “the very hairs of our head are all numbered,” to prove that they will all be restored at the resurrection. “If they were to be lost,” Tertullian reasons, “where would be the use of having taken such a numeral care of them?”

Body Means Person

This misunderstanding of the meaning of “the resurrection of the body” could have been avoided by recognizing the simple truth that for Biblical writers, the term “body” is simply a synonym for “person.” For example, when Paul writes, “We wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:23), he simply means the redemption of our total being. This meaning is evident later in the same epistle where Paul makes the appeal “to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1). Here the presenting of our “bodies” to God is explicitly defined as the rendering of our “spiritual worship” through our total being.

When Paul speaks of the resurrection of the body, he is clearly thinking of the whole person. As Michael Perry rightly points out, “In Paul’s usage, ‘body’ is not ‘something external’ to a man himself, something he *has*. It is what he *is*. Indeed, *soma* (the Greek word for ‘body’)

is the nearest equivalent to our word ‘personality’.”²³ In view of this fact, to believe in the resurrection/translation of the body means to believe that my human self, the human being that “I” am, will be restored to life again. It means that I will not be someone different from whom I am now. I will be exclusively *myself*. In short, it means that God has committed Himself to preserving my individuality, personality, and character.

It is important to note that in this whole chapter Paul speaks about the resurrection of persons. There is no reference to the reattachment of resurrected bodies to spiritual souls. In fact, the “soul-*psyche*” is never mentioned. If the resurrection involved the reattachment of the body to the soul, would it not be very strange for Paul to fail to mention it altogether in his discussion of the nature of the resurrection? After all, such a concept is fundamental for understanding what happens to the body and soul at the resurrection. The absence of any reference to the soul clearly indicates that Paul believed in the resurrection of the whole person, body and soul.

It should be mentioned that in 1 Corinthians 15:44 Paul did use the adjective *psychikon*, which derives from the noun *psyche* [soul] and is generally translated as “natural” or “physical.” But he used it to describe the “physical body-*soma psychikon*” which is buried, not the spiritual soul that allegedly survives the death of the body. This goes to show that for Paul the “soulish-*psychikon*” aspect of the human body is buried at death and awaits the resurrection.

In order to take the resurrection seriously, we must also take death seriously. Karl Barth stated a profound truth when he said: “The man who does not know what death is does not know either what resurrection is.”²⁴ Both death and resurrection affect the total person. Helmut Thielicke states this point in a personal and emphatic way: “I dare not regard my death as something that no longer strikes the real me, since I am immortal, but moves on bypassing my soul. No, all of me goes down into death. Nothing gives me the right to reject the totality of man, which the Scriptures proclaim in connection with the disaster of death, and suddenly split him into body and soul, into a perishable and an imperishable I-segment. But as a Christian I go down into this death with the complete confidence that I cannot remain therein, since I am one whom God has called by name and therefore I shall be called anew on God’s day. I am under the protection of the Resurrected One. I am not immortal, but await my own resurrection.”

The Identity of the Resurrected Persons

Central to the Biblical promise of the resurrection is that the resurrected persons will be the same individuals as those who existed previously on earth. God is not going to resurrect an indefinite group of look-a-like people, but the very same people who died. This raises the question: How can we account for the preservation of the personal identity between this life and the life to come? What guarantees the continuity of the personal identity of a person from this life to the next?

Dualists claim that they have absolutely no difficulty in guaranteeing the continuity of personal identity, because “the very same person who dies continues without interruption to exist [as a disembodied soul] with Christ until the resurrection body is received.”²⁶ The nature of the resurrected bodies may be different because each body will be radically transformed, but the personal identity endures, because the soul, which embodies the essential characteristics of each person, survives the death of the body and eventually is reunited to the resurrected body.

Dualists claim that a “fatal flaw” of the wholistic view of human nature is that it cannot guarantee the continuity of personal identity. They say that the wholistic view “cannot show that resurrected persons are the very same persons who lived on earth rather than being mere copies; it cannot preserve the principle of personal identity.”²⁷ This criticism is based on the assumption that since the wholistic view does not allow for any continuity of body or soul between death and resurrection, the resurrected bodies must be “different persons no matter how much they might look or think alike.”

This criticism of the wholistic view is flawed for two major reasons. First, nowhere does the Bible suggest that the personal identity of an individual is preserved after death by the survival of the soul. We have found that in the Bible the “soul” is not an immaterial or rational component of human nature that survives the death of the body. Rather, the soul is the whole physical and spiritual life that is subject to the law of sin and death. Second, the survival of personal identity is not dependent upon the continuity of physical or spiritual substances, but on God’s preservation of the character or personality of each individual.

The Bible reassures us of the preservation of our identity through the suggestive imagery of our “names written in the book of life” (Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12). A name in the Bible stands for character

or personality, as indicated by the various names used to portray the character of God. This suggests that God preserves an accurate picture of the character of each person who ever lived on this planet. The record of each life is all inclusive, because Jesus said: “On the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt 12:36-37).

The challenge of our Christian life is to “grow in grace and knowledge” (2 Pet 3:18) in order to develop a character fit for eternity. It is the character or personality that we have developed in this life that God preserves in His memory and will reunite to the resurrected body. This explains the importance of developing a Christian character in this present life, because this will be our personal identity in the world to come. Developing a godly character is the work of a lifetime. It requires the daily surrender of self to the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Paul tells us that “suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope” (Rom 5:3-4).

Each believer develops his or her own unique character as a result of the temptations, struggles, defeats, disappointments, victories, and growth in grace each one experiences. This means that the possibility of “multiple replication” of people at the resurrection, all looking, acting, and thinking alike, is inconceivable. There are no two Christian characters that are the same. Each one of us has a unique character or personality that God preserves and will unite to the resurrected body.

Charles Hartshorne maintains that at death human beings “live on in the complete and infallible memory of God. . . . Death cannot be the destruction, or even the fading of the book of one’s life; it can only mean the fixing of its concluding page. Death writes: ‘The End’ upon the last page, but nothing further happens to the book, by way of either addition or subtraction.”

Some Practical Implications

The practical implications of the belief in the resurrection/translation of the whole person are not difficult to see. The fact that at His coming Christ will resurrect believers, restoring to each their distinct personality and character, teaches us, as aptly stated by Ellen G. White, that “the characters formed in this life will determine the future destiny.”³⁰

This means also, as the same author emphasizes, that “now is the time for all to cultivate the powers that God has given [us], that [we] may form characters for usefulness here and for a higher life hereafter.”

To believe in the resurrection/translation of the body means also to treat our human body with respect because what we do to it and with it will determine our resurrection identity. The model of the seed and the fruit used by Paul suggests that there is a degree of continuity between our present body and the resurrection body. This continuity condemns the exaggerated asceticism of those who despise their bodies as something earthly to be discarded once they reach the heavenly Canaan. It also condemns the libertinism of those who believe that they can indulge their bodies to the limit, since what happens to their bodies does not affect their souls.

To believe in the resurrection/translation of the body means to believe that we will be able to recognize our loved ones. We shall recognize our resurrected and translated loved ones, though not necessarily because they will look exactly the same as when we last saw them. I was known to my grandmother as the little boy who visited her at her farmhouse. I am known to my wife as the bald man she married 45 years ago with plenty of wavy hair. I am known to my grandchildren as the grandpa who tells stories from the World War II.

At the time of the resurrection/translation, we will recognize our loved ones, not because they will look as young or as old as when we last saw them, but because their unique individuality and personality is providentially preserved and resurrected with a brand-new body by God. When we meet elementary or high-school classmates after 20 or 30 years, most often we have difficulty in recognizing them because their external appearance has changed over the years. Yet, as we talk together, we soon realize that their unique personalities really have not changed. They are still the Mary, the John, or the Bob we knew many years before.

The same principle applies to the recognition of our resurrected loved ones. We shall recognize them in spite of the noticeable improvements in their physical appearance, because God will resurrect their unique individuality and personality.

Summing up, we can say that the belief in the resurrection of the body challenges us to take seriously our total being with its mental,

physical, and spiritual components, because we are “a temple of the Holy Spirit . . . which [we] have from God” (1 Cor 6:19) and which God will miraculously resurrect at Christ’s return.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the months of September, October, and November 2006. I wish to extend my personal, warm invitation to all who are able to attend one of the followings rallies.

SEPTEMBER 15-16: CANADA - KENDALWOOD SDA CHURCH

Location: 300 Kendalwood Road, Whitby, Ontario L1N 2G3, Canada
For information call Pastor Hymers Wilson, at (905) 728-6459

SEPTEMBER 22-23: RIDGECREST SDA CHURCH

Location: 555 West Las Flores Avenue, Ridgecrest, CA 93555
For information call Pastor John D Aiken at (760) 499-7475 or (760) 221-5448

SEPTEMBER 29-30: ORLANDO -ALTAMONTE SPRINGS SDA CHURCH

Location: 455 Mailand Avenue, Altamonte Springs, Florida 32701
For information call Pastor Ron Bentzinger at (407) 767-7522

OCTOBER 6-7: CANADA -MISSISSAUGA SDA CHURCH

Location: 2250 Credit Valley Road, Mississauga, Ontario L5M 4L9, Canada.
For information call Pastor Nerval Myrie at (905) 755-0014 or (416) 303-7287.

OCTOBER 13-14: ONTARIO SDA CHURCH, CALIFORNIA

Location: 856 North Sultana Avenue, Ontario, CA 91764
For information call Pastor Mike Leno at (909) 997-7870 or (909) 986-8261.

OCTOBER 20-21: LOS ANGELES - NORWALK SDA CHURCH

Location: 12191 Firestone Boulevard, Norwalk, CA 90650.

For information call Pastor Frank Haynes at (562) 863-0614 or (909) 399-0949

OCTOBER 27-28: OMAHA: WESTSIDE COMMUNITY CONFERENCE CENTER

Location: 3534 South 108th Street, Omaha, NE 68144.

For information call Pastor Jim Anderson at (402) 932-0046 or (402) 616-7811.

NOVEMBER 3-4: CALGARY: GARDEN ROAD SDA CHURCH

Location: RR7, Site 17, Box 5, Calgary T2P 2G7, Canada.

NOVEMBER 10-11: ST. PAUL/M-MARANATHA SDA CHURCH

Location: 717 Highway 7, Hopkins, MN 55305 (Minneapolis). For information call Pastor Absalon Birai at (763) 557-7285 or (612) 386-4608

NOVEMBER 17 TO 28: AUSTRALIA, See above.

ANNOUNCEMENTS OF SERVICES AND PRODUCTS

NEW DVD ALBUM ON *CRACKING THE DA VINCI CODE*

Dan Brown's best selling novel, *The Da Vinci Code* has sold more than 60.5 million copies in 45 languages by May 2006. The book and the movie have become a social phenomenon that is shattering the faith of millions of Christians by blatantly attacking the fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith.

What makes *The Da Vinci Code* one of the best seller of all times, is especially Dan Brown's ability to presents as facts what in reality are fictitious and absurd claims: Christ married Mary Magdalene and they had a daughter Sarah; Christ chose Mary Magdalene to lead His church, not the twelve apostles; Constantine chose our 4 Gospels out of 80, because they promote Christ's divinity; He rejected the Gnostic Gospels because they stress the human traits of Christ; The early Christians worshipped the "sacred feminine" with ritual sex in order to experience the knowledge of God; The Catholic Church has conspired to suppress the secret of Christ's marriage by using murderous organizations like *Opus Dei*.

With the help of 135 colorful slides, Dr. Bacchiocchi examines *The Da Vinci Code* historically, biblically, and prophetically. He shows that the real conspiracy is carried out, not by the Catholic Church, but by Dan Brown himself, who uses subtle and deceptive methods to discredit Christianity, in order to promote his neo-pagan worship, which entails, among other things, ritual sex as a way to achieve the knowledge of God. The false worship being promoted by *The Da Vinci Code* must be seen as a manifestation of the prophetic endtime battle between true and false worship.

You will find this DVD recording of *CRACKING THE DA VINCI CODE*, intriguing, informative and enlightening. It addresses a host of questions, including the divinity of Christ and the alleged role of Constantine in changing the Sabbath to Sunday.

You can order the **DVD album on *CRACKING THE DA VINCI CODE* at the special pre-publication price of \$35.00, instead of \$100.00**, in four different ways:

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PROF. GRAEME BRADFORD BOOK AND CD/DVD ALBUM

- * **The book *More than a Prophet***
- * **The CD/DVD album with Prof. Bradford's writings and live video lecture on Ellen White**

The book *More than a Prophet*

The book *More than a Prophet* was born out of the raging controversy over the credibility of Ellen White as an inspired writer. This timely book that can restore confidence in the prophetic ministry of El-

len White and help reclaim former Adventists who have left the church because of unresolved questions about Ellen White's writings.

With clear reasoning and compelling documentation, Prof. Bradford helps the reader to rediscover the TRUE Ellen White—a frail woman used by God in a mighty way, in spite of her limitations and personal problems. She has left a rich legacy not only for the Seventh-day Adventist Church but for the world at large.

The CD/DVD Album with Prof. Bradford's Publications and Video Recording

The CD-ROM Disk

The CD disk offers a searchable data base of most of Prof. Graeme Bradford published and unpublished writings. It includes also the latest book *More than a Prophet!* During the past 30 years, he has written books and articles on a wide variety of subjects such as occultism, near death experiences, Israel in Prophecy, expository preaching, kids and drugs, the Bible and Archeology, and endtime prophecies. His articles always offer a refreshing biblical perspective on current issues.

Until now Prof. Bradford's books and articles were available only in a printed form, often unavailable at local ABC stores. In view of my indebtedness to Prof. Bradford scholarship, I have offered to help him to place all of his books and articles on a CD album. This makes it possible with the ACROBAT global search, to locate immediately what he has written on biblical texts or current topics.

You will find in this collection a priceless resource to enrich your understanding and experience of biblical truths. You will especially appreciate his latest book *More than a Prophet*—a book that has been long overdue and will do much to restore confidence in the validity of Ellen White's prophetic ministry.

The DVD Video Recording

On June 20, a professional crew recorded Prof. Bradford's popular two hours powerpoint lecture on "More than a Prophet," at the Avondale College Media Center in Australia. With the help of 75 slides, he

discusses in an open and objective ways the major issues related to the prophetic ministry of Ellen White.

This lectures clears the air of prevailing misconceptions about Ellen White which have caused thousands of Adventists to leave church. Listening to this dynamic, visual presentation will enhance your appreciation for the gift of prophecy manifested in the writings, preaching, and teachings of Ellen White.

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Until now Prof. Paulien books and articles were available only in a printed form, often unavailable at local ABC stores. In view of my indebtedness to Prof. Paulien's scholarship, I have offered to help him to place all of his books and articles on a CD disk. This makes it possible with the ACROBAT global search, to locate immediately what he has written on biblical texts or current topics.

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