

"Living and Nourishing The Advent Hope"

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

I am writing this newsletter from my native city of Rome, Italy, where I am spending a blessed week, visiting with my 88 years old godly mother and preparing myself to speak in Italian (which is rusty) at rally here in Rome, next Sabbath, November 2, 2002. Being in Rome, I cannot help but send you the biblical greeting found in Hebrews 13:26: "Those who come from Italy send you their greeting."

What a privilege to greet you from Rome by the Word of God! May I also send you greeting also from London, England, where I was the previous Sabbath on October 26, 2002. We had a marvelous rally attended by about 800 people at the Holloway SDA Church. Our believers asked me to bring their greetings to our members around the world, especially to Jamaica, where I will be speaking from November 29 to December 7, 2002.

Have you ever struggled to make an important decision in your life? You prayed about it. You sought the advice of your trusted friends who counseled you in different ways. You discussed the matter at length with your spouse. You waited for some clear indications on which directions you should go. In the process you changed your mind several times, until you sensed a feeling of relief at the thought that Lord had finally led you to make the right decision.

If you ever had such an experience, then you can relate to the struggle I have faced in recent weeks on whether or not to post the first installment of my study on the sevenfold prophecy about the three and half years/1260 days. In the last newsletter No. 90, I informed you that I would post it within few weeks after reading some important studies and making some changes recommended by the 8 scholars who reviewed the first draft of this study.

REASONS FOR POSTPONING THE POSTING OF LATEST RESEARCH

To the disappointment of many, I have decided to postpone indefinitely the posting of the continuation of my research on this amazing sevenfold prophecy. Let me explain you the reason. After further reading, reflection, and prayer, I decided to follow the wise counsel of my dear wife, Anna, who from the very beginning told me not to deal with this controversial prophecy. Over the years she has felt more than I have, the criticism and alienation our family has experienced when I wrote such controversial books as *Women in the Church* and *The Christian and Rock Music*.

My wife feels that there is no need to have to suffer again for a research on a prophecy which is foreign to the vast majority of Seventh-day Adventists. In fact, in the last college Bible class that I taught at Andrews University in the Spring of the year 2000, only 3 of about 60 students had ever studied the prophecies of the 2300 and 1260 days. The new generation of Adventists know very little about these time prophecies which they find it difficult to relate to the concerns of their Christian life.

Two additional reasons finally convinced me to shelf this research for the time being. The first reason is the negative criticism of a few concerned fellow believers, some of whom are church leaders. Reading their criticism it became evident to me that any modification of our traditional Adventist application of the 1260 days prophecy to the period of papal supremacy from 538 to 1798, is clearly seen as a repudiation of our Adventist faith. Several have told me that I am on the road to apostasy. I want to reassure all my readers that I am a deeply committed Adventist and I firmly believe that the papacy has fulfilled and is still fulfilling the prophetic role of the Little Horn, in promoting false worship and persecuting God's people. The question is whether or not the anti-god power of the Little Horn has a broader scope that transcends the traditional dates of the supremacy of the papacy from 538 to 1798.

Frankly, the reaction of our concerned fellow believers surprised me, because after all what I suggested in the newsletter No. 86 on "Islam and the Papacy in Prophecy," is to broaden the scope of the nature and time of the Little Horn, by including other anti-god powers such as Islam. This suggestion is not new, because several recent Adventist books cited in the previous newsletter, view the 1260 days prophetic period to be more *qualitative* rather than *quantitative*.

The second reason for giving a sabbatical rest to this research, is the valid observation made by several subscribers that this newsletter is not the appropriate forum to discuss the broadening and strengthening of the 1260 days prophecy. Among the 20,000 plus subscribers there are Adventists and non-Adventists from all walks of life. While the vast majority of them are educated people with inquiring minds, appreciative of fresh attempts to understand more fully prophecies, there is a significant minority who are greatly distressed by any proposed modification of traditional beliefs. For them to tinker with traditional interpretations is tantamount to heresy. In good conscience I cannot ignore the concerns of these committed fellow believers. To do so would show a lack of pastoral understanding.

I would like to take this opportunity to apologize to those concerned fellow believers who are distressed by my latest newsletters. Let me reassure you that it was not my intent to be divisive or to question the integrity of our Adventist message. Over the years I have paid a high price to stand up and defend our Adventist message. But, for me to be a committed Adventist means to constantly seek new ways to make our beliefs more relevant and consonant to Scripture and history. This is what I have attempted to do during the past 30 years of teaching, writing, and preaching. Let me illustrate this point with an example.

A PREVIOUS CHALLENGE

I recall the challenge I faced when I began my research on the origin of Sunday observance. I had to decide on whether to defend the traditional Adventist position or to accept the witness of the earliest documents. Let me explain the difference between the two. The earliest references to Sundaykeeping indicate that this practice began in the early part of the second century. But the traditional Adventist view, which is largely based on Ellen White's statements in *The Great Controversy* (see newsletter No. 87), maintains that Sunday observance began in the fourth century.

Specifically, our Adventist church has taught that the introduction of Sunday observance was accomplished by Emperor Constantine when he promulgated the famous Sunday Law in 321, under the influence of the bishop of Rome. Undoubtedly, you have heard this view proclaimed by some of our leading evangelists in satellite programs, crusades, and publications. Unfortunately this view is discredited by the earliest available documents which point to an earlier origin of Sunday observance in the early part of the second century.

Critics like Dr. James Kennedy, have capitalized on the problems of our traditional explanation of the origin of Sunday, in order to accuse our church of ignorance and dishonesty. As you recall, in Endtime Issues No. 79, I refuted at great length (over 40 pages) Dr. Kennedy's accusations by showing him that Adventists are neither ignorant nor dishonest, because competent Adventist scholars have shown for long time that Sunday observance began, not in the fourth century, but in the early part of the second century as a result of an interplay of political, social, pagan, and religious factors.

Over the years I have been able to refute many critics like Dr. Kennedy, because of the decision I made at the outset of my research to strive for biblical and historical accuracy, even if it means modifying our traditional Adventist positions. I took this decision because I believe that our Adventist church is committed to be accurate, both biblically and historically.

THE RESPONSE OF CONCERNED BRETHREN

Some concerned brethren were deeply troubled by the conclusions of my research on the origin of Sunday. They cited my view of an earlier origin of Sunday as a major proof for their allegation that I was a "Jesuit spy," brainwashed by the Jesuits in Rome, and paid by them to lead Adventists to accept the religious leadership of the Pope. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is hard to believe that some Adventists would fabricate such senseless, false accusations.

Initially this defamation campaign posed some problems for my itinerant ministry. In several churches where I was invited to speak, our church members were suspicious about me, because they received in the mail few days before my visit a four pages flier, full of false accusations about my being a "Jesuit infiltrator," promoting the legitimacy of Sunday as the Lord's Day.

I shall never forget that Friday evening when I was met at the entrance of our Adventist Church in New Brunswick, Maine, by an elder who without hesitation told me upfront: "I have received this flier indicating that you are a Jesuit spy, because you do not accept the Adventist explanation of the origin of Sunday. I will be listening very carefully to your lectures to determine for myself if the accusations are true or false." After listening to my testimony on Friday night, he came to me feeling embarrassed and asked me to forgive him for his suspicion about me."

In time this defamatory campaign has proved to be counterproductive, because it sparked a greater interest to attend my lectures. The outcome was positive, because the vast majority of Adventists who heard my presentations and read my books, came to accept me as a genuine Adventist believer. They also came to realize that an earlier second century origin of Sunday observance, is an undeniable historical fact. They understood that Satan was not on vacation during the first three centuries, waiting until the fourth century to attack against the Sabbath. The research of other Adventist scholars defending the same view, has favored the wide acceptance of an earlier origin of Sunday.

This positive experience has given me reason to assume that the same thing would happen, when presenting my research on the 1260 days prophecy, especially since other Adventist scholars have published similar views in our church publications. But, it soon became evident that my assumption was wrong. The few but strong negative reactions to my tentative proposal to expand the prophetic time and scope of the Little Horn (Antichrist), by including the historical role played by Islam in persecuting Christians and promoting false worship, made me forcefully aware that the traditional application of this prophecy exclusively to the supremacy of the papacy between 538 to 1798, is for some of our believers an untouchable "sacred cow."

At this point in time I feel that if I were to continue my research on the sevenfold prophecy, posting its results in several installments, I would only add fuel to the fire. The controversy would intensify, consuming most of my precious time and energy, that I need to devote to a more constructive ministry. This experience has taught me to stay away from controversial subjects, devoting my efforts instead to help our fellow believers to understand and experience more fully the vital truths of our message.

I am reminded of a curious episode that occurred at the pre-session of the 1888 General Conference. There was considerable debate among the brethren over the identification of the horns of Daniel 7. The debate became so passionate and exhausting, that some of the leading brethren failed to show up on the opening day of the General Conference because they were worn out by the struggle over the horns of the previous days. The lesson is clear. By consuming our time and energies to major in minors, we can lose sight of our primary mission. By God's grace, I want to avoid this mistake.

A CONSULTATION OF COMPETENT SCHOLARS

A reexamination of our traditional Adventist interpretation of the sevenfold prophecy in question is needed. Our attempt to lump together the seven references to the three and a half years/42 months/1260 days, applying all of them exclusively to the period of papal domination between 538 to 1798, poses some biblical and historical problems that we need to resolve.

But the resolution cannot be accomplished in isolation by one or even a few independent Adventist scholars. What we need is an official commission of trusted Adventist scholars and administrators, who are appointed by the General Conference to undertake this project. Few days ago I wrote a letter to the Director of the Biblical Research Institute, proposing for their consideration the convocation of such a commission or consultation. If and when this commission convenes, I will be glad to report on its deliberations.

Let there be no illusion. Our concerned fellow believers will not automatically accept any possible modification of the traditional interpretation of this time prophecy, even if proposed by a commission set up by the General Conference. A case in point is the new interpretation of the number 666 of the Beast of Revelation 13, which was proposed in the recent Sabbath School Quarterly on *Great Apocalyptic Prophecies* (April, May, June 2002). Contrary to the traditional interpretation of 666 as being the numeric value of the Pope's official title, VICARIUS FILII DEI—a title which is often used in official papal documents—the Sabbath School Quarterly proposed that 666 may be “a symbol of humanity separated from God” (p. 85). “At the present time, the symbolism of intensified rebellion, six used three times, and total independence from God seem to be the best option” (p. 86).

This new interpretation has greatly upset our concerned fellow Adventists who have expressed to me their disappointment. For them this departure from the traditional interpretation is devastating because they believe that it deprives them of the most compelling identification of the papacy as the beast of Revelation 13. The new interpretation is posing problems also for our evangelists. Some of whom may not yet be prepared to modify their PowerPoint diagram of the numerical value of VICARIUS FILII DEI. Yet, this is the price we must be willing to pay if we want to ensure that our teachings are biblically and historically accurate.

THE NEED TO REEXAMINE THE PROPHETIC PERIOD OF PAPAL SUPREMACY

What is true for the number of the Beast, is also true for the prophetic time of the supremacy of the Little Horn. The issue is not the prophetic role played by the papacy in promoting false worship and persecuting dissenting Christians. For me this is an indisputable fact, amply supported by my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday*, where I document the theological, social, and liturgical measures taken by the pope to lead Christian away from Sabbathkeeping to Sundaykeeping. Rather, the issue is whether the sevenfold prophecy of the 1260 days applies exclusively to the period of papal supremacy as traditionally defined between 538 to 1798.

This interpretation poses some problems that need to be addressed by competent and trusted Adventist scholars. Over the years many pastors and church members have asked me to investigate the significance of the year 538. Frankly, I ignored these requests because I believed that our pioneers had satisfactorily established the validity of 538 as the establishment of the supremacy of the papacy by significant actions taken by Emperor Justinian.

It was only few weeks ago that for the first time I began doing some reading into what happened to the papacy in and around 538. The preliminary reading has been very informative. I was surprised to learn that while in theory Emperor Justinian affirmed and expanded the authority of the papacy, in practice he forced three popes to promote his political agenda.

To understand Justinian's strategy, we need to take a quick look at how he manipulated and humiliated the pope. Through the influence of Justinian's wife, Empress Theodora, general Belisarius selected Pope Vigilius in 537 while the previous Pope Silverius was still alive. The pontificate of Vigilius (537-555) is characterized by repeated doctrinal compromises under the pressure of Emperor Justinian who kidnapped and humiliated him. The outcome was that Vigilius was excommunicated by some Western bishops, and his papal authority was rejected in several western provinces.

Briefly stated, this is the story of the relationship between Emperor Justinian and Pope Vigilius. To gain the support of the Eastern Church, in the year 544 Emperor Justinian issue an edict, known as "Three Chapters," because it condemned the writings of three influential Antiochene teachers (Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyros, and Ibas de Edessa). These men opposed the Monophysite doctrine, which taught that Christ had only a divine nature during His incarnation. This teaching was popular in the Eastern Greek Church, but was strongly rejected by the Western Latin Catholic church, that upheld the Chalcedonian creed, which stated that the divine and human natures of Christ coexisted "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation."

Pope Vigilius Brought to Constantinople

Emperor Justinian was very eager for Pope Vigilius to approve his edict of 544, in order to gain for it wide acceptance among both Eastern and Western bishops. The Pope, however, delayed his approval because it represented a denial of the Chalcedonian creed. To break the deadlock, Justinian had Pope Vigilius kidnapped on November 22, 545 from the church of St. Cecilia, in Rome, and had him transported to Constantinople. Here the pope faced the most humiliating trials of his life. After months of relentless pressure from the Emperor and Eastern bishops, he signed the imperial edict, and published on April 11, 548 the *Iudicatum*, in which he condemned the "Three Chapter," and thus indirectly supported the monophysistic heresy.

The reaction was to be expected. Many western provinces protested against the doctrinal compromise of Vigilius' *Iudicatum*, including his immediate entourage. He was even excommunicated by a synod of African bishops. The situation reached a dangerous climax for the pope, causing him to explain that he had been induced to publish the *Iudicatum* by the ruthless pressure of the Emperor.

Recognizing the critical situation, Justinian allowed Vigilius to retract the *Iudicatum*, on condition that he would condemn again the “Three Chapters,” in a synod to be convened by the Emperor. The synod was held in 551 without the presence of Vigilius who refused to accept its decree. Fearing retaliation the pope fled from his lodging in the *Domus Placidiae* to the church of St. Peter in the Palace of Hormisdas. “Justinian tried by means of police power to drag the Pope from his asylum, but Vigilius literally defended himself with his hands and feet. Only when the Emperor gave him a guarantee of his personal freedom could he be induced to return to the *Domus Placidiae*. However, since Justinian did not keep his promise, but treated him like a prisoner, he fled a second time, now across the Propontis to the Council Church of St. Euphemia at Chalcedon” (Hubert Jedin, *History of the Church*, vol. 2. p. 453).

After intrigues, compromises, and pressure by the emperor, Vigilius returned to Constantinople, with the understanding that the final decision was to be entrusted to a Council he would preside. But without the concurrence of the Pope, Justinian convened at Constantinople in 553 the *Fifth Ecumenical Council* from May 21 to June 2. The Council suspended the Pope and condemned again the “Three Chapters,” thus, sanctioning the monophysite doctrine. After six months of threats and pressure, Vigilius yielded again by approving the actions of the Council. As Philip Schaff notes, “His fourfold change of opinion does poor service to the claim of papal infallibility” (*History of the Christian Church*, vol 3, p. 771). Deeply humiliated and rejected by the Western bishops, Vigilius succeeded to leave Constantinople after 8 years of absence, but he died in Syracuse in 555 before he could ever reach Rome. This is the sad story of the Pope who is supposed to mark the establishment of papal supremacy in 538.

“His successor, Pelagius I, immediately acknowledged the [Fifth Ecumenical] Council. But upon this the churches in Northern Italy, Africa, and Illyria separated themselves from the Roman see, and remained in schism till Pope Gregory I” (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol 3, p. 771).

This brief historical sketch of the manipulation, excommunication, schisms, and humiliation of Pope Vigilius, raises questions about our traditional Adventist interpretation of the establishment of papal supremacy in 538 by the direct intervention of Emperor Justinian. The impression one gets reading the history of the papacy during this period, is that the Emperor Justinian was an unscrupulous ruler who did not hesitate to humiliate, kidnap, and hold the pope hostage, in order to advance his political agenda. These imperial actions make it difficult for our Adventist church to argue that Justinian was largely responsible for establishing the papal supremacy in or around 538.

Responsible and committed Adventist scholars need to reexamine the problems posed by the choice of the date 538. They need to explore the possibility of finding a more defensible date for the 1260 days prophecy. This important task, as mentioned earlier, can only be accomplished by a commission duly appointed by the General Conference.

AN EXAMPLE OF HISTORICAL INACCURACY

In the previous newsletter no. 90, I mentioned some inaccurate statements made by Adventist authors to prove the establishment of papal supremacy in 538. In this context I will mention another example, simply to highlight the need to reexamine this question. William Shea, a respected Adventist scholar who has served for many years in the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference, claims that “The capital of the Roman Empire had been moved to Constantinople by Justinian in the sixth century A. D. That left a power vacuum in the city of Rome itself . . . that was soon filled by the bishop of Rome.” (*Daniel 7-12 - Prophecy of the End Time*, 1996, p. 138).

Shea is right in affirming that the transference of the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to Constantinople facilitated the ascendancy of the papacy, but he is wrong in attributing this important action to “Justinian in the sixth century A. D.” The fact is that the transference of the capital was accomplished two centuries earlier in A. D. 330 by Constantine, who gave to the city his own name, “Constantinople,” that is, the city of Constantine. This goes to show that the papacy filled the power vacuum left in the city of Rome by Constantine’s transference of the capital to Constantinople, long before 538 and the division of the Roman Empire.

My objective is not to expose such inaccuracies, but to show the need for a reexamination of the relevant biblical texts and their historical applications. We want to ensure that our interpretation of the 1260 days prophecy is true to Scripture and history. This reexamination, as mentioned earlier, can best be accomplished by trusted Adventist scholars and administrators commissioned by the General Conference. It is my fervent hope and prayer that the discussion sparked by these newsletters, will encourage the setting up of such a commission responsible to strengthen our prophetic interpretation. I look forward to report the outcome of this consultation if and when it will take place.

A REFLECTION ON THE HATE FACTOR

One of the most troubling realities of our time is the hate factor which is pervasive in the political, social, racial, international, and religious realms. The divisive and destructive effects of the hate factor is impossible to calculate, because it manifests itself in countless ways.

Many people could be categorized by whom they hate most. Republicans and Democrats are known for displaying their hate for each other, especially during political rallies at election time. Defaming, discrediting, and assassinating the character of the opposing candidate, has become an acceptable form of political strategy to win an election.

Catholics and Protestants have been known for centuries for hating each other to the point of fighting such bloody wars against each other, as the Thirty Years War that ended in 1648. In countries like Ireland, the conflict between Catholic and Protestants is not over yet. While growing up in Italy, I vividly remember that most of the converts to our Adventist church were former Communists. They were attracted to our church because of our preaching and teaching against the prophetic Beast of the papacy—an enemy common to both communism and Adventism.

Blacks and Whites have not yet overcome the deep seated suspicion for one another, as indicated by the local conflicts in American cities and by international conflicts in such countries like Zimbabwe where white farmers are chased out of their lands without compensation.

Christians and Moslem preachers are having a field day attacking each others. Recently Jerry Falwell announced in CBS’s “60 Minutes,” that Muhammed was “a terrorist.” Similarly Pat Robertson has called Muhammed “a robber and a brigand.” On their part Islamic fundamentalists are capitalizing on the attacks of Christian fundamentalists by telling Muslims: “We told you, Christians hate Muslims. We need to fight a Holy War against them.” *Newsweek* writes: “Throughout the Muslim world, America’s friends—the reformers, the moderates—are embarrassed [by the hate campaign of Christian fundamentalists], while its foes are celebrating” (October 21, 2002, p.40).

Unfortunately, the hate factor is present even in our Adventist church. The hate mail received from ultraconservative fellow believers after posting the newsletters 87 and 88, have made me forcefully aware that the hate factor is far more real than I had ever imagined. It is amazing how a disagreement over the interpretation of a prophetic time period like the 1260 days, can fuel so much hate. The same has been true on the disagreement on women ordination. The explosion of hate, threats, and insults our family witnessed after writing the book *Women in the Church* could easily fill the pages of a sizeable book.

During this past 10 days I have spent first in London, England, then in my native city of Rome, Italy, I have been reflecting on why is the hate factor so pervasive in the whole fabric of our society. It is evident that Satan is having a field day in seeing the abundant harvest he is reaping from the seeds of hate and discord he has sown since the beginning of time.

How can we overcome the hate factor? There is no magic way to eradicate hate from the human heart and replace it with the love. What is needed is a change of heart that can only be accomplished by the miracle of the Gospel. When we accept the Good News that “while we were yet sinners Christ dies for us” (Rom 5:8), then our hearts are filled with the love of God: “God has poured out his love into our hearts by His Spirit” (Rom 5:5).

When the love of God is poured out in our hearts, then the hate factor is replaced by the love factor. We learn to love according to Christ’s admonition: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt 5:44).

In my study of the early church, the area of my doctorate, I found that it was the love factor that made Christianity an irresistible force that turned the Roman world upside down. Those early Christians had none of the medical, educational, printed material, and media resources we have today. But they had something the Roman world had never seen, namely, the capacity to love even their enemies.

I recall reading an arresting statement of Tertullian, a church leader and prolific writer who lived in Carthage, North Africa at about A. D. 200. He remarks that the pagans were jealous of the Christians, because the latter were able to love their enemies more than the Romans could love their blood relatives.

What we need today as individuals, families, Christian churches, and society at large, is a new infusion of the love that God alone can pour out into our hearts through His Spirit—a love that empowers us to love everybody, whether rich or poor, intelligent or ignorant, black or white, Catholic or Protestant, Christian or Moslem, and traditional or progressive Adventists. The manifestation of such love is the most tangible proof that the Holy Spirit is operating in our hearts (Gal 5:22), equipping us to be agents of peace in a world of conflicts.

THANK YOU FOR INVITING YOUR FRIENDS TO SUBSCRIBE

Every week we process over 150 new subscriptions from people who received an ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER from a subscriber. Thank you for sharing these Bible studies with your friends. Just let them know that they can receive this newsletter directly simply by emailing us their request at: <sbacchiocchi@qtm.net> As a result of your promotional endeavors over 20,000 people are already benefiting from these Bible studies.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AT THE END OF THIS NEWSLETTER

At the end of this newsletter you will find the following important announcements:

- 1) The date and location of my weekend seminars for the remaining part of 2002.
- 2) Information on how your church can invite me next year to present the popular PowerPoint Seminars on the SABBATH, SECOND ADVENT, and CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE.
- 3) A special Christmas offer on my books, audio cassettes, videos, DVDs, and CD-Roms
- 4) Information on how to order the newly released *REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST: A COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION*, by Ranko Stefanovich, published by Andrews University Press.
- 5) Information on how to purchase one of the best LCD VIDEO PROJECTORS on the market (HITACHI 375) at a substantially reduced price through an Adventist distributor.

INTRODUCTION TO THIS NEWSLETTER

The responses to the essay of Jon Paulien Ph. D., on “September 11 and God's Mysterious Grace,” posted in the last newsletter No, 90, were very gratifying. Many of you expressed appreciation for his refreshing insights into the problem of human suffering. My plan was to post in this newsletter another essay by a respected scholar, but before leaving for the rally in London, England, I learned that his essay will not be ready for sometime. Other essays by prominent Adventist scholars will be submitted and posted within the next few weeks. In fact the next ENDTIME ISSUES newsletter No. 92, will offer you a penetrating study on “Forgiveness and Cleansing” by Roy Gane, Ph. D., Professor of Old Testament at Andrews University Theological Seminary.

While trying to figure out a topic for this newsletter, I was reminded of the commentary I use to post on our Sabbath School lessons. Many of you encouraged me to offer this service as a regular feature, since the comments provided some helpful insights into the lesson you had to teach. I looked through our current Sabbath School Quarterly on “Living the Advent Hope” to see if per chance there were some significant aspects of this vital doctrine that had been omitted. Indeed I found several of them that I have examined at length in my book *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*.

In the next few newsletters I will endeavor to fill some gaps of the Sabbath School Quarterly, by sharing with you some of the highlights of my research on the Advent Hope. You might be interested to know that the more I studied about the Sabbath, and the more I became excited about the Second Advent, because these two doctrines are linked together, not only in our church name, but also theologically and practically.

Theologically, the Sabbath and the Second Advent invite us to meet the Lord. The Sabbath invites us to meet *the invisible Lord in time in His Holy Day*, and the Second Advent invites to meet the *visible Lord in space on the glorious day of His coming*. Practically, the weekly preparation to meet the Lord in time on the Sabbath, constitutes an essential preparation to meet Him in space at His Return.

Here are some of the topics I am thinking of presenting in the forthcoming newsletters. Feel free to suggest any other topic related to the Second Advent that you wish to be examined.

The Imminence and Distance of the Advent Hope

The New Testament speaks of the time of the Second Advent in seemingly contradictory terms: *imminent* and *yet possibly distant*. This Bible study suggests four possible resolutions to this apparent contradiction. We shall see that this tension is an essential component of the Biblical Advent Hope which is designed to help us experience in the present the reality of the future;

The Nature and Function of the Endtime Signs

This Bible study examines the nature and function of the signs pointing to Christ's imminent Return, in order to encourage a legitimate use and appreciation of them. We shall see that the endtime signs are designed to encourage constant preparation, not sensational prognostications.

Today's Fulfillment of the Endtime Signs

This important Bible study will review a few of the endtime signs given by Jesus in His prophetic discourse (Matt 24) and clarified by NT writers. We shall see that the unparalleled fulfillment of these endtime signs in our time gives us reasons to believe that Christ's Return "is near, at the very gates" (Matt 24:33).

The Mistaken Signs of the Second Advent

This Bible study focuses on three popular but mistaken signs of Christ's Return, namely, the restoration of the Jews to Palestine, the Rapture, and the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple. These mistaken signs are widely accepted and promoted by many evangelical Christians who follow the so-called dispensational school of prophetic interpretation. We shall see that these mistaken endtime signs are misleading, and ultimately weaken rather than strengthen the Advent Hope.

For this topic I plan to call upon my esteem friend and respected scholar, Hans LaRondelle, D. Th., to contribute an essay on "Israel in Prophecy." LaRondelle has written a best selling book on this topic. In a recent telephone conversation, he has reassured me that he would be glad to share with us the highlights of his research. Upon my return to the USA next week, I will call him to confirm the invitation.

Living and Nourishing the Advent Hope

The topic of this Bible study prepared during the few days I spent in Rome, Italy, is "Living and Nourishing the Advent Hope." Its aim is to suggest some practical ways in which to live in the joyful expectancy of a soon-coming Savior. Surprisingly, this topic is not directly presented in our Sabbath School Quarterly, entitled "Living the Advent Hope." If you find this meditation informative and inspiring, feel free to print it out and share it with your Sabbath School members.

SPECIAL OFFER ON THE BOOK AND RECORDING ON *THE ADVENT HOPE*

All the topics mentioned above scheduled for future newsletters, are largely excerpted from the following two books: *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness* and *Hal Lindsey's Prophetic Jigsaw Puzzle*. The highlights of this research have been recorded in 8 audio cassettes which come in an artistically designed plastic album. To make it possible for our subscribers to benefit from this research, we extend the following special offer:

THE COMPLETE PACKAGE consisting of *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness* (regular \$20.00), *Hal Lindsey's Prophetic Jigsaw Puzzle* (regular \$20.00), *Advent Seminar Album with 8 audio cassettes* (regular \$60.00), is offered until December 31, 2002, for only US\$60.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$100.00.

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“LIVING AND NOURISHING THE ADVENT HOPE”
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What does it mean to live in the expectancy of a soon-Coming Saviour? How should the Advent Hope affect our daily life: the way we speak, the way we work, the way we relate to people, the places we go, the things we read or view on our TV, the goods we buy, the profession we choose, in short, our total outlook toward life? I believe that these are crucial questions that we need to take time to consider, because ultimately the way we answer these questions determines whether or not the hope of a soon Coming Savior has any meaning at all in our lives.

To guide our reflection I have divided this Bible study in two parts. In the first part we shall reflect on how to live the Advent Hope, by considering five distinguishing characteristics of the lifestyle of an Adventist believer, that is, of a believer who lives in the joyful expectancy of the soon-coming savior.

In the second part we shall consider how to nourish the Advent Hope. The passing of almost twenty centuries since Christ promised “I will come again and will take you to myself” (John 14:3) makes it easier today than ever before to become complacent or even skeptical about Christ’s Return. In fact, many have lost sight of its certainty, imminence, and relevance. Consequently, it is important to reflect upon how to keep the Advent Hope alive in our hearts and minds.

PART I
LIVING THE ADVENT HOPE

1. Living with a Forward Look

The first and foremost characteristic of an Advent-oriented (Adventist) lifestyle is living with a forward look. Some people live in the past. They love to talk about their past scholastic achievements, their past successes in their college football team, in their past business ventures, their past promotions, their past family life. For them the life that counts is the one they have already lived in the past.

Other people live in and for the present. They look with satisfaction at their latest scholastic and/or professional attainments, at their latest acquisition of goods and gadgets. They love to talk about the money they make in their new business, the fun of the new car they have just purchased, the promotion they have just received, the comforts of the new home they have just built, the excitement of the exotic vacation in paradise island they have just enjoyed. For them the life that really counts is the one they live today. They live by the epicurean motto: “Eat, drink and be merry today because tomorrow you will die.”

By contrast, the Advent believer lives not in the past, nor in the present, but looking forward to the world to come to be inaugurated by Christ at his the Second Coming. Paul eloquently expresses this forward look, saying: **“Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”** (Phil 3:13-14).

It is noteworthy that the Apostle finds the motivation for living and serving the Lord, not in his past life, which he chooses to forget, nor in his present attainments, which he finds still short of God’s expectations, but in the future prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Imagine what would have happen to Paul, if he had kept thinking back to his past life when with holy zeal he was seeking out for Christians to put to death. Poor Paul, he would have become totally demoralized and paralyzed by an overwhelming sense of guilt. Thank God that we too, like Paul, do not have to live worrying about our past failures, because God’s forgiving grace has taken care of it.

Note, however, that Paul chose to ignore not only his past failures but also his present attainments. This is surprising because very few people have attained Paul's dedication, moral maturity and success in the service of the Lord. Yet Paul says: "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; . . . Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own" (vv. 12,13).

Have you ever met Christians who believe that they have "made it," that they have reached perfection? Paul for sure did not feel that way. In spite of his moral and spiritual attainments, Paul admits that he had not "made it" yet; he was not yet perfect. Why? Because the Apostle recognized the danger of believing to have attained perfection, to have reached God's expectations for our life. To believe that we have finally reached the moral and spiritual maturity God expects of us, means to become proud, self-satisfied and judgmental toward those whom we believe have not made it yet.

Thus, Paul chose to find his motivation for living and serving the Lord in what lies ahead. He tells us that he lived like an athlete straining forward to what lies ahead, stretching every muscle to reach the finish line. The reason is that he knew that the real prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus will be given at the Coming of the Lord. The Apostle understood the fundamental truth that to be an Advent believer, one must live with a forward look. He urges all mature Christians to have the same forward look: "Let those of us who are mature be thus minded" (Phil 3:15).

Pilgrims's Outlook. What does it mean to live with a forward look? It means to view our present life as a pilgrimage, a journey to a better land. It means to live like Abraham, looking "forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb 11:10). It means to labor in this world, without making our labor the ultimate reality for which we live. It means to study hard to become the best possible doctor, teacher, preacher, engineer, nurse, lawyer, without making our academic or professional attainments the ultimate reality for which to live. It means to work hard to provide our family members with a nice home, food, education, conveniences, without making any of these things, the ultimate reality for which to live. Indeed, it means to view this world, *not as the living room* in which to live as though Christ may never come, but as *the waiting room to the world* that Christ will soon usher in at His Coming.

Let us ask ourselves, Do we view ourselves as pilgrims or as permanent residents of this earth? Someone has said that twentieth-century Christians are "the best-disguised set of pilgrims this world has ever seen." Many Christians hardly give the impression that they are just "passing through," when sometimes they are moonlighting at a second or third job, in order to have more and more and never be satisfied.

Function of the Sabbath. When I first heard about moonlighting, I thought that it was a romantic activity conducted under the silver ray of the moon. I was soon informed that "moonlighting" is not romanticism but a second or third job some will hold to earn more and more without often being satisfied. A vital function of the Sabbath is to teach our greedy hearts to become grateful, to remind us that we are pilgrims and not permanent residents of this world. When Friday night comes, it is *shabat*, that is, time to stop. We stop not only our work, but also our desire to have more. We start counting the blessings that the Lord has brought to our life during the week which has gone by.

The Sabbath teaches us to live with a forward look by encouraging us each week to look forward to the rest and peace of the Sabbath which is a foretaste, an anticipation of the greater blessings to be enjoyed in the world to come. To live with a forward look means then to maintain a Sabbatical outlook in which we view all our achievements and our possessions such as homes, cars, gadgets, as transitory; as things God gives us in this present life to help us prepare for and appreciate the greater realities that awaits us in the life to come.

2. Living by the Spirit

A second characteristic of an Advent-oriented lifestyle is living by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. It is only by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit that we can “live sober, upright, and godly lives” (Titus 2:12) while awaiting the coming of our Lord. To emphasize the important role the Holy Spirit in the life of those who await His Return, Christ related the parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt 25:1-3).

How did the five foolish virgins run out of oil? Why were the five foolish virgins unprepared to meet Christ, the Bridegroom, at His Coming? Surely it was not because they lived immoral lives. The very fact that they are called virgins indicates that they were pure, genuine Christians. What was their problem, then? They failed to seek constantly the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. They were self-sufficient Christians. They did not sense the need to ask daily for a fresh provision of divine grace to meet the challenge of their daily lives. Here lies the essential difference between the life of a genuine Christian (wise virgins) and that of a nominal Christian (foolish virgins) or an unbeliever. A genuine Christian lives a life of constant dependency upon God. A nominal Christian lives a life of independence from God.

Dependent or Independent Christians. Are we dependant or independent Christians? Do we sometime feel self-sufficient like the foolish virgins? Do we feel that we have all the necessary financial, intellectual, professional resources to resolve our problems? Do we feel that we can manage our lives by ourselves without seeking God's help? Do we find it humiliating to kneel before God each day and ask for the enabling power of His spirit?

I believe that if ever there was a time when we as Adventist Christians need the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, such time is today, as we are called to live in a selfish, impatient, unkind, immoral, intemperate, secularly minded society. Every day we are tempted and pressured to conform to the world in eating and drinking, dressing, entertainment, Sabbathkeeping, divorcing and remarrying, sexual permissiveness. Today more than ever before we need to ask daily for the enabling power of God's Spirit. We need to ask the power of His Spirit as we begin each day, saying: God help me today to live sober, upright and holy life. Help me through Thy Spirit to be pleasant toward the people I shall meet, to be diligent in my work, to be truthful in my speaking.

We need to ask the power of His Spirit also as we go through the day and we are confronted with unexpected situations that may cause us to loose our patience, to become hostile, to become discouraged. Let us pause for a moment and ask God for the special assistance of His Spirit. Suddenly you will find that you are again in control of a situation that seemed difficult or out of control. When that happens, pause again to thank God for strength received.

In researching the biblical teachings on vital areas of our Christian faith, I have often been confronted with problematic texts, whose meaning was puzzling to me. I would consult all the available resources, but still I was not sure how to interpret the text. That is the moment when I have learned to pose, and pray that God would open my mind so that I could understand the true meaning of His Word. Surprisingly, what was puzzling to me soon became clear. At that moment I sensed the need to thank God for help received.

As we live by the power of the Spirit we become more and more like One we are expecting, because as the Scripture tells us, “We all are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18).

3. Living a Balanced Life

A third characteristic of an Advent-oriented lifestyle is living a balance life, by avoiding the extremes of fanaticism on the one hand and liberalism or indifferentism on the other hand. To live a balance lifestyle, we need to heed Peter's admonition, as found in 1 Peter 4:7: "The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers. Above all hold unfailing love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sin."

In this text Peter uses two imperatives which in Greek are much stronger than in most English translations. The first imperative is *sophronesate*, which means: *Be mentally vigilant*. The translation "keep sane," does not quite convey the notion of mental vigilance. The second imperative is *nepsate*, which means, *Be physically abstinent*. The common translation "be sober," ignores the primary meaning of the verb *nepho*, which literally means "Do not drink" or "be abstinence." This verb is used six times by Peter and Paul to urge believers to be physically abstinent. Unfortunately, most translators chose to translate the verb figuratively as "be sober" or "be temperate," in order to save the face of the face of drinking by condemning drunkenness instead.

Mental vigilance and physical abstinence go hand in hand. In fact, mental vigilance requires physical abstinence, because alcohol impairs our mental judgement. This is the fundamental reason for the biblical prohibition of the use of alcoholic beverages, namely, because of they impair the functioning of the mind. Any substance that impairs our mind is to be avoided, because the mind is the most precious organ God has given us. It is through the mind that we apprehend God and offer to Him a rational—*logike*—service (Rom 12:2). It is through the renewing of our mind that we "put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:24). Ultimately, anything that impairs our minds, defiles our body, which is the Temple of the Holy spirit (1 Cor 3:16).

As Advent believers we need in a special way to be mentally vigilant and physical abstinent because the expectation of Christ's imminent Return can give rise to two equally dangerous attitudes: fanaticism and indifference. In my itinerant ministry across North America and overseas I have found that these two trends can be found in a smaller or greater degree in every church.

Fanaticism. On the one hand there are Adventists who, like the Thessalonians of Paul's day, became so "shaken in mind (and) excited" (2 Thess 2:2) at the thought of Christ's imminent Return, that they lose their balance by championing fanatical practices or teachings. For example, some become fanatic in their diet. Others become fanatic in their Sabbathkeeping. They observe the Sabbath as a day of absolute rest. They seem to believe that the best way to honor God is by being paralytic on the Sabbath. Others become fanatic by majoring in minors or by promoting a particular doctrine as if it was the whole Gospel.

Indifference. While some lose their balance by becoming fanatics, there are many others who lose their balance by becoming indifferent toward Christ's Coming. Like the unwise servant, they say in their hearts, "My master is delayed in coming" (Luke 12:45). Thinking that Christ's Return still lies somewhere in the distant future, they chose to make this present world a *living room* in which to live as though Christ may never come, rather than the *waiting room* to the world to come.

Usually these are the people who argue that the beliefs and standards of the church are too strict and out of touch with the present reality. They are the people who often ask: What is wrong? What is wrong with moderate drinking, dancing, going to movies, buying food and services on the Sabbath, divorcing and remarrying, being a homosexual or lesbian? They interpret the freedom of the Gospel as freedom to pursue their heart desires and inclinations. May I propose that if we want to be serious in preparing ourselves and others for Christ's coming, we need to stop asking, What is wrong? and affirm instead what is right.

To avoid the two dangers of fanaticism on the one hand and indifference on the other hand, we need to heed to Peter's admonition to be mentally vigilant and physical abstinent in view of Christ's Return. This entails, as expressed on page 336 of *The Advent Hope*, "living temperately, not only to abstain from drugs and alcoholic beverages but also by learning to distinguish between necessities and luxuries, wants and wishes, restraining our desires for the latter.

"It means to be willing to ask ourselves, when buying new clothes, a new car, a new house, or new furniture: Am I buying these to bolster my weak self-image? To keep up with the Joneses? Simply to keep up with fashion? Will this purchase encourage fellow Christians to live the kind of lifestyle Christ is calling us to live while awaiting His Return? Do I have a right to purchase anything my heart desires simply because I can afford it?

"If our motive for the acquisition of goods is primarily to gratify extravagant wishes rather than meeting genuine needs, then we need to heed God's admonition, 'Be sober!' If we buy more food than we can consume so that we find ourselves constantly throwing away food which has spoiled, then we need to heed God's admonition, 'Be sober!' If the size of our wardrobe is such that we have not worn many of the outfits for months or even years, then we need to heed God's admonition, 'Be sober!' If we choose to live in a large house where half of the rooms are never used, then we need to heed God's admonition, 'Be sober!'"

A balanced, temperate lifestyle extends way beyond eating and drinking to include many facets of our life. And how easy it is for us living in an affluent society to become victims of intemperance.

Preserve your Prayer Life. The reason given by Peter for being mentally vigilant and physical abstinent is, "for your prayers" (1 Pet 4:7), that is to say, in order to be able to pray as we ought. It is not difficult to see the connection between temperance and prayer life. A person who lives an intemperate lifestyle will either ignore his or her prayer life or will pray for the wrong things. The opposite is equally true. A person who maintains a healthy prayer life enables the Holy Spirit to operate more fully in his/her life.

The importance of prayer in the life of those who live in the expectancy of Christ's Coming was underscored by the Saviour Himself in His Olivet Discourse. After warning about the danger of intemperance, Christ said: "Watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36). It is noteworthy that Christ makes prayer the key to obtaining the strength to withstand external pressures and to be ready to stand before Him at His Coming. The reason why prayer is so essential is because it makes us more receptive and responsive to the influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

4. Living Lovingly

A fourth characteristic of an Advent-oriented lifestyle is living lovingly. Peter emphasizes this characteristic saying: "Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet 4:8). Peter characterizes Christian love as "unfailing." The Greek term (*ektenes*) has also the meaning of being *zealous* and *outreaching*. In other words genuine Christian love is zealous, never-failing, reaching to all the lovable and unlovable.

There is much talk about love today, but most of it is love of self rather than love of others. People often speak of how much they love their job, their car, their clothes, their sexual partner, the place where they live. What they actually love is the self-gratification these things offer them. This is self-centered love that often leads to indifference toward the needs of others. The result of this self-love is most evident today in the appalling number of broken homes, violent crimes, abused children, neglected elderly people. Jesus predicted these pre-Advent conditions when He said that "most men's love will grow cold" (Matt 24:12).

In studying the secret of growth of the early church, I found that Christian love was a key factor in the success of the Christian's outreach to the Roman world. The Romans could not understand how Christians could love their enemies more than they would love their blood relatives. I believe that genuine Christian love is also a vital factor today to the success of our Endtime mission to preach the Gospel to all the world (Matt 24:14).

Sometimes ago I was invited to speak at the General Conference Session of the Church of God Seventh-day. I recall having breakfast with a businessman who recently joined that church. I asked him how long he had been a members of that church. He replied: "Six months." Then I asked him, "Have you ever attended an Adventist Church?" "Yes," he replied. "For how long?" I asked him. "About six months," he replied. That answer made me curious, so I asked him, "Could you tell me why you chose to join the Church of God Seventh-day instead of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?" His reply was most sobering. He said: "In that particular Adventist church I found *too-much law and too-little love.*" Most likely that church was an exception. Yet, it reminds us of the need to be more loving and less critical, is we want to fulfil the gospel commission of reaching the world for Christ.

5. Living Industriously

A fifth characteristic of an Advent-oriented lifestyle is living industriously, by developing and using to the full every gift God has given us. In the parable of the pounds Christ commissions those who wait for His Return, saying: "Trade with these till I come" (Luke 19:13). In fact the only servant who was condemned at the return of the master was the servant who chose to hide his talent by not using it (Matt 25:24-30; Luke 19:20-23).

To fulfill the Gospel commission we need to make full use of every gift each believer possesses. It may be a gift of speaking, of music, of understanding, of a word of encouragement, counseling, practical service, hospitality, money, or possessions inherited. Whatever gifts each one of us possesses, we much regard them as endowments to be used to hasten to establishment of Christ's Kingdom.

Sometime I meet people who believe that the Lord has not equipped them with any special gift. Obviously that is not true because each one of us has some special gifts. Not all the gifts are equally noticeable, but all of them are equally needed. Some of you may have the give of cheering up people. That is a great gift that is so much needed today when so many seem to be so gloomy and doomy. My goodly mother has this gift. She has a smile and a word of encouragement for any person she meets. One cannot help but feeling good after speaking for few moments with my mother.

Some of you may have the gift of understanding people's problems. You are able to listen to people with an open mind, without prejudging them. That is a rare gift that is so much needed today. Have you ever looked for somebody that could understand your problem—someone willing to listen to you without prejudging you? If God has given you such a gift, use it. You can be a blessing to many people.

"Trade with these till I come" (Luke 19:13), is Christ's commission to us who wait for His Return. Christ expects us to plan and work for the future without making our future plans the only dominant future to live for. We must live as if Christ would return today, and yet plan and work as if His Coming were still in the future. Keeping this tension in balance is essential for our life today.

PART TWO

NOURISHING THE ADVENT HOPE

In view of the vital role the Advent Hope should play in our Christian lives, consideration will be given in the second part of our Bible study to five specific ways to nourish the Advent Hope in our hearts.

1. Worship

A Foretaste of Heavenly Worship. An important way to nourish and strengthen the Advent Hope in our hearts is through personal and corporate worship. When we worship we break through the barriers of time and space and experience a foretaste of the blessedness of the future heavenly worship in the presence of God and in the fellowship of the redeemed of all ages. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of this vital function of worship: "You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant" (Heb 12:22-24).

This passage enumerates some of the future glories that we can apprehend and anticipate, especially through the worship experience, namely, the new Jerusalem, the joyful gathering of the angels, and the fellowship of the redeemed and of Christ Himself. The communal worship with fellow believers can enable us temporarily to forget and transcend the unpleasant realities of this present life and to catch a glimpse of the blessedness of the world to come.

The songs, the prayers, the proclamation, the witness of and fellowship with fellow members can give us a foretaste of the future heavenly Jerusalem and the festal gathering of God's children. Such an experience nourishes and strengthens the Advent Hope in our hearts by giving us a vision and a foretaste of the glories of the Second Advent. "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov 29:18, KJV). The vision of the glories of the Second Advent, captured especially through the worship experience, can help keep alive the flame of the Advent Hope.

Mutual Encouragement. Corporate worship also nourishes the Advent Hope by providing opportunities for encouraging one another. The pain, the sorrow, the frustrations, the disillusionments and the tensions of this life constantly tempt us to give up hope in a future divine solution to our present problems. The encouragement we receive from a caring church family, especially when we feel that the burdens of this life are too heavy to bear, can renew our hope and help us to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

The writer to the Hebrews speaks specifically of the mutual encouragement that Christians receive from worshipping together: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, *not neglecting to meet together*, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and *all the more as you see the Day drawing near*" (Heb 10:23-25).

It is noteworthy that the need to assemble together for worship and mutual encouragement is presented in this passage as all the more pressing as the Day of Christ's Coming draws near. The reason is that the nearer we draw to the Return of Christ, the more intense will be Satan's efforts to undermine the work of God in our lives and in this world. "Woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!" (Rev 12:12). The inspiration and encouragement we receive from worshipping together with fellow believers can help us to hold fast to our faith and hope in the soon-Coming Savior.

2. Lord's Supper

A vital aspect of worship that can nourish our Advent Hope is the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Whenever we eat the bread and drink the wine we "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). In other words, by participating in the Lord's Supper we celebrate not only the *Passion* but also the *Parousia* of our Lord. On the one hand, we look back to the Last Supper and the atoning sacrifice of our Lord, and on the other hand, we look forward to the Marriage Supper and the Glorious Return of our Lord.

Symbols are essential to conceptualize and experience spiritual realities. Through the Lord's Supper we can appropriate the reality not only of what Christ has accomplished for us at the Cross, but also of what He will accomplish for us at His Second Advent. Thus, every Lord's Supper should be viewed as a celebration, not only of Christ's atoning death, but also of His glorious Coming. Just as the Jews end their Passover service with the words, "Next year in Jerusalem!" so we as Christians should close our Lord's Supper with the words: "Our Lord is coming [Maranatha!]" (1 Cor 16:22). This eschatological meaning of the Lord's Supper is often ignored. It is therefore imperative for the pastor or the officiating officer to lead the congregation to view each Lord's Supper service as a foretaste of the messianic banquet in God's final Kingdom.

3. The Sabbath

Closely related to worship and the Lord's Supper is the celebration of the Sabbath—a divine institution which, like the Lord's Supper, invites us not only to look back, but also to look forward. In several studies I have shown how the weekly seventh-day Sabbath, both in the Bible and in the Judeo-Christian tradition, memorializes not only the past perfect creation and complete redemption, but also the future restoration of both the human and subhuman creation.

In Old Testament times the experience of peace, rest, and liberation which both the weekly and the annual Sabbaths provided to the Jews served to epitomize and nourish the hope of future messianic redemption. Similarly in the New Testament the "Sabbath rest" that "remains for the people of God" (Heb 4:9) is seen as a physical cessation from work to celebrate not only God's past creative and redemptive accomplishments, but also His future restoration of this world and of our lives. Through its rich meaning and experience the Sabbath offers both *theological assurance* and *practical opportunities* to nourish and strengthen the Advent Hope.

Theological Assurance. Theologically the seventh-day Sabbath nourished our Advent Hope by constantly reassuring us that there is a future "Sabbath rest" that "remains for the people of God" (Heb 4:9). In fact, the Sabbath offers us not only the assurance of the future rest, but it also challenges us to "strive to enter that rest, that no one fall by the same sort of disobedience" (Heb 4:11). The allusion in the latter half of the verse is to those Israelites of the wilderness generation who, because of disobedience, failed to enter into the rest of the land of Canaan—rest of which the Sabbath rest was a type. That experience serves as a warning to us Christians who look forward to the rest of the heavenly Canaan—rest of which the Sabbath is also a type. If, like the wilderness generation, we become unfaithful and disobedient, then we will not enter into the future rest of the heavenly Canaan.

Practical Opportunities. The Sabbath celebration nourishes our Advent Hope by offering us not only theological assurance of the rest and peace of the world to come, but also practical opportunities to experience a foretaste of the divine presence, peace, and rest of the world to come.

In a sense the holiness of the Sabbath, spoken of repeatedly in the Scriptures (Ex 16:23; 20:8; 31:15; Deut 5:12; Neh 9:14; Is 58:13; Jer 17:22), consists of the promise God has made on and through this day to manifest in a special way His holy presence in our lives. To hallow the Sabbath means not merely to set aside a weekly day for rest and worship, but to welcome the Lord of the Sabbath, our Savior Jesus Christ, as our invisible and yet very real guest of honor.

God summons us on the Sabbath to be free from work in order that we may be able to cultivate more freely and fully the awareness of His presence and peace in our lives. Through the Sabbath, as eloquently expressed by Thomas Aquinas, God invites us “*ad vacandum divinis*—to have a vacation with Him.” (*Summa Theologica* (New York, 1947), vol. 2, question 122, article 4, 1, p. 1701).

We can enjoy the Sabbath vacation with God, not only during the formal worship service, but also during the informal activities of the day, because all of them spring out of a heart which has deliberately chosen to honor God on His Holy Day. This spiritual communion that we enjoy with the Lord on the Sabbath nourishes our Advent Hope by offering us a foretaste of the fuller communion we shall enjoy when we shall see Him face to face.

Meeting in Time and Space. The weekly preparation that is made to be ready to welcome the Sabbath, when it arrives at sunset on Friday, in a sense constitutes an incentive to our constant preparation to be ready to welcome the Savior when He comes at the sunset of this world’s history. To put it differently, we might say that our preparation to meet our invisible Lord in *time* on the Sabbath is in a sense a preparation to meet our visible Lord in *space* at His Second Advent.

As Seventh-day Adventists we acknowledge the close link between the Sabbath and the Second Advent in the very name we carry. Our church name indicates that we view these two Biblical doctrines not only as important but also as interrelated. We believe that to be a *Sabbathkeeper* who welcomes the Savior on His Sabbath day also means to be an *Adventist* who is waiting to welcome the Savior at His Second Advent. Thus the preparation for and the celebration of the Sabbath offer a most effective vehicle to nourish our Advent Hope.

Delighting in God’s Creation. Another practical way in which the Sabbath celebration nourishes our Advent Hope is by affording the opportunity to delight in the goodness of God’s creation (Is 58:13-14). By inviting us to worship God as our perfect Creator, Redeemer, and ultimate Restorer, the Sabbath offers us not only the time but also the spiritual resources perceptively to enjoy God, people, and things. It invites us to look at the world through the eyes of eternity, that is to say, to view things not merely as they are, but as they must have been originally and as they will be ultimately.

The prevailing materialistic view of this world has resulted in an ethic of exploitation of nature to the extent that we have become aliens in our own habitat. The Sabbath is a movement away from the *exploitation* of nature to its *admiration*. The joyful celebration on the Sabbath of God’s creation, redemption, and restoration of all the natural order teaches us to act not as *predators* but as *curators* of the world. It teaches us to become responsible stewards of God’s good creation, since Christ at the End will restore it to its original perfection. Thus it nourishes our Advent Hope by offering us a preparation for and a foretaste of the delight and blessedness of the new world.

4. Witnessing

Our Advent Hope is nourished and strengthened not only through the blessings we receive from corporate worship, the Lord's Supper service, and the Sabbath celebration, but also through the blessings we impart to others as we share with them the good news of a soon-Coming Savior. Biblical truths burn brighter in our consciousness when we share them with others. When we see the comfort, courage, and new meaning which the Advent Hope brings to the lives of those to whom we witness, we ourselves gain a deeper appreciation of its relevance for our own personal life.

The Advent Hope was so deeply felt by New Testament Christians that they coined the password "*Maranatha*—Our Lord is coming" to greet one another (1 Cor 16:22). Such a greeting summed up their Advent Hope and motivated them to share their faith. The Thessalonians, for example, who deeply believed in the imminent Return of Christ (1 Thess 5:1-11; 2 Thess 2:1-12), are commended by Paul for their evangelistic zeal: "You became an example to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia . . . your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything" (1 Thess 1:7-8).

Broadcasting Center. This small group of believers, who had only recently been converted from heathenism, had become so inspired by the vision of the soon-Coming Savior that they "sounded forth" the word of their Lord "everywhere"—presumably through Asia Minor and Greece. We might say that Thessalonica became a Christian "broadcasting center." Thessalonica was an important center of trade situated at the intersection of important highways. Christian merchants of Thessalonica must have carried with them in their journeys the treasure of the Gospel together with their merchandise. They did not keep to themselves the good news of the Savior who had come to save all people from sin and who is coming again to take the saved home to His eternal fellowship.

The experience of the Thessalonians has often been repeated in the course of history. The proclamation of the imminent return of Christ has brought about not only religious awakenings, but also a renewed sense of urgency to reach out to the whole world with the good news of salvation. Seventh-day Adventists are a case in point. Our church grew out of the Advent awakenings of the 1840's. The firm belief in Christ's imminent Return has affected not only our lifestyle, by inspiring Seventh-day Adventists to healthful and holy living, but also our sense of mission, by giving a sense of urgency to their global evangelistic outreach. To the degree that the Advent Hope affects our Christian living and motivates our witnessing, to the same degree such a hope is nourished and strengthened within our hearts.

5. The Advent Signs

The Advent Hope is nourished also by what we have called the Advent signs. Without recognizable signs we lose hope of reaching our destination. This is true whether we travel by car on cement highways or by faith on the Christian highway to the Kingdom. Christ was cognizant of the human need for signs which could nourish our hope of His imminent Return. Thus He gave several signs foreshadowing His Return. In chapters 8, 9, and 10 we examined at length the various Advent signs and their unprecedented fulfillment in our time. We noted that these signs nourish our Advent Hope, not by *pinpointing* the exact time of Christ's Return, but by *pointing* toward its certainty and nearness.

Some signs, such as the worldwide Gospel proclamation (Mark 13:10), nourish our Advent Hope by reassuring Adventists that God is bringing about the consummation of redemption to be realized at the Second Advent. Other signs, such as earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, famines, and pestilences (Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11) sustain our Advent Hope by constantly reminding us of the final divine judgment upon human wickedness which Christ will execute at His Coming. The latter signs also have a message for unbelievers, summoning them to repent and be saved before it is forever too late.

Constant Readiness. The unprecedented fulfillment of the endtime signs, strengthen our Advent Hope, not by informing us about the exact time or manner of Christ's Return, but by encouraging us to be constantly ready for this event. The keynote of the whole Olivet Discourse is: "Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is Coming" (Matt 24:42; cf. vv. 43, 44; 25:13). This constant readiness has been encouraged by the generic nature of the signs of the End which have found a degree of fulfillment in every age.

The intensification which we see in our times of the sign of divine grace, manifested in the worldwide Gospel proclamation (Mark 13:10), of the signs of human rebellion evidenced in the proliferation of antichristian theologies and ideologies, military conflicts among nations, and growth of lawlessness (Mark 13:6-9), and of the signs of divine judgment, revealed through calamities such as earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, famines, and pestilences (Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11)—all of these are to believers today a constant reminder that "the coming of the Lord is at hand . . . the Judge is standing at the doors" (James 5:8-9).

CONCLUSION

The Advent Hope, nourished in our hearts, greatly affects our motives, our values, our choices, in short, our total lifestyle. We have seen that to be an Advent-oriented Christian means, among other things, to live with a forward look, laboring in this world while looking forward to the world to come. It means keeping Christ at the center of our existence. It means to live by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, experiencing in this present life a foretaste of the blessings of the life to come. It means living balanced lives, avoiding the extremes of fanaticism and indifferentism. It means living lovingly, showing our outreaching love to our friends and foes. It means living industriously, by developing and using our God-given gifts.

To nourish and strengthen the Advent Hope in our hearts, God has provided us with vital resources such as worship, the Lord's Supper, the Sabbath, witnessing, and the Advent signs. The worship experience can nourish our Advent Hope by enabling us to transcend the unpleasant realities of this present life and to catch a glimpse of the blessedness of the world to come. The Lord's Supper can sustain our Advent Hope by inviting us to look not only backward to Christ's Passion but also forward to His Parousia.

The Sabbath can nourish our Advent Hope by offering us a theological reassurance of the "Sabbath rest" that "remains . . . for the people of God" (Heb 4:9), and practical opportunities to experience a foretaste of future rest, peace, and delight. Witnessing gives us a deeper appreciation of the relevance of the Advent Hope, as we see the comfort, courage, and transformation that such Hope brings to the lives of others. Finally, the Advent signs are intended to nourish our Advent Hope by constantly reassuring us of the certainty and imminence of Christ's Return and by encouraging us to be constantly ready to receive Him.

Among all the things that are difficult to comprehend in the Scriptures, the Advent Hope stands out for its clarity, centrality, and certainty. Its certainty rests on Christ's first Advent, which constitutes the center from which the line of salvation-history runs backwards through the covenant people to creation, and forward through the mission of the Church to the Second Advent and the final restoration. The Return of Christ in glory is presented in the Scriptures as the consummation of God's creative and redemptive purpose for individual persons and for the whole universe.

Without the Advent Hope our lives would be deprived of meaning and comfort. Motivation would be weak or even lacking “to live sober, upright, and godly lives” (Titus 2:12) among the problems, pain, and perversions of this present world. The promise of eternal life without the Second Advent would be like a staircase leading nowhere, or like a large check drawn on a fundless account. The glorious Coming of Christ is a necessity if our Christian life is to have meaning, courage, comfort, motivation, and hope for a better life to come. Without the *Advent Hope* there would only be *Human Hopelessness*. Let us thank God that

We have this hope that burns within our hearts,
Hope in the coming of the Lord.
We have this faith that Christ alone imparts,
Faith in the promise of His Word.
We believe the time is here,
When the nations far and near
Shall awake, and shout, and sing
Hallelujah! Christ is King!
We have this hope that burns within our hearts.
Hope in the coming of the Lord.

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! (Rev 22:20)
Maranatha!

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 November and December, 2002. Every Sabbath it is a great pleasure for me to meet our subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminars.

NOVEMBER 8-9: THOUSAND OAKS SDA CHURCH

Location: 480 W. Gainsborouh, Thousand Oaks, CA 91360

For information call Pastor Michael Brownfield at (805) 368-6377 pr (805) 376-2961

NOVEMBER 15-16: MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

Location: Lilydale SDA church, Hull Road, Lilydale, Melbourne

For information contact Dr. Neil Watts, 3/6 Kitchener Road, Croydon 3136, Victoria Australia

NOVEMBER 19: NUNAWADING SDA CHURCH, MELBOURNE

Localtion: 169 Central Rd, Nunawading, Melbourne.

For information call Pastor Norm Hardy at (61) 3 8812 2804

NOVEMBER 20: GEELONG SDA CHURCH, MELBOURNE

Location: 8-10 Little Myers Street, Geelong, Melbourne

For information call Pastor Des Potts at (61) 3 5272 3300.

NOVEMBER 22-23: DANDENONG POLISH SDA CHURCH

Location: 100 James street, Dandenong, Melbourne

For inforation call Pastor Marek Ignasiak at 03 95038840 or 04 15683735.

NOVEMBER 29-30: HAGLEY PARK SDA CHURCH, KINGSTON, JAMAICA

Location: 114A Hagley Park Road, Kingston 11, Jamaica

For information call Pastor Adrian Cotterell at (876) 924-1061

DECEMBER 6-7: WESTERN JAMAICA CONFERENCE RALLY

For information call the Conference Secretary, Elder Charles Brevitt at (876) 952-4820 or 979-9026.

DECEMBER 13-14: RALLY IN VANCOUVER, WASHINGTON

Location: will be finalized within few days.

For information call Pastor Dave Bostrom at (360) 666-9877

WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO COME TO YOUR CHURCH TO PRESENT MY POPULAR SEMINARS ON THE SABBATH, SECOND ADVENT, AND CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE?

If your church has been thinking of inviting me to present one of my popular PowerPoint Seminars on the SABBATH, SECOND ADVENT or CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE, feel free to contact me at this time by email at <sbacchiocchi@qtm.net> or by phone at (616) 471-2915. The seminar usually consists of three presentations, given on Friday evening, Sabbath morning, and Sabbath afternoon. During the next few weeks I will be setting up my 2003 calendar of speaking engagements, and I will be glad to reserve a special weekend for a rally in your church.

This past year I have spent over 1000 hours to organize all my seminar lectures with PowerPoint slides. The response has been overwhelming. Every weekend capacity crowds attend the seminars which are designed to enrich the understanding and experience of our message. Feel free to contact me for a date and further information.

IS YOUR CHURCH LOOKING FOR A GOOD VIDEO PROJECTOR AT A SPECIAL PRICE?

If your church is looking for a good LCD video projection at a reasonable price, I would be glad to put you in contact with an Adventist brother in Texas, who is able to sell HITACHI CP-S370W video projectors with 2200 lumens at a special price of US\$2700.00, instead of the suggested factory retail price is over \$6,000.00.

I bought one of this projectors myself, after I discovered that it outperformed my new IN-FOCUS projector, which I purchased few months ago. I made this discovery in Gentry, Arkansas, where I was invited to speak. Tim Rosenburg, the church pastor, showed me the HITACHI projector that their church had just bought. In fact they bought four of them, for the youth, elementary school, and academy. We set up both projectors and to my surprise I found that the HITACHI provided a much brighter and sharper picture. Pastor Tim Rosenburg placed me in contact with the Adventist brother in Texas who buys these projectors from HITACHI for our churches.

If your church is planning to buy a video projector, I would be glad to place you in contact with our Texan brother. Just email to me your name and phone number and I will pass it on to him. He will contact you directly and you can made all the necessary arrangements with him.

I am extremely happy with this new HITACHI projector that I use every weekend. The image is bright and clear, even when some lights are on. It is small, weighs only about 5 pounds and I can put both the projector and the lap top computer in my brief case, with space left over for my Bible and two books. If your church is looking for a good video project at a reasonable price, you will be very happy this one.

RANKO STEFANOVIC, REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST: COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION

This book is by far the best commentary on the Book of Revelation that our Adventist church has ever published (645 pages). This commentary is an outgrowth of Ranko Stefanovic doctoral dissertation on Revelation. Stefanovic is serving as Professor of New Testament at Andrews University. I highly recommend this timely book.

Copies may be ordered on-line at <<http://www.andrewsuniversitypress.com>>, or by toll-free telephone at 800-467-6369, or from any Adventist Book Center.

SPECIAL CHRISTMAS OFFER ON THE NEWLY RECORDED SABBATH SEMINAR

The many messages of appreciation for the newly SABBATH ENRICHMENT SEMINAR, have led me to extend the special offer until November 30, 2002. The seminar was recorded last March 15-17, 2002, at the First Fort Worth SDA Church in Texas by the TEXAS MEDIA CENTER. We spent a lot of time and efforts preparing this new recording where I use about 100 PowerPoint slides for each presentation. The response has been very gratifying. Church leaders in different parts of the world are expressing appreciation for the blessings of these timely Sabbath messages. Your personal effort to share them with your congregation is much appreciated.

The new SABBATH SEMINAR consists of a total of 8 one-hour lectures covering the following topics: the gripping story of my search for the Sabbath at a Vatican University in Rome; the discoveries I made in Vatican libraries on how the change came about from Sabbath to Sunday in early Christianity; practical principles on how to keep the Sabbath to experience Christ's rest and peace in our lives; an update report on the most recent Sabbath/Sunday developments; and a sacred concert with two outstanding tenors entitled THE SABBATH IN SONGS. The concert was recorded in a television studio in South Bend, Indiana.

This new SABBATH ENRICHMENT SEMINAR is now available in THREE FORMATS:

- 8 AUDIO cassettes
- 4 VIDEO tapes
- 3 DVD disks.

Each of them come in a nice plastic album with an artistically designed jacket. Your special CHRISTMAS OFFER until December 31, 2002, are as follows:

- 1) **SABBATH SEMINAR IN 8 AUDIO CASSETTES** at the special CHRISTMAS OFFER of only \$30.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$60.00. The 8 audio cassettes come in a nice album with an artistically designed color jacket.
- 2) **SABBATH SEMINAR IN 4 VIDEO TAPES** at the special CHRISTMAS OFFER of only \$50.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$120.00. The price is the same for both the American and the overseas PAL system. Specify which system you need. The 4 video tapes come in a nice album with an artistically designed color jacket.
- 3) **SABBATH SEMINAR IN DVD DISKS** at the special CHRISTMAS OFFER of only \$60.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$120.00. The DVD disks are compatible with all TV systems overseas. No conversion is necessary. The 3 DVD disks come in a nice triple Jewel case with an artistically designed color jacket.

The easiest way to order the new AUDIO cassettes, VIDEO tapes, or DVD disks, is with your credit card. You can order by calling us at (616) 471-2915 or by emailing us your credit card number, expiration date, and your address. If you prefer to pay by check, mail your check to: BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49103, USA. We guarantee to process your order immediately.

AN INCREDIBLE CHRISTMAS OFFER ON ALL MY PUBLICATIONS AND RECORDINGS

For the next few weeks until December 31, 2002, you can order all my books and recordings at SPECIAL CHRISTMAS offer of \$250.00, instead of the regular price of \$825.00.

THIS IS THE LIST OF ALL THE ITEMS INCLUDED IN THIS SPECIAL PACKAGE

1. All the 16 BOOKS: regularly retails for \$305.00
2. SABBATH SEMINAR IN 8 AUDIO cassettes placed in an artistically designed album: regularly it retails for \$60.00
3. ADVENT SEMINAR IN 8 AUDIO cassettes placed in an artistically designed album: : regularly it retails for \$60.00
4. CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE SEMINAR IN 8 AUDIO cassettes placed in an artistically designed album: regularly it retails for \$60.00
5. SABBATH SEMINAR IN 4 VIDEO cassettes or 3 DVD disks: regularly they retail for \$120.00 and \$140.00 respectively. Both of them come in an artistically designed album. You need to choose either the VIDEO or the DVD for the package.
6. TWO CDS: one with all my BOOKS and ARTICLES and the one with all my SEMINARS. The two CDs retail for \$100.00 each.

Your SPECIAL CHRISTMAS offer for the complete list of all my books, cassettes, videos or DVDs, and CDs, is ONLY \$250.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$825.00.

You can order this SPECIAL PACKAGE by calling us at (616) 471-2915 or by emailing us your credit card number, expiration date, and your address. If you prefer to pay by check, mail your check to: BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49103, USA. We guarantee to process your order immediately.

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