

**ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 107:
HUMAN NATURE AND DESTINY
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Greeting from Singapore, a most delightful city that stands out for its cleanliness and orderliness. Much of the city looks like downtown Manhattan, with tall buildings dotting the skyline. Being an extremely small country with only about 404 square miles, Singapore can only grow upward toward the sky.

THE VISIT TO SINGAPORE

During the past three days, from November 21 to 23, 2003, I delivered a total of 6 PowerPoint lectures at the Maranatha SDA Church—a brand new elegant church that was inaugurated earlier this year. Today, Monday November 24, 2003, I can catch my breath because I don't have any speaking engagements. The only scheduled appointment is a fellowship lunch with our Adventist pastor, Berson Sim, and Pastor Noel Goh, of the Covenant Community Methodist Church. Tomorrow, God willing, I will fly home.

From the 12th floor of my hotel room overlooking the Singapore harbor, I am writing this newsletter, which will be emailed as soon I get home on Tuesday night. I decided to share with you the lecture I delivered last night on "HUMAN NATURE AND DESTINY." You should find this lecture informative because it builds upon the previous newsletter on the deception of conscious life after death. The lecture was well received. In fact, our Singapore Mission President told me that he wants me to come back to Singapore next year, to deliver, especially, this lecture to the local clergy. He was thrilled by the response of the ministers who attended the lectures. Within the next few months, I plan to prepare a PowerPoint version of this lecture. It is going to be a challenging task to find images that illustrate such abstract concepts as the soul, the breath of life, life-giving Spirit, the moral regeneration of this present life and the physical restoration of the life to come.

The theme of the seminar presented in Singapore was EDEN LEGACIES. My six lectures focused on five major Edenic Legacies: The Sabbath, Marriage, Health, Human Nature and Destiny, and the

Advent Hope. The two lectures on HOW TO BUILD A HAPPY, LASTING MARRIAGE and THE CHRISTIAN AND ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES, were brand new. I invested over 400 hours in preparing them with 220 PowerPoint slides. It is time consuming looking for appropriate pictures or art work to illustrate the concepts presented. Once I find a suitable picture I rework it with PHOTOSHOP, to create space for the text or blend it with other pictures. The work is tedious, but very rewarding. The greatest satisfaction comes when I see the attentive faces of the congregation visualizing the message I try to communicate with my broken Italian accent.

The seminar was widely promoted through announcements on the radio, newspapers ads, and the mailing of a nice color flier to 700 non-SDA. A banner 25 feet long was hanged along the external walls of the church. The attendance averaged about 200 persons, of whom over 60 were non-SDA. They registered by phone prior to the seminar. Comparing to previous weekends, the attendance was rather small. A week ago in Montreal, Canada, we had over 1000 people attending the seminar at the magnificent Westmount SDA Church—a former Catholic Cathedral with a nice dome that reminded me of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome.

Our local church leaders were quite happy with the attendance, because of the good number of non-Adventists, including some Protestant ministers. One of them, Rev. Ng Koon Sheng, is the Bishop of the impressive St. Andrew’s Anglican Cathedral in Singapore. He contacted me by email and ordered my Sabbath books prior to my coming to Singapore. At the seminar he purchased my SABBATH SEMINAR in DVD and the two CD-Roms, which he plans to share with his congregation.

Surprisingly, Rev. Sheng told me that he has accepted the Sabbath and has already shared some aspects of this doctrine with his congregation. In fact, he asked Pastor Berson Sim of our Maranatha SDA Church, if I could to speak at his church. Unfortunately, I cannot prolong my stay in Singapore at this time, because I promised my wife and children that this year I will be home for our Thanksgiving family reunion.

Other ministers attended the seminars. They all bought my books, DVD, and CDs. One of them is Pastor Noel Goh, minister of the 500

members of the Covenant Community Methodist Church. The Methodist church is the largest Protestant denomination in Singapore. The church operates an impressive educational campus, which includes an elementary school, an academy, a college, and a theological seminary. Pastor Goh took Pastor Sim and myself out for lunch at a very elegant club. We enjoyed two hours of pleasant fellowship together.

To my surprise Pastor Goh has read some of my books and has accepted the validity and value of the Sabbath. In fact, next year during his sabbatical, he plans to come to America and spend a couple of weeks at Andrews University. He wants to sit in some Seminary classes and examine some of the theological resources of our the James White Library. His challenge is how to share the Sabbath message with his congregation without creating a major division. May God grant him wisdom and grace in meeting this challenge. I am leaving Singapore with a grateful heart for the opportunity God has granted me this weekend to touch the lives of sincere people.

THE TRIP TO SWEDEN AND NORWAY

From October 30 to November 8, I spent 9 delightful days speaking at six rallies in Sweden and Norway. Our largest attendance was at the Stockholm SDA Church in Sweden. The church was crowded to capacity with about 400 persons attending the meetings—twice the usual attendance. Some told me that they learned about the meetings from our Endtime Issues newsletter and rode by the train for 9 hours to come to Stockholm. The reception and response was marvellous.

Our Adventist church in Scandinavia is aging and gradually declining in membership. In recent years our membership has been steadily declining, because fewer new members are replacing the old members who are passing away. In discussing the problem with some of our pastors and local church officers, there seems to be a consensus that our Adventist church in Scandinavia (as in much of Western Europe), is suffering from a crisis of identity. Some of our Adventist believers no longer see the difference between being an Adventist and an Evangelical Christian in general. Consequently, they sense no urgency to share the Adventist message with others Christians. It is evident that the effort of recent years to minimize the differences and maximize the similarities between our Adventist church and other Protestant churches, has worked—albeit negatively for the growth of the church. We may have overcome the sectarian stigma, but in the process we are losing our identity.

I was made aware of the identity crisis in a message I received from Pastor Bobby Sjolander of our Ekebyholm Junior College in Sweden. He asked me specifically to speak on what does it mean to be a Seventh-day Adventist Christian today. I was glad to present a PowerPoint meditation on this very topic. It is one of my favorite sermon. The response surpassed my fondest expectations. Our members appreciated the opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to our message and mission. The same was true at all the convocations in Sweden and Norway.

Our Adventist believers in Scandinavia need our prayers as they face the challenge of proclaiming the Endtime message of a soon-coming Savior to an increasingly secular and materialistic society. Our greatest challenge is not only to find new methods of church planting, but also to enhance the relevance of our message for the secular mindset. Church planting in recent years has focusesprimarily on methods, largely ignoring the importance of the message. But, lasting growth can only occur when the precious seeds of biblical truths are planted into the heart.

A young and bright Swedish pastor who recently attended a church planting seminar at Willowcreek, near Chicago, shared with me his conviction that the search for new methods of church growth, has overshadowed the urgent need to explore ways to make our message more relevant to the needs of secular minded people. We need to challenge our gifted theological Adventist thinkers to take a fresh look at our Adventist beliefs with the intent of making them relevant to the concerns of today's society. Such a challenging task is urgently needed and can only be accomplished through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

CHRISTIANITY TODAY'S "TAKE BACK THE SABBATH"

Several readers have emailed me a copy of the editorial "Take Back the Sabbath" that appeared in *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*, last November 4, 2003. The editorial comments on the decision of the FAMILY CHRISTIAN STORES (FCS) to open their 315 stores on Sunday afternoon in order "to expand their ministry opportunity." "The media were quick to make comparisons with other Christian-owned businesses that do not open on Sundays: Lifeway Christian Stores, Mardel Christian and Educational Supplies, Hobby Lobby stores, and Chik-fil-A restaurants."

The justification given by David Bronwe, the President of FCS, for opening their 315 stores on Sunday, reflects the problem Sundaykeeping Christians are facing in trying to make Sunday the biblical Sabbath. The problem is both historical and biblical.

Historically, Sunday observance began and has largely remained the hour of worship. Consequently, doing business on Sunday afternoon reflects a historical practice. The earliest account of Sunday observance come to us from Justin Martyr, a leader of the church of Rome who wrote at about A. D. 150. In his *Apology* (defense of Christianity) addressed to the Emperor Antoninus Pius, Justin explains that Christians came together early on the *Dies Solis*—Day of the Sun, for a short worship service. Afterwards, they all returned to their various occupations. In other words, Sunday began as an early morning church service, followed by business as usual.

Later attempts made by Constantine, popes, church councils, and Puritans to make Sunday into a total day of rest and worship, have never succeeded. Indeed, Sunday began and has largely remained the HOUR OF WORSHIP, NOT the DAY OF REST AND WORSHIP. The recognition of this historical reality has led the Catholic Church at Vatican II to anticipate the first Sunday Mass to Saturday afternoon or evening. According to the *SUNDAY* magazine of the Lord's Day Alliance of the USA, over 10,000 Protestant churches in America have adopted the same practice.

The underlying philosophy for this practice is the belief that the essence of Sunday observance is, as Luther explains, going to church to hear the proclamation of the Word. Thus, those who cannot make it to church on Sunday are given the opportunity to fulfill this obligation on Saturday afternoon or evening. This expedient arrangement may be good for Sundaykeeping, but not for Sabbathkeeping. The reason is that the essence of Sabbathkeeping is the consecration of Sabbath time unto the Lord. Whether we participate in corporate worship in church or enjoy informal fellowship, visitation, or recreation, all our Sabbath activities should be seen as an act of worship, because they spring from a heart that has decided to honor God on His Holy Sabbath Day.

By opening their 315 stores on Sunday afternoon, FCS are re-

flecting and respecting the historical understanding of Sunday as the HOUR OF WORSHIP, NOT the DAY OF REST OF REST AND WORSHIP. Incidentally, in a recent speaking engagement in Georgia, I discovered that most businesses in the Bible belt are closed during the church service on Sunday morning. They open on Sunday noon after the church services are over. One gasoline station had the sign: "We are at Church now. See you after church."

The FCS decision to open their stores for business on Sunday afternoon, reflects also the biblical problem of those who try to make Sunday the Christian Sabbath. The fact is that Sunday is not the Sabbath. The two days have a different origin, meaning, authority and experience. For this reason the attempts to make Sunday the Christian Sabbath have always been largely unsuccessful. Lacking a biblical mandate, Sunday observance can only be promoted by social, economic, and ecological arguments.

This is the approach taken by *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*'s editorial, which says: "Our churches and families need to return to a Sabbath consciousness that can provide a platform for countercultural witness. Without being legalistic about it, Christians have a duty to protest the oppressive tyranny of time and productivity and an economic order that tries to squeeze inordinate productivity out of people's energies."

This attempt to promote Sunday as the day of liberation from the oppressive tyranny of productivity and consumerism, ignores the fact that most people already enjoy a short work week of 40 hours with two or three free days for leisure. If this is what Sunday is all about, then most people do not need the Sunday liberation, because they already enjoy the liberation of the weekend.

The Biblical Sabbath is a day of liberation from the tyranny of work, but the reason for such liberation is God-centered, not self-centered. The Sabbath commandment summons us to rest, not unto ourselves, but unto the Lord. As Hebrews 4:10 explains, we cease from our work on the Sabbath in order to enter into God's rest. In other words, we stop our work to allow God to work in us more fully and freely.

The profound theological meaning of the Sabbath rest as a faith,

love response to the Savior, is brought out especially in Hebrews 4. The author explains to Hebrew-minded Christians the deeper meaning of the Sabbath rest as a faith response to the Savior. "We who have believed enter into His rest." This meaning can hardly be applied to the Sunday rest, because Scripture attributes no theological significance to Sunday or to its rest.

The notion of Sunday rest is foreign to the Bible. Thus, those who wish to defend the legitimacy of Sunday rest, must appeal to socio-economic considerations. The problem is that such considerations per se do not provide compelling reasons for observing Sunday as a Holy Day. The outcome is that Christian stores currently closed on Sunday, sooner or later will follow the example of FCS in opening their stores for business on Sunday afternoon. The lesson is clear. The change from Sabbath to Sunday, has ultimately been the change from a HOLY DAY into a HOLIDAY.

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 November and December 2003.

2) Information on how your church can purchase a state-of-the-art HITACHI LCD VIDEO PROJECTORS at over 65% discount on the Factory Suggested Retail price. HITACHI has agreed to offer their line of outstanding LCD projectors to our Adventist churches and institutions at an incredible discount. Few weeks ago on September 2003 HITACHI came out with an incredibly powerful HIGH RESOLUTION, wide angle, 2000 lumens projector that they are offering to our Adventist institutions for only \$1995.00, instead of the regular retail price of \$6,595.00 Read the rest of the story at the end of this newsletter. I just bought one for myself. It outperforms any projector in its class. I speak from experience because I have bought five different projectors and tried at least 30 different brands in the various churches where I present my seminars. None of them compare to the HITACHI in color quality, image sharpness, and brightness.

3) A special offer on the newly released TWO CD-ROMS containing over 7000 pages of my research and all my PowerPoint seminars, including the latest one I presented in Singapore on Marriage and Health. Your special offer is only \$70.00 for the TWO CD-ROMS, instead of the regular price of \$200.00.

A THANK YOU NOTE

Thank you for informing your friends about this ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTERS. As a result of your endeavors, over 25,000 persons are now receiving this newsletter. If you have friends who have not yet subscribed, let them know that they also can benefit from these timely studies. All what they need to do to subscribe is to email me a message at <sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com>, saying: SUBSCRIBE ME.

HUMAN NATURE AND DESTINY

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No age knows so much about the chemistry, physiology, and psychology of the human body, yet no age seems to be more confused about the make up of human nature and the prospect for human destiny. The question of the make up of human nature is not an academic issue only for scholars to debate, but a fundamental question that affects every human being. The reason is that one's understanding of the make up of human nature largely determines one's view of the present life, the value of this world, the scope of redemption, and the future life in the world to come.

Two Views of Human Nature

Historically, Christians have held two major view regarding the constitution of human nature, one known as *dualistic* and the other *wholistic*. The vast majority of Christians have believed that human nature is *dualistic*, consisting of a material, mortal body, and an immaterial, immortal soul. At death, the soul allegedly detaches herself from the body and survives in a disembodied state, either in the bliss of Paradise

or in the torment of Hell. Catholic and others allow for pardonable souls to be purified in Purgatory before ascending to Paradise. At the resurrection, the material body is supposedly reunited with the spiritual soul, thus intensifying the pleasure of Paradise or the pain of Hell.

The dualistic view of human nature is found also in most pagan religions. This Sunday morning, November 23, I visited a Hindu Shrine in your beautiful city of Singapore. I had a pleasant conversation with a Hindu man who spoke fluent English. He explained to me that both Hinduism and Buddhism believe in the immortality and reincarnation the soul. A recording angel decides at death on the type of reincarnation to be assigned to the soul of a dead person. The soul of a good person may reincarnate into a heavenly being, while that of a bad individual into an animal such as a dog. I asked him how he would feel if his soul was to be reincarnated into a dog for all eternity. He replied: "I must accept God's decision." It is sad to see how Satan's lie: "you shall not die," has so grossly distorted God's glorious plan for our nature and destiny.

A minority of Christians have historically believed that human nature is *wholistic*, consisting of an indivisible whole where body, soul, and spirit, are only characteristics of the same person. The soul is the animating principle of the body, which is manifested in the conscious, thinking, living aspect of a person. At death, the body and soul do not come apart at death, but simply cease to exist and rest unconsciously in the grave until the resurrection. At that time the total mortal person will be resurrected either to eternal life or eternal death.

These two historical views of human nature have been reexamined in recent years by Biblical scholars of different persuasion. A close reexamination of the basic Biblical terms for *body*, *soul*, *spirit*, *flesh*, *mind*, and *heart*, has led many scholars to conclude that in the Bible there is no dichotomy between a mortal body and an immortal soul that "comes apart" at death. Both body and soul are an indivisible unity that ceases to exist at death until the resurrection. In short, the verdict is that the dualistic view of human nature derives from Platonic dualism rather than from Biblical wholism.

To bring into focus the fundamental importance of recovering of the Biblical wholistic view of human nature, the first part of this lecture compares and contrasts the practical and doctrinal implications of the

dualistic and wholistic views of human nature. These reflections will set the stage for examining in the second part the biblical view of human nature from the perspective of Creation, the Fall, and Redemption.

These reflections are drawn from my book *Resurrection or Immortality? A Biblical Study of Human Nature and Destiny* where you can find a fuller treatment of the subject. The book is Foreworded by Clark Pinnock, a distinguished theologian who has served as the President of the Evangelical Theological Society. Dozen of scholars of different denominations have favorably reviewed this timely book that exposes the deception of conscious life after death that is spreading like wildfire today. Ellen White rightly warned that this error will play a major role in the final Endtime deception. To order copies of this timely study (\$20.00 per copy, postage paid), just call us at (269) 471 2915 or email us at <sbachiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com> To facilitate the circulation of *Immortality or Resurrection?*, we offer the book by the case of 30 copies, for only \$7.00 per copy, mailing expenses included.

PART I SOME PRACTICAL AND DOCTRINAL IMPLICATION

Christians who hold to the *dualistic view of human nature* conceptualize the *present life dualistically*. They view the *spiritual life of the soul* as more important than the *physical life of the body*. Since saving the soul is more important than caring for the body, the goal of the Christian life is seen as cultivating the needs of the soul rather than the welfare of the body.

Saving the Soul while Ignoring the Body

Historically, this dualistic view has envisioned the saints as persons who devote themselves primarily to *vita contemplativa* (contemplative life), detaching themselves from the *vita activa* (secular life). Since cultivating the soul has been seen as more important than caring for the body, the physical well-being of the body often intentionally has been ignored or even suppressed.

I witnessed this dualistic mentality during the five years I spent at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Italy. Often I would see some of my classmates, mostly Catholic monks and priests from all over

the world, first going to the chapel to cultivate their soul through prayer and meditation, and then going to the bar at the end of the hallway to intoxicate their bodies with alcoholic beverages while smoking cigarettes. They saw no conflict between the two activities, because, according to their dualistic mentality, what they did to their bodies did not affect the salvation of their souls.

This dualistic mentality is openly contradicted by the Bible which teaches us to glorify God not only with our mind but also with our body, because our body is “a temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:19) to be presented as “a living sacrifice” to God (Rom 12:1). The way we treat our bodies reflects the spiritual condition of our souls, because our bodies and souls are one. When Paul expressed the desire that “Christ will be honored in my body” (Phil 1:20), he meant the honoring of Christ with his whole person. If we pollute our bodies with tobacco, drugs, unhealthy foods or intemperate lifestyle, we cause not only the *physical pollution* of our bodies, but also the *spiritual pollution* of our souls.

The dichotomy between body and soul, the physical and the spiritual, is still present in the thinking of many Christians today. Many still associate redemption with the human soul rather than the human body. We describe the missionary work of the church as that of “saving souls.” The implication seems to be that the souls are more important than the bodies.

Practical Implications of Wholism

The Gospel gives us no basis for a doctrine of redemption which saves the souls apart from the bodies to which they belong. The Gospel commission is not to save souls but whole persons. What God has joined together at creation and redeemed at the Cross, no Christian has the right to put apart. Yet, many Christians have been guilty of divorcing the human body from its soul by making salvation an internal experience of the soul rather than a total transformation of the whole person.

The Biblical wholistic view of human nature challenges us to be concerned about the whole person. In its preaching and teaching, the church must meet not only the spiritual needs of the soul but also the physical needs of the body. This means teaching people how to maintain emotional and physical health. It means that church programs should not neglect the needs of the body. Proper diet, exercise, and outdoor activities should be encouraged as an important part of Christian living.

Accepting Biblical wholism means to opt also for a *wholistic* approach in such areas as education, health, social issues. Christian education should promote the development of the whole person. This means that the school's program should aim at the development of the mental, physical, and spiritual aspects of life. A good physical-education program should be considered as important as its academic and religious programs. Parents and teachers should be concerned about teaching good eating habits, the proper care of the body, and a regular program of physical exercise.

The Biblical concept of the whole person also has implications for medicine. Holistic medicine recognizes today the importance of treating the whole person, including physical, emotional, spiritual, nutritional condition of the patient. Biblical wholism challenges us also to serve the world and not to avoid it. The issues of social justice, war, racism, poverty, and economic imbalance should be of concern to those who believe that God is working to restore the whole person and the whole world.

Doctrinal Implications of Dualism

The dualistic view of human nature has also enormous doctrinal implications. A host of doctrines derive from or are largely dependent upon dualism. For example, dualism has given rise to the heresy that at death the soul separates from the body and transits either to the bliss of paradise or to the torment of hell. The latter in turn has fostered such heresies as the intercession of the saints, the praying for the dead, indulgences, Purgatory, the reattachment of the soul to the body at the resurrection, the eternal torment in Hell, the beatitude of Paradise as a spiritual retreat where glorified souls will spend eternity in everlasting contemplation and meditation.

The negative impact of these heresies on the Christian faith and practice is inestimable. For one thing these heresies have weakened and obscured the expectation of the Second Advent. If at death the soul of the believer *goes up* immediately to the beatitude of Paradise to be with the Lord, there can hardly be any real sense of expectation for Christ to *come down* to resurrect the sleeping saints. The primary concern of these

Christians is *to go up to heaven* to meet Christ immediately at death, albeit as disembodied souls, rather than to prepare themselves and others to meet Christ when He *comes down to this earth* at His Return.

In the New Testament the Advent Hope is not “a pie in the sky for disembodied souls when their bodies die” but a real meeting upon this earth between embodied believers and Christ on the glorious day of His Return. Out of that real meeting will come a radical transformation affecting humanity and nature. This great expectation is obscured by the belief in individual immortality and heavenly bliss immediately after death.

When the only future that really counts is the individual soul’s survival after death, the anguish of mankind can have only a peripheral interest and the value of God’s redemption for this whole world is largely ignored. The ultimate result of this belief is, as noted by Abraham Kuyper, that “by far the majority of Christians do not think much beyond their own death.”¹ The Individualistic concern for immediate immortality overrides the Biblical corporate hope for an ultimate restoration of the whole creation and its creatures (Rom 8:19-23; 1 Cor 15:24-28).

Spiritual Paradise

Dualism has fostered also misconceptions about the world to come. The popular concept of paradise as a spiritual retreat center somewhere up in space, where glorified souls will spend eternity in everlasting contemplation and meditation, has been inspired more by Platonic dualism than by Biblical realism. For Plato, the material components of this world were evil and, consequently, not worthy of survival. The aim was to reach the spiritual realm where souls liberated from the prison-house of a material body and world, enjoy eternal bliss.

This dualistic vision is foreign to the Bible which envisions a cosmic redemption that encompasses the body and the soul, the material and the spiritual world. Both the Old and New Testaments reject the dualism between the material world below and the spiritual realm above. The final salvation inaugurated by the coming of the Lord is regarded in Scripture not an *escape from* but a *transformation of* this earth. The Biblical view of the world to come is not a *spiritual heavenly retreat* inhabited by glorified souls, but this *physical earthly planet* populated by resurrected saints (Is 66:22; Rev 21:1).

Biblical Earthly View of the World to Come

Believers enter the new earth not as disembodied souls but as resurrected bodily persons (Rev 20:4; John 5:28-29; 1 Thess 4:14-17). Though nothing unclean shall enter the New Jerusalem, we are told that “the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, . . . they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations” (Rev 21:24, 26). These verses suggest that everything of real value in the old heaven and earth, including the achievements of man’s inventive, artistic, and intellectual prowess, will find a place in the eternal order. The very image of “the city” conveys the idea of activity, vitality, creativity, and real relationships.

It is regrettable that this fundamentally concrete, earthly view of God’s new world portrayed in the Scripture has largely been lost and replaced in popular piety with an ethereal, spiritualized concept of heaven. The latter has been influenced by Platonic dualism rather than by Biblical realism.

At a time when many Christians are losing interest in heaven because they find it too chaste, too disinfected, too unreal, and too boring, it is imperative to recover the Biblical wholistic and realistic vision of the new earth. It will be a place where every faculty will be developed, our loftiest aspirations will be realized, the grandest enterprises will be carried out, and the sweetest fellowship will be enjoyed with God and fellow beings.

PART II

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE

The preceding observations about practical and doctrinal implications of the dualistic/wholistic views of human nature, have set the stage for exploring the Biblical view of human nature from three perspectives: Creation, the Fall, and Redemption. We will consider what human nature was at creation, what it became after the Fall, and what it can become as a result of redemption.

Human Nature at Creation

The distinctive characteristics of human nature at creation are

expressed in two texts, Genesis 1:26-27 and 2:7. The first text tells us how God planned to create human beings: “‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness;’ . . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

Elaborate attempts have been made to define what the “image of God” is in which man was created. Some contend that the image of God is the immaterial, spiritual soul implanted in the human body . Thus, Calvin affirms: “It cannot be doubted that the proper seat of the image is the soul.”²

This view presupposes a dualism between body and soul which is not found in the account of creation. Man did not receive a soul from God; he was *made* a living soul. The animals also were made “living souls” ((Gen 1:20, 21, 24, 30; 2:19), yet, they were not created in the image of God.

The image of God in mankind is to be found in the unique moral and rational capacities granted to human beings to reflect His moral character. Conformity to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49) is generally understood, not in terms of an immortal soul present in human nature, but in terms of righteousness and holiness: “Put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator” (Col 3:10; cf. Eph 4:24). By virtue of being created in the image of God, human beings are capable of reflecting His character in their own life.

Immortality is never mentioned in the Bible in connection with the image of God in human beings. The tree of life represented immortality in fellowship with the Creator, but as a result of sin, Adam and Eve were barred access to the source of continuous life.

Genesis 2:7: “A Living Soul”

The second important Biblical statement for understanding human nature at creation is the brief account of the actual creation of man found in Genesis 2:7: “Then God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” Historically, this text has been read through the lenses of traditional dualism. It has been assumed that the breath of life God breathed into Adam’s nostrils was simply an immaterial, immortal soul that God

implanted into his body. Thus, the phrase “man *became* a living soul” (Gen 2:7; KJV) has been interpreted to mean that “man *obtained* a living soul.” And just as earthly life began with the implantation of an immortal soul into a physical body, so, according to dualists, it ends when the soul departs from the body.

The problem with this interpretation lies in the fact that the “breath [*neshamah*] of life” that God breathed into Adam’s nostrils, was not an immortal soul that God implanted into Adam’s material body, but the life-giving Spirit that is often characterized as the “breath of God.” Thus, we read in Job 33:4: “The spirit [*ruach*] of God has made me, and the breath [*neshamah*] of the Almighty gives me life.” The parallelism between the “spirit of God” and “the breath of the Almighty” which is often found in the Bible (Is 42:5; Job 27:3; 34:14-15), suggests that the two are used interchangeably because they both refer to the gift of life imparted by God to His creatures.

The reason the life-giving Spirit of God is described by the suggestive imagery of the “breath of life,” is because breathing is a tangible manifestation of life. A person who no longer breathes is dead. Job says: “As long as my breath [*neshamah*] is in me, and the spirit [*ruach*] of God is in my nostrils; my lips will not speak falsehood” (Job 27:3). Here the human “breath” and the divine “spirit” are equated, because breathing is seen as a manifestation of the sustaining power of God’s Spirit.

Possession of the “breath of life” does not in itself confer immortality, because at death “the breath of life” returns to God. Life derives from God, is sustained by God, and returns to God. This truth is expressed in Ecclesiastes 12:7: “The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.” What returns to God is not the human immortal soul, but God’s life giving Spirit which in Scripture is equated with God’s breath: “If he [God] should take back his spirit [*ruach*] to himself, and gather to himself his breath [*neshamah*], all flesh would perish together, and man would return to the dust” (Job 34:14-15). The parallelism indicates that God’s breath is His life-giving Spirit.

The fact that death is characterized as the withdrawal of the breath of life (God’s life-giving Spirit), shows that the “breath of life” is not an immortal spirit or soul that God confers on His creatures, but rather the gift

of life which human beings possess for the duration of their earthly existence. As long as the “breath of life” remains, human beings are “living souls.” But when the breath departs, they become dead souls. This explains why the Bible frequently refers to human death as the death of the soul (Lev 19:28; 21:1, 11; 22:4; Num 5:2; 6:6,11; 9:6, 7, 10; 19:11, 13; Hag 2:13).

Most Bible scholars recognize that the “soul–*nephesh*” in Genesis 2:7 is not a distinct immaterial, immortal essence implanted in the body, but is simply the animating principle of the body. Commenting on Genesis 2:7, Catholic scholar Dom Wulstan Mork, writes: “It is *nephesh* [soul] that gives life to the *bashar* [body], but not as a distinct substance. Adam does not have *nephesh* [soul]; he is *nephesh* [soul], just as he is *bashar* [body]. The body, far from being divided from its animating principle, is the visible *nephesh* [soul].”³ On a similar vein, Hans Walter Wolff, author of the state-of-the-art study *Anthopology of the Old Testament*, asks: “What does *nephesh* [soul] mean here? Certainly not soul [in the traditional dualistic sense]. . . . man does not *have nephesh* [soul], he *is nephesh* [soul], he lives as *nephesh* [soul].”⁴

Summing up, we can say that the expression “man became a living soul–*nephesh hayyah*” simply means that as a result of the divine inbreathing, the lifeless body became a living, breathing being, no more, no less. The heart began to beat, the blood to circulate, the brain to think, and all the vital signs of life were activated. Simply stated, “a living soul” means “a living being,” and not “an immortal soul.”

Animals as “Living Souls”

A most compelling proof that “living soul” does not mean “immortal soul” is the repeated use of the same phrase “living soul–*nephesh hayyah*” to describe the creation of animals (Gen 1:20, 21, 24, 30; 2:19; 9:10, 12, 15, 16; Lev 11:46). This important fact is unknown to most people because the translators of most English versions have chosen to translate the Hebrew phrase “*nephesh hayyah*” as “living creatures” when it refers to animals and as “living soul” when used for human beings. Why? Simply because the translators were so biased by their belief that only human beings have an immortal soul which animals do not have, that they took the liberty of translating the Hebrew *nephesh* as “creature” rather than “soul” whenever it is used for animals.

Norman Snaith rightly condemns this arbitrary mistranslation as “most reprehensible” because “the Hebrew phrase should be translated exactly the same way in both cases. To do otherwise is to mislead all those who do not read Hebrew. There is no excuse and no proper defense.”⁵

The repeated use of *nephesh*–soul to refer to all sorts of animals clearly shows that *nephesh*–soul is not an immortal essence given to human beings, but the animating principle of life or “the life-breath” which is present in both people and animals because both are conscious beings. What distinguishes the human soul from that of animals is the fact that humans were created in God’s image, that is, with godlike possibilities unavailable to animals.

Human nature at creation was wholistic, consisting of an indivisible whole where the body, the breath of life, and the soul functioned, not as separate entities, but as characteristics of the same person. The body is a person as a concrete being; the soul is a person as a living individual; the breath of life or spirit is a person as having his source in God. This is in essence the creational wholistic view of human nature which is expanded in the rest of the Bible.

Human Nature after the Fall

The Fall did not change the make up of human nature, but it did change its state or condition. From a state in which it was possible for human beings not to die (*conditional immortality*), they passed into a state in which it was impossible for them not to die (*unconditional mortality*). Prior to the Fall the assurance of immortality was vouchsafed, not by the possession of an immortal soul, but by partaking of the tree of life. The presence of the “tree of life” in the garden of Eden indicates that immortality was *conditional* to the partaking of the fruit of that tree.

To prevent sinful humanity to “live for ever” (Gen 3:22), after the Fall God barred the access to the tree of life (Gen 3:22-23). This divine act per se reveals that at creation immortality was not an endowment residing in the soul, but a possibility conditional upon human obedience. Those who insist in finding the immortality in the soul, read into the human creation dualistic Greek ideas foreign to the Bible.

After the Fall, Adam and Eve no longer had access to the tree of life (Gen 3:22-23) and, consequently, began experiencing the reality of the dying process. The fact that Adam and Eve did not die on the day of their transgression, as God had warned them (Gen 2:17), has led some to conclude that they did not die because they were endowed with an immortal soul. This imaginative interpretation can hardly be supported by the text, which, literally translated, reads: “dying you shall die.” What God simply meant is that on the day they disobeyed, the dying process would begin.

The divine warning (Gen 2:17) places a clear ethical connection between life and obedience versus death and disobedience. Human nature was not created with an immortal soul, but with the possibility of becoming immortal. Disobedience resulted in death, not just for the body, but for the whole person. God did not say: “in the day that you eat of it your body shall die but your soul will survive in a disembodied state.” Rather He said: “You,” that is, your whole person, “shall die.”

Death as Cessation of Life

A fundamental teaching of the Bible is that the wage of sin is *death*, not just for the body, but for the whole person (Rom 6:23; Ez 18:4, 20). “The soul that sins shall die” (Ez 18:4). The death of the body is linked to the death of the soul because the body is the visible form of the soul. This explains why the death of a person is often described as the death of the soul. (Num 31:19; 35:15,30; Jos 20:3, 9; Gen 37:21; Deut 19:6, 11; Jer 40:14, 15; Judg 16:30; Num 23:10). As Joshua conquered the various cities beyond the Jordan, we are told repeatedly “he utterly destroyed every soul [*nephesh*]” (Jos 10:28, 30, 31, 34, 36, 38). The destruction of the body is seen as the destruction of the soul because at death the soul ceases to function as the animating life-principle of the body.

The nature of death is seen in both the Old and New Testaments as a state of unconsciousness, often compared to a “sleep.” The expression and so-and-so “slept with his fathers” runs like an unbroken thread through the Bible (Gen 2:28; Deut 31:16; 2 Sam 7:12; 1 King 2:10; Job 7:21), ending with Peter’s statement that “the fathers fell asleep” (2 Pet 3:4).

Jesus Himself used the “sleep” metaphor to describe Lazarus’ death: “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awake him out of sleep” (John 11:11). Lazarus’ condition in death was similar to a sleep from which one awakens. The *awakening* of Lazarus out of the sleep of death by the sound of Christ’s voice parallels the awakening of the sleeping saints on the day of His glorious coming. They, too, shall hear the voice of Christ and come forth to life again. “The hour is coming when all who are in the tombs *will hear his voice* and come forth” (John 5:28; cf. John 5:25). There is harmony and symmetry in the expressions “sleeping” and “awakening” as used in the Bible for going into and coming out of a death state.

The “sleep” metaphor is used in the Bible to describe the nature of death because there is a striking similarity between the “sleep” of the dead and the “sleep” of the living. Both are characterized by a condition of unconsciousness and inactivity which is interrupted by an awakening. Furthermore, the “sleep” metaphor is a hope-inspiring figure of speech that intimates that death is not the *final* human destiny. There will be an awakening out of the sleep of death on resurrection morning.

This fundamental Biblical view of death as cessation of life for the whole person, is openly rejected by Catholic and most Protestant churches. They firmly believe and emphatically teach that death is the separation of the immortal soul from the mortal body. For example, the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: “By death the soul is separated from the body, but in the resurrection God will give incorruptible life to our body, transformed by reunion with our soul.”⁶ In his well-known *Systematic Theology*, Augustus Strong defines death in similar terms: “Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body.”⁷ Statements like this could be multiplied, since they are found in all the major confessional documents and the standard systematic theology books.

In spite of its antiquity and popularity, this view of death is clearly contradicted by Scripture which describes death as the cessation of life for the whole person. In pronouncing sentence upon Adam’s disobedience, God said: “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for . . . you are dust and to dust you shall return” (Gen 3:19). This graphic statement tells us that death is not the separation of the soul from the body, but the cessation of life, which results in the decay and decomposition of the body.

Modern Biblical scholarship has challenged the traditional view of death as the separation of the soul from the body. For example, Lutheran theologian Paul Althaus notes that in the Bible the whole “person, body and soul, is involved in death. . . . The Christian faith knows nothing about an immortality of the personality. . . . It knows only an awakening from real death through the power of God. There is existence after death only by an awakening of the resurrection of the whole person.”⁸ Althaus perceptively observes that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul empties the resurrection of its meaning and rips apart what belongs together: the body and the soul, the destiny of the individual and that of the world.⁹

In its article on “death,” the *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, states: “No Biblical text authorizes the statement that the ‘soul’ is separated from the body at the moment of death. The *ruach* ‘spirit’ which makes man a living being (cf. Gen 2:7), and which he loses at death, is not, properly speaking, an anthropological reality [that is, a distinct human essence], but a gift of God which returns to him at the time of death (Eccl 12:7).”¹⁰

Similar statements by scholars of different persuasions could be multiplied. This challenge by modern scholarship to the traditional view of death as the separation of the soul from the body, has been long overdue. Unfortunately no amount of Biblical scholarship will cause mainline churches to abandon their dualistic view of death. The reason is simple. Abandoning such a long-cherished doctrine can be devastating to the faith of their members and destabilizing to their church organization. Yet, Christians who are committed to the normative authority of the Bible, must be willing to abandon long-cherished beliefs when they are found to be contrary to the teachings of the Word of God

Summing up, human nature after the Fall passed from a state of *conditional immortality* to a state of *unconditional mortality* for the whole person. The traditional and popular belief that the soul survives the body at death, can be traced back to Satan’s deceptive lie, “You shall not die” (Gen 3:4). This subtle lie has lived on in different forms throughout human history until our time.

Our only protection against this popular deception is to be found through a clear understanding of the Biblical view of human nature and

destiny. Scripture teaches that immortality is not a natural endowment of the soul, but the *gift* of God (Rom 6:23) to be *sought* (Rom 2:7) and *put on* (1 Cor 15:53) at the resurrection by those who have accepted the gracious provisions of salvation (John 17:2-3; Matt 19:29).

Human Nature as a Result of Redemption

Creation tells us that originally human nature was *conditionally immortal*. The Fall informs us that human nature became *unconditionally mortal*. Redemption reassures us that God has made provision for human nature to be *morally renewed* in this present life and *physically restored* in the world to come.

Redemption reveals the value God places upon human nature because He chose to redeem it through the incarnation of His Son: “He became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). The idea of the Son of God assuming a physical human nature, was incomprehensible to the Gnostics, an influential sectarian early Christian movement largely influenced by Greek dualism. They openly rejected the incarnation of Christ because they saw no value in the physical aspect of human nature. This forcefully illustrates the difference between the Biblical wholistic view of human nature, which places value on the body, and the Greek dualistic view, which regards the body as the prison house of the soul to be discarded at death.

The fact that the divine Son of God took on a mortal human body at birth and retained a glorified human body at His resurrected (John 20:27), shows in the strongest possible way that human nature has its place in God’s eternal purpose. It tells us that the body it is not a temporary prison house or proving ground for “souls,” but our total personality that God is committed to preserve and bring back to life on the day of the resurrection.

The Moral Regeneration of Human Nature

The purpose of Christ’s redemptive mission is not the removal of the soul from the body, but the regeneration of the whole person in this present life and the resurrection of the whole person in the world to come. The Spirit of God is the active agent in both the creation and re-creation of human nature. The re-creation of human nature takes place in two

phases: the moral regeneration takes place in this present life and physical transformation from mortality to immortality will occur at the resurrection. The function of the Spirit–*pneuma* as life principle is expanded in the New Testament to include both the present moral regeneration and the future physical transformation.

At creation man was made a living soul by the Spirit of God (Gen 2:7). As a result of redemption believers are made a new creation by the work of the Spirit. The moral regeneration accomplished by the Holy Spirit is described by John as *rebirth* (John 3:5) and by Paul as *new creation*.

Paul attributes vital importance to the role of the Spirit in the new life of the believer (2 Cor 5:17; cf. 1 Cor 6:11; Gal 3:27; 6:15; Eph 4:24). This is indicated by the fact that in his letters he refers to the “spirit” 146 times, compared with only 13 references to the “soul.” Furthermore, Paul never uses the “soul–*psyche*” to denote the life that survives death. On the contrary, Paul uses the phrase *soma psychikon*, which literally means “soulish body,” to describe the *physical body* that will be changed into *soma pneumatikon–spiritual body* at the resurrection. The reason Paul avoids the use of the term “soul–*psyche*” to designate the life to come, is most likely because such term could mislead his Gentile converts to think of eternal life according to the Greek view of innate immortality.

To ensure that salvation be understood exclusively a divine gift of grace mediated by “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:2), Paul emphasizes the role of the Spirit both in the moral regeneration of this present life (Eph 4:23; Rom 8:5) and physical transformation of the life to come (Rom 8:11, 22-23). Both creation and recreation, birth and rebirth, are acts of the Spirit because, as Jesus explained, “It is the Spirit that gives life” (John 6:63).

Physical Transformation of Human Nature. The ultimate transformation of the human nature will be realized on the glorious day of Christ’s Coming “when the perishable put on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality” (1 Cor 15:54). Paul reassures the believers that “the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead . . . will give life to your mortal bodies” (Rom 8:11). It is evident that immortality is not a natural endowment of the soul, but a divine gift mortal bodies will receive (“put on”) at the resurrection.

The ultimate transformation of human nature is described as “the resurrection of the body” because the New Testament never accepted the belief in the immortality of the soul. Life without the body is inconceivable in the Bible, because the body is the concrete expression of the whole person. Its resurrection is indispensable to ensure a full personality and life in the new earth.

It is noteworthy that in 1 Corinthians 15, the chapter devoted to the resurrection/translation of believers, there is no reference to the reattachment of resurrected bodies to spiritual souls. In fact, the “soul-*psyche*” is never mentioned in the whole chapter. 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.

“The resurrection of the body” does not mean the rehabilitation of our present physical bodies, which are often sick and suffering, but the restoration of our whole person. When Paul writes, “We wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:23), he simply means the restoration of our total being. 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.

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. No two characters are the same because no two persons face the same temptations, struggles, defeats, disappointments, victories, and growth in their Christian life. This means that the possibility of “duplication” of people at the resurrection, all looking, acting, and thinking alike, is inconceivable. Each one of us has a unique character or personality that God preserves and will unite 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.

The preceding survey has shown that the Bible is consistent in teaching that human nature is an indivisible whole, where body and soul function as characteristics of the same person, and not as separate entities. At creation the whole human nature was *conditionally immortal*, but as a result of the Fall the whole human nature became *unconditionally mortal*. The Good News of the Gospel is that through Jesus Christ God has made provision for the redemption of our whole nature. This is accomplished through the *moral transformation* of our nature in this present life and the *physical transformation* in the world to come.

May each one of us accept and experience God’s marvellous provision for the moral and physical transformation of our nature, and for the glorious destiny He has planned for us.

ENDNOTES

1. Cited in G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids, 1972), p. 34. The same view is expressed by Russell Foster Aldwinckle, *Death in the Secular City* (London, 1972), p. 82.

2. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* I, XV, 3 (London, 1949), Vol. 1, pp. 162, 165.

3. Dom Wulstan Mork, *The Biblical Meaning of Man* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1967), p. 34.

4. Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, 1974), p. 10.

5. Norman Snaith, “Justice and Immortality,” *Scottish Journal*

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6. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Rome, 1994), p. 265.

7. Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic theology* (Old Tappan, New Jersey), p. 982.

8. Paul Althaus, *Die Letzten Dinge* (Gutersloth: Germany, 1957), p. 157.

9. *Ibid.* pp. 155-158.

10. E. Jacob, "Death," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, 1962), Vol. 1, p. 802.