

Immortality or Resurrection?

**A Biblical Study
on
Human Nature and Destiny**

Samuele Bacchiocchi

**Foreword
by
Clark Pinnock**

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DEDICATED
to my caring wife, Anna,
whose loving support
motivates me to
greater service
for the Lord

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FOREWORD

by

Clark H. Pinnock

Let me welcome another splendid book from Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi. In the tradition of Oscar Cullmann, Dr. Bacchiocchi has demonstrated in a much fuller way the contrast between the primitive Christian hope for the resurrection of the dead and the Hellenistic expectation of the survival of the immortal soul. In this fine new book, he offers a thorough biblical study of human nature as an indivisible unity and draws out implications for our destiny and many other matters.

Anthropological dualism has done such a serious harm in weakening our blessed hope of Christ's appearing and in distorting our understanding of the world to come. It has also fostered many false dichotomies including a negative view of the body in contrast to the soul and a concept of salvation as interior experience rather than total transformation. Worst of all, it has given rise to the sadistic teaching that God makes the wicked suffer unending conscious torment in hell, which has been such a burden to the Christian conscience and such unnecessary offense to many seekers.

A large number of scholars agree with the author as regards human nature but no one has so courageously drawn out many of the necessary implications. This book is much needed in order to combat the persistent but mistaken opinion among Christians that the soul is an immortal substance, a belief which is both unbiblical and harmful. I congratulate Dr. Bacchiocchi and thank him for this decisive volume.

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INTRODUCTION

Why write a book on the Biblical view of human nature and destiny? Isn't this a dead issue that theologians have settled long time ago? What is the point of investigating this question again? Do people really care about what the Bible teaches about the make-up of their nature and God's plan for their destiny?

The truth of the matter is that the question of human nature and destiny is far from being a dead issue. In recent years, numerous Bible scholars, philosophers, and scientists have reexamined the traditional dualistic view of human nature, consisting of a material, mortal body, and a spiritual, immortal soul. They have found such a view to be contrary to Scripture, reason and science.

A close reexamination of the basic Biblical terms for man (*body, soul, spirit, flesh, mind, 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, flesh and spirit are an indivisible unity, part of the same person who ceases to exist at death until the resurrection. Reading these scholarly studies, one almost gets the impression that Christianity is coming out of a stupor and is suddenly discovering that for too long it has held to a view of human nature derived from Platonic dualism rather than from Biblical wholism.

The massive scholarly assault on the traditional dualistic view of human nature eventually will filter through the rank and file of Christian denominations. When this happens, it will cause intellectual and personal crisis to Christians accustomed to believing that at death their souls break loose from their bodies and continue to exist either in the beatitude of paradise or in the torment of hell. Many Christians will be sorely disappointed to discover that their beliefs in the after life are a delusion.

There is no question that Biblical scholarship is bound to cause a great deal of existential anxiety to millions of Christians who believe in going to heaven at death with their disembodied souls. Any challenge to traditionally held beliefs can be devastating. The purpose of this study is not to intensify such anxiety, but to encourage all Christians committed to the normative authority of the Scripture to reexamine their traditional beliefs and reject them if proven to be unbiblical. The Christian hope for a better tomorrow must be grounded on the unmistakable teachings of God's Word, not on ecclesiastical traditions.

Reasons for Writing this Book. Two major reasons have motivated me to undertake this research. The first is the awareness that in spite of the massive attacks by Bible scholars against traditional dualism, the belief in conscious existence after death is gaining greater popular acceptance. According to a recent Gallup Poll, 71 percent of Americans believe in some form of conscious life after death.¹ The increase in this belief can be attributed to such factors as the polished image of mediums and psychics, the sophisticated "scientific" research into near-death experiences, and the popular New Age channeling with the alleged spirits of the past. Methods such as these are very successful in making people believe Satan's lie that no matter what they do, they "shall not die" (Gen 3:4) but become like gods by living for ever.

The second reason for undertaking this study is that most scholarly studies on this area are technical in nature and limited in scope. They are written in a technical language, making use of original Hebrew or Greek words that most lay readers do not understand. Their scope is also limited, often dealing exclusively either with the question of human nature (Biblical anthropology) or that of human destiny (Biblical eschatology). Biblical scholars seldom have attempted to show the correlation between the Biblical teaching on the make-up of human nature and its teaching on the nature of human destiny.

The awareness of the growing popular acceptance of the belief in conscious existence after death and the scarcity of popularly written books addressing this issue from a Biblical perspective convinced me of the need to write this book. My goal is twofold. On the one hand, I attempt to unmask with Biblical reasoning the oldest and possibly the greatest deception of all time, namely, that human beings possess immortal souls that live on forever. This deceptive teaching has fostered a whole spectrum of erroneous beliefs that have adversely affected Christian thought and practice. On the other hand, I endeavor to show how the Biblical wholistic view of human nature enhances our appreciation of our physical life, this present world, redemption, and our ultimate destiny.

Procedure. The procedure that I have followed consists of two steps. First, I have investigated in chapters 2 and 3 the Old and New Testaments understanding of human nature by examining the meaning and usage of key terms such as soul, body, spirit, flesh, and heart. This study shows that these terms are often used interchangeably because the Biblical view of human nature is *wholistic*, not *dualistic*. The body and soul, the flesh and spirit, are characteristics of the same person and not detachable components that “come apart” at death.

Second, I have shown in chapters 4 to 7 how the wholistic view of human nature relates to the Biblical teachings regarding the nature of death, the state of the dead until their resurrection, the Second Advent, the final punishment of evildoers, and the world to come. The study shows that there is a clear correlation between the Biblical *wholistic* view of human nature and its *realistic* view of human life and destiny. This means that what we believe about the make-up of our human nature, determines what we believe about our present life and future destiny.

Christians who hold to a *dualistic view of human nature* consisting of a mortal body and an immortal soul that survives the death of the body, also envision a *dualistic type of human life and destiny*. They define dualistically the present life, death, the state of the dead, the resurrection, the Christian Hope, the final punishment, and the world to come.

Dualism has fostered a negative view of the body in contrast to the positive role of the soul. “Saving souls” is more important than preserving bodies. *Vita contemplativa* is superior to *vita activa*. Redemption is an internal experience of the soul rather than a total transformation of the whole person.

Dualism defines death as the separation of the soul from the body; the state of the dead as the conscious existence of disembodied souls either in the bliss of paradise or in the torment of hell; the resurrection as the reattachment of a glorified material body to a spiritual soul; the Christian Hope as the ascension of the soul to the bliss of paradise; the final punishment as the eternal torment of body and soul in hellfire; and paradise as a spiritual, heavenly retreat where glorified, spiritual saints spend eternity in everlasting contemplation and meditation.

By contrast, Christians who accept the Biblical *wholistic view of human nature*, consisting of an indivisible unity of body, soul, and spirit, also envision a *wholistic type of human life and destiny*. They define *wholistically* death as the cessation of life for the *whole* person; the state of the dead as the

rest of the *whole* person in the grave until the resurrection; the Christian Hope as the expectation of Christ's return to resurrect the *whole* person; the final punishment as the annihilation of the *whole* person in hellfire; paradise as this *whole* planet earth restored to its original perfection, and inhabited by real people who will engage in real activities. The Biblical *wholistic* view of human nature determines the *realistic* view of this life and the world to come.

Method and Style. This book is written from a Biblical perspective. I accept the Bible as normative for defining Christian beliefs and practices. Because the words of the Bible contain a divine message written by human authors who lived in specific historical situations, every effort must be made to understand their meaning in their historical context. My conviction is that an understanding of both the historical and literary context of relevant Biblical texts is indispensable in establishing both their original meaning and their present relevance. This conviction is reflected in the methodology I have followed in examining those Biblical texts that relate to human nature and destiny.

Concerning the style of the book, I have attempted to write in simple, nontechnical language. In some instances where a technical word is used, a definition is provided in parenthesis. To facilitate the reading, each chapter is divided into major parts and subdivided under appropriate headings. A brief summary is given at the end of each chapter. Unless otherwise specified, all Bible texts are quoted from the Revised Standard Version, copyright 1946 and 1952. In few instances, some key words of a Bible text have been italicized for emphasis without footnoting them, since the reader is aware that the English Bible does not italicize words.

Author of Foreword. Among the many authors I have read in preparing for this book, Prof. Clark H. Pinnock stands out as the one who made the greatest contribution to the development of my thoughts. Pinnock is a highly respected evangelical scholar, author of numerous books, and a former president of the Evangelical Theological Society. He is to be commended not only for challenging with compelling Biblical reasoning the traditional dualistic view of human nature and of unending conscious torment in hell, but also for being willing to face courageously the harassment from those evangelicals who disagree with his position. There are evangelical scholars who share Pinnock's views, but they prefer to keep their convictions private to avoid unpleasant negative reactions. Pinnock has shown that he is not afraid to take "the heat" for challenging what he considers unbiblical teachings.

In view of the great admiration I hold for Prof. Clark Pinnock, I sent him a copy of this manuscript on September 24, 1997, hoping he might find time

to read it and feel inclined to write a foreword by October 30, 1997. Frankly, I did not hold much hope that he would be able to fulfill my request. What a pleasant surprise it was for me to receive on October 2, 1997 a fax containing his gracious foreword. His willingness to make time in his busy schedule to offer me this service on such a short notice gives me reason to be eternally grateful to him.

Acknowledgments. It is most difficult for me to acknowledge my indebtedness to the many persons who have contributed to the realization of this book. Indirectly, I am indebted to the scholars who have written articles, pamphlets, and books on different aspects of human nature and destiny. Their writings have stimulated my thinking and broadened my approach to this subject.

Directly, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to about twenty scholars and church leaders who have taken time in their busy schedule to read this lengthy manuscript, offering me valuable comments. Words fail to express my gratitude for their valuable service to me.

A special thanks to Joyce Jones from Andrews University, Jarrod J. Williamson from the University of Southern California, and Edwin de Kock, originally from South Africa and currently teaching English in Texas. Each of them has made a significant contribution by correcting and improving the style of the manuscript. They have worked many hours on this manuscript, reworking sentences so that they would sound more English and less Italian.

Last but not least, I need to express my special thanks to my wife who has been my constant source of encouragement and inspiration during the past thirty-six years of our married life. She saw little of me while I was researching and writing this book. Without her love, patience, and encouragement, it would have been most difficult for me to complete this project in a relatively short a time.

Author's Hope. I have written these pages with the earnest desire to help Christians of all persuasions recover the Biblical wholistic view of human nature and its realistic vision of human life and destiny. At a time when most Christians still hold to the traditional dualistic view of human nature, a belief which has done serious harm to Christian life and thought, it is imperative to recover the Biblical wholistic view of human nature and its realistic vision of the world to come.

Biblical wholism challenges us to view positively both the physical and spiritual aspects of our life because our body and soul are an indissoluble unit, created and redeemed by God. The way we treat our body reflects the spiritual

condition of our soul, because our body is “a temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:18). Biblical wholism teaches us to be concerned about the whole person by seeking to meet both the spiritual needs of the soul and the physical needs of the body.

Biblical wholism presupposes a cosmic view of redemption that encompasses the body and the soul, the material and the spiritual world, this world and the world to come. It envisions not an ethereal paradise inhabited by glorified souls, but this planet earth restored to its original perfection and inhabited by real people who will engage in real life and activities. It is my fervent hope that this book, fruit of many months of dedicated research, will increase the appreciation of many Christians for God’s glorious plan for our present life and our future destiny.

NOTE TO THE INTRODUCTION

1. See Table 2.1 Religious Belief, Europe, and the USA, in Tony Walter, *The Eclipse of Eternity* (London, 1996), p. 32.

Chapter I

THE DEBATE OVER HUMAN NATURE AND DESTINY

What Christians believe about the make-up of their human nature largely determines what they believe about their ultimate destiny. Those who believe their nature is dualistic, that is, consisting of a material, mortal body and a spiritual, immortal soul, generally envision a destiny where their immortal souls will survive the death of their body and will spend eternity either in the bliss of paradise or in the torment of hell. For some, like Catholics and others, the possibility also exists that pardonable souls can be purified in purgatory before ascending to Paradise.

On the other hand, those who believe their nature is wholistic, consisting of an indivisible whole where body, soul, and spirit are only characteristics of the same person, generally envision a destiny where their total mortal person will be resurrected either to eternal life or eternal death. The two different destinies envisioned by a dualistic or wholistic view of human nature could be characterized, as suggested by the title of the book, *immortality of the soul or resurrection of the dead*.

The Biblical view of human nature and destiny has attracted considerable scholarly attention in recent years. Leading scholars of different religious persuasions have addressed this question in articles and books. A survey of the studies produced during the last fifty years or so, reveals that the traditional dualistic view of human nature has come under massive attack. Scholars seem to outdo one another in challenging traditional dualism and in affirming Biblical wholism. Reading the scholarly literature in this field, one almost gets the impression that Christianity is coming out of a stupor and is suddenly discovering that for too long it has held to a view of human nature derived from Platonic dualism rather than from Biblical wholism.

Objectives of This Book. This book builds upon the research done by numerous scholars in recent years and endeavors to show how the Biblical wholistic view of human nature determines to a large extent our understanding of ourselves, this present world, redemption, and our ultimate destiny.

The objectives of this study are twofold. The first is to establish the Biblical view of human nature. We shall learn that the Bible sees human nature as an indivisible unity. This truth has been accepted in recent years by many scholars of all persuasions. In the Bible there is no dividing of a person into body and soul, or body, soul, and spirit. All of these are components or characteristics of the same person. The dichotomy of body and soul derives from Platonism and not from Biblical revelation. The Biblical view of human nature is wholistic or monistic, not dualistic. The Platonic view of the body as the prison of the soul is foreign to the Bible and has done great harm to Christian spirituality, soteriology, and eschatology.

The second objective of this book is to examine how the Biblical view of human nature relates to our present life and ultimate destiny. There is a tendency in scholarly studies to examine in isolation either the Biblical view of human nature (Biblical anthropology) or that of human destiny (Biblical eschatology). Seldom are attempts made to study the correlation between the two. Yet, the two cannot be studied in isolation because the Biblical view of human nature determines the view of human destiny.

We have a penchant and a genius for dividing, analyzing, and isolating, but often fail to synthesize and show how the various parts contribute to the larger picture. In this study I attempt to show how the Biblical wholistic view of human nature presupposes the Biblical realistic view of human destiny in which body and soul, flesh and spirit, the material and spiritual components of our nature and of our world are all part of God's creation, redemption, and ultimate restoration.

Procedure. The procedure in this book is as follows: First, we study the Biblical view of human nature by examining some of the key words used for man in the Old and New Testaments. While at first glance this looks like analysis, we must keep in mind throughout our study that under each term we are viewing the whole person: person as soul, person as body, person as spirit. Thus, while we consider the various aspects of human nature, we are always looking at the person as a whole. We must keep in mind that in the Bible, as J. A. T. Robinson puts it, "Any part can stand at any moment for the whole."¹

The second step of the procedure is to examine the Biblical view of human destiny in the light of its teaching about human nature. The study shows that the Biblical wholistic view of human nature, where body and soul

are an indissoluble unit, presupposes also a Biblical view of human destiny, where the whole person, body and soul, is resurrected to receive either eternal life or eternal death. Moreover, those who receive eternal life will spend eternity, not in an ethereal, spiritual Paradise, but in this material planet earth, restored by God to its original perfection.

The study of human destiny requires an analysis of popular misconceptions regarding the intermediate state between death and resurrection, paradise and hell. Each of these topics is examined in a separate chapter in the light of Biblical teaching. Special attention is given to the study of hell in chapter 6, in view of the widespread rejection of the traditional view of hell as conscious torment. The ultimate goal of this study is not merely to expose the fallacies of prevailing views but primarily to affirm the Biblical wholistic and realistic view of human nature and destiny.

This introductory chapter is designed to provide an overall view of the two basic views of human nature and their impact upon Christian faith and practice. Its purpose is to help the reader understand the importance of the issues we are addressing in this book. We shall find that what Christians believe about the constitution of their human nature largely determines their understanding of themselves, this present world, redemption, and ultimate destiny.

1. Two Basic Views of Human Nature and Destiny

There are two basic Christian visions of human destiny which originate from two fundamentally different views of human nature. The first is based on the belief of the immortality of the soul, and the second on the belief of the resurrection of the body. In his scholarly study *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Reinhold Niebuhr suggests that the fundamentally different Christian beliefs about human nature and destiny derive from two basic views: (1) the *Classical* and (2) the *Christian*.² The first derives from Greek philosophy and the second from the teaching of the Bible. The term “Christian” for the latter view may be misleading, because, as we shall learn, the vast majority of Christians throughout the centuries have been greatly influenced by the classical view of human nature which consists of a mortal body and an immortal soul. Therefore, I prefer to call the second view “Biblical,” because, as this study shows, it reflects the teachings of the Bible.

Classical Dualism. The classical view of human nature is largely derived from the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. The emphasis of these philosophies is on the distinction between the material and spiritual components of human nature. In Platonic thought, human nature has both a material and a spiritual component. The material component is the body,

which is temporary and essentially evil; and the spiritual component is the soul (*psyche*) or the mind (*nous*), which are eternal and good. The human body is transient and mortal while the human soul is permanent and immortal. At death, the soul is released from the prison house of the body where it was entombed for a time. Historically popular Christian thought has been deeply influenced by this dualistic, un-Biblical understanding of human nature. The far-reaching implications of the classical view of human nature for Christian beliefs and practices is inestimable. We reflect upon them shortly.

Biblical Wholism. The Biblical view of human nature is essentially wholistic or monistic. The emphasis in the Bible is on the unity of body, soul, and spirit, each being part of an indivisible organism. Since this book as a whole is intended to articulate the Biblical wholistic view of human nature, I simply refer here to two significant differences with the classical view. The first is that the wholistic view of human nature is predicated on the belief that the material creation of this world, including that of the human body, is “very good” (Gen 1:31). There is no dualism or contradiction between the material and the spiritual, the body and the soul, the flesh and the spirit, because they are all part of God’s good creation. Redemption is the restoration of the whole person, body and soul, and not the salvation of the soul apart from the body.

A second contrast with the classical view is that human nature was not created innately immortal, but with the capacity of becoming immortal. Human beings do not possess a mortal body and an immortal soul; they have a wholistic mortal body and soul which can become immortal. Immortality or eternal life is God’s gift to those who accept His provision of salvation. Those who reject God’s plan for their salvation ultimately will experience eternal destruction, not eternal torment in an ever-burning hellfire. The reason is simple. Immortality is given as a recompense to the saved, not as a retribution to the unsaved.

Here is God’s Good News. Although Adam and Eve were created mortal (with the possibility of becoming immortal by partaking of the Tree of Life) and we today are born mortal, we can receive immortality if we accept God’s gift of eternal life. Immortality is a divine gift and not an innate human possession. It is *conditional* upon our willingness to accept God’s gracious provision for the salvation of our total nature, body and soul. Thus the Biblical view is also referred to as *conditional immortality*, because it is offered on God’s terms and *conditions*.

The Body-Soul Debate. Some readers may feel that the body-soul question is a dead issue which no one cares about any more. Writing a book about this topic may be seen as a waste of time. The truth of the matter is that

the body-soul question is far from being an irrelevant, dead issue. The recent mass suicide at a mansion in San Diego of 39 persons who wanted to leave behind the “container” of their body in order to reach with their souls the Hale-Bopp comet reminds us of how much alive the soul-body question is. Interest in the afterlife appears to be greater today than ever before. During the Middle Ages belief in the afterlife was promoted through literary and artistic, superstitious representations of the bliss of the saints and the torments of the sinners. Today such a belief is propagated in a more sophisticated way through mediums, psychics, “scientific” research into near-death experiences, and New Age channeling with the spirits of the past. The outcome of all of this is that the body-soul question is attracting unprecedented attention even in the scholarly community. A survey of the scholarly literature produced in recent years clearly shows that this question is being hotly debated by leading scholars of different religious persuasions.

The central issue is whether the soul can survive and function apart from the body. In other words, is human nature so constituted that at death the soul, that is, the conscious part, leaves the body and continues to exist while its “container” disintegrates? Traditionally, the vast majority of Christians have answered this question in the affirmative. They have believed that between death and the final resurrection of the body, God preserves the existence of their human disembodied souls. At the resurrection, their material bodies are reunited with their spiritual souls, thus intensifying the pleasure of paradise or the pain of hell.

This traditional and popular view has come under massive attack in recent years. An increasing number of leading evangelical scholars are abandoning the classical, dualistic view of human nature which sees the body as mortal, belonging to the lower world of nature, and the soul as immortal, belonging to the spiritual realm and surviving the death of the body. Instead, they are accepting the Biblical wholistic view of human nature in which the whole person, body and soul, experiences death and resurrection.

Several factors have contributed to the abandonment of the classical dualism on the part of many scholars. One of them is a renewed study of the Biblical view of human nature. A close examination of the basic Biblical terms used for man (*body, soul, spirit, flesh, mind, and heart*) has led many scholars to recognize that these do not indicate independent components, but the whole person seen from different view points. “Recent scholarship has recognized,” writes Eldon Ladd, “that such terms as body, soul, and spirit are not different, separable faculties of man but different ways of viewing the whole man.”³

Virtually any part of the body can be used in the Bible to represent the whole human being. There is no dichotomy between a mortal body and an immortal soul that survives and functions apart from the body. Both body and soul, flesh and spirit in the Bible are part of the same person and do not “come apart” at death.

Dualism under Attack. Numerous Biblical scholars in recent times have argued that Old and New Testament writers do not operate with a dualistic view of human nature, but with a monistic or wholistic one. Their studies are discussed in the following chapters. The outcome of these studies is that many today are questioning or even rejecting the notion that Scripture teaches the existence of souls apart from bodies after death.

Church historians support these conclusions by claiming that a dualistic view of human nature and the belief in the survival of disembodied souls were brought into the Christianity by Church Fathers who were influenced by Plato’s dualistic philosophy. This explains why these beliefs became widely accepted in the Christian church even though they are foreign to the teachings of the Bible.

Philosophers and scientists also have contributed to the massive assault against the traditional dualistic view of human nature. Philosophers have attacked traditional arguments that the soul is an immortal substance that survives the death of the body. They have proposed alternative theories according to which the soul is an aspect of the human body and not a separate component.

Scientists, too, have challenged the belief in the independent existence of the soul by showing that human consciousness is dependent on and influenced by the brain. At death, the brain ceases to function and all forms of consciousness stop. To scientists the cessation of all mental functions at death suggests it is highly unlikely that the mental functions ascribed to the soul can be carried out after death.

These concerted attacks on dualism by Biblical scholars, church historians, philosophers, and scientists have led liberal and even some conservative Christians to reject the traditional dualistic view of human nature. In his book *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*, John W. Cooper summarizes the outcome of this development, saying: “Liberals rejected it [dualism] as old-fashioned and no longer intellectually tenable. And some conservatives Protestants argued that since we ought to follow the Scripture alone and not human traditions, if anthropological dualism is a human tradition not based on Scripture, we ought to reform our confessions and purge them of such accretions of the Greek mind. The soul-body distinction has come under attack from many directions.”²⁴

Dualists Are Concerned. These developments have raised serious concerns on the part of those who find their traditional dualistic understanding of human nature severely challenged and undermined. Cooper's book represents one of many attempts to reaffirm the traditional dualistic view by responding to the attacks on dualism. The reason for this response is well expressed by Cooper: "If what they [scholars] are saying is true, then two disturbing conclusions immediately follow. First, a doctrine affirmed by most of the Christian church since its beginning is false. A second consequence is more personal and existential—what millions of Christians believe will happen when they die is also a delusion."⁵

Cooper is deeply concerned about the cost of abandoning the traditional dualistic understanding of human nature. He writes: "The most obvious is that the beliefs virtually all ordinary Christians have about the afterlife must also be jettisoned. If souls are not the sort of thing which can be broken loose from bodies, then we do not actually exist between death and resurrection, either with Christ or somewhere else, either consciously or unconsciously. That conclusion will cause many Christians some level of existential anxiety. A more general cost is the loss of another plank in the platform of traditional Christian belief, pried loose and tossed into the shredder of modern scholarship."⁶

There is no question that modern Biblical scholarship is causing great "existential anxiety" to millions of sincere Christians who believe in their disembodied souls going to heaven at death. Any challenge to traditionally cherished beliefs can be devastating. Yet, Christians who are committed to the normative authority of Scripture must be willing to reexamine traditional beliefs, and change them if proven to be unbiblical.

Strong emotional reactions are to be expected from those whose beliefs are challenged by Biblical scholarship. Oscar Cullmann, for example, found himself bitterly attacked by many who strongly objected to his book *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* He wrote: "No other publication of mine has provoked such enthusiasm or such violent hostility."⁷ In fact, the criticism became so intense and so many took offense at his statements that he deliberately decided to keep silent for a time. I should add that Cullmann was not impressed by the attacks against his book because he claims they were based not on exegetical arguments, but on emotional, psychological, and sentimental considerations.

Tactics of Harassment. In some cases, the reaction has taken the form of harassment. Respected Canadian theologian Clark Pinnock mentions some of the "tactics of harassment" used to discredit those evangelical

scholars who have abandoned the traditional dualistic view of human nature and its related doctrine of eternal torment in a fiery hell. One of the tactics has been to associate such scholars with liberals or sectarians like the Adventists. Pinnock writes: “It seems that a new criterion for truth has been discovered which says that if Adventists or liberals hold any view, that view must be wrong. Apparently a truth claim can be decided by its association and does not need to be tested by public criteria in open debate. Such an argument, though useless in intelligent discussion, can be effective with the ignorant who are fooled by such rhetoric.”⁸

Despite the tactics of harassment, the Biblical wholistic view of human nature which negates the natural immortality of the soul and, consequently, the eternal torment of the unsaved in hell, is gaining ground among evangelicals. Its public endorsement by John R. W. Stott, a highly respected British theologian and popular preacher, is certainly encouraging the trend. “In a delicious piece of irony,” writes Pinnock, “this is creating a measure of accreditation by association, countering the same tactics used against it. It has become all but impossible to claim that only heretics and near-heretics [like Seventh-day Adventists] hold the position, though I am sure some will dismiss Stott’s orthodoxy precisely on this ground.”⁹

Stott himself expresses anxiety over the divisive consequences of his new views in the evangelical community where he is a renowned leader. He writes: “I am hesitant to have written these things, partly because I have great respect for longstanding tradition which claims to be a true interpretation of Scripture, and do not lightly set it aside, and partly because the unity of the worldwide evangelical community has always meant much to me. But the issue is too important to be suppressed, and I am grateful to you (David Edwards) for challenging me to declare my present mind. I do not dogmatize about the position to which I have come. I hold it tentatively. But I do plead for frank dialogue among evangelicals on the basis of Scripture.”¹⁰

Stott’s plea for a “frank dialogue among evangelicals on the basis of Scripture” may be very difficult if not impossible, to realize. The reason is simple. Evangelicals are conditioned by their denominational traditional teachings, just as much as the Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox. In theory, they appeal to *Sola Scriptura*, but in practice, Evangelicals often interpret Scripture in accordance with their traditional denominational teachings. If new Biblical research challenges traditional doctrines, in most cases, Evangelical churches will choose to stand for *tradition* rather than for *Sola Scriptura*. The real difference between Evangelicals and Roman Catholics is that the latter are at least honest about the normative authority of their ecclesiastical tradition.

To be an “Evangelical” means to uphold certain fundamental traditional doctrines without questioning. Anyone who dares to question the Biblical validity of a traditional doctrine can become suspect as a “heretic.” In a major conference held in 1989 to discuss what it means to be an evangelical, serious questions were raised as to whether such persons like John Stott or Philip Hughes should be considered evangelical, since they had adopted the view of conditional immortality and the annihilation of the unsaved. The vote to exclude such theologians failed only narrowly.¹¹

Why evangelicals are so adamant in refusing to reconsider the Biblical teachings on human nature and destiny? After all, they have taken the liberty of changing other old traditional teachings. Perhaps one reason for their insistence on holding to the dualistic view is that it impacts on so many other doctrines. We noted at the beginning of this chapter that what Christians believe about the make-up of human nature largely determines what they believe about human destiny. To abandon dualism, also entails abandoning a whole cluster of doctrines resulting from it. This may be called “the domino effect.” If one doctrine falls, several others fall as well. To clarify this point, we briefly consider some of the doctrinal and practical implications of classical dualism. This should alert the reader to its complex ramifications.

2. Implications of Dualism

Doctrinal Implications. The classical dualistic view of human nature has enormous doctrinal and practical implications. Doctrinally, a host of beliefs derive from or are largely dependent upon classical dualism. For example, the belief in the transition of the soul at the moment of death to paradise, hell, or purgatory rests on the belief that the soul is immortal by nature and survives the body at death. This means that, if inherent immortality of the soul should prove to be an unbiblical conception, then popular beliefs about paradise, purgatory, and hell have to be radically modified or even rejected.

The belief that at death the souls of the saints ascend to the beatitude of Paradise has fostered the Catholic and Orthodox belief in the intercessory role of Mary and of the saints. If the souls of the saints are in heaven, it is feasible to assume that they can intercede on behalf of needy sinners on this earth. Thus, devout Christians pray to Mary and the saints to intercede on their behalf. Such a practice runs contrary to the Biblical teaching that “there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1Tim 2:5). More important still, if the soul does not survive and cannot function apart from the body, then the whole teaching of the intercessory role of Mary and the saints must be rejected as an ecclesiastical fabrication. Truly, a re-examination of

the Biblical view of human nature can have frightening consequences for long-cherished Christian beliefs.

Similarly, the belief that at death the souls of those who are pardonable transit to purgatory has led to the teaching that the church on earth has the jurisdiction to apply the merits of Christ and of the saints to souls suffering in purgatory. This is accomplished through the granting of indulgences, that is, the remission of the temporal punishment due to forgiven sin. Such a belief led to the scandalous sale of indulgences which sparked the Protestant Reformation.

The Reformers eliminated the doctrine of purgatory as unbiblical, but they retained the doctrine of the immediate transit after death of individual souls to a state of perfect blessedness (*heaven*) or to a state of continuous punishment (*hell*). Again, if the belief in the survival and functioning of the soul apart from the body is proven to be unbiblical, then popular beliefs about purgatory, indulgences, and transit of the souls to heaven or to hell must be rejected also as ecclesiastical fabrications.

The work that the Reformers began by eliminating purgatory now would have to be completed by redefining paradise and hell according to Scripture and not ecclesiastical traditions. It is unlikely that such a monumental task can be undertaken by any Protestant church today. Any attempt to modify or reject traditional doctrines is often interpreted as a betrayal of the faith and can cause division and fragmentation. This is a very high price that most churches are not willing to pay.

Immortality of the Soul Weakens Second Advent. Traditional dualism also has contributed to weakening the Advent Hope. The belief in the ascension of souls to heaven can obscure and eclipse 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, one hardly can have any real sense of expectation for Christ to *come down* to resurrect the sleeping saints. The primary concern of these Christians is to reach paradise immediately, albeit as a disembodied soul. This concern leaves barely any interest in the coming of the Lord and the resurrection of the body.

To believe in the immortality of the soul means one regards at least part of oneself as immortal in the sense of being incapable of passing out of existence. Such a belief encourages confidence in oneself and in the possibility of one's soul going up to the Lord. On the other hand, to believe in the resurrection of the body means that one does not believe in self or in disembodied souls going to the Lord; rather one believes in Christ who will

return to raise the dead and transform the living. This means believing in the *coming down* of the Lord to this earth to meet embodied believers instead of in the *going up* of disembodied souls to heaven to meet the Lord.

In the New Testament the Parousia stresses a final consummation realized by a movement of Christ's *coming down* to mankind rather than individual souls *going up* to Him. The Advent Hope is not "a pie in the sky when you 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 transformation affecting humanity and nature. This great expectation is obscured and erased by the belief in individual immortality and heavenly bliss immediately after death.

Another significant implication of the individualistic hope for immediate immortality is that it overrides the Biblical corporate hope for an ultimate restoration of this creation and its creatures (Rom 8:19-23; 1 Cor 15:24-28). 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."¹²

Misconceptions About the World to Come. Classical dualism also has fostered wrong ideas 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 enjoy eternal bliss.

During the course of our study, we shall see that 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).

Practical Implications. At a more practical level, the classical dualistic view of human nature has fostered the cultivation of the soul in detachment from the body and the suppression of physical appetites and healthy natural impulses. Contrary to the Biblical view of the goodness of God's creation, including the physical pleasures of the body, medieval

spirituality promoted the mortification of the flesh as a way to achieve the divine goal of holiness. The saints were ascetic persons who devoted themselves primarily to *vita contemplativa*, detaching themselves from the *vita activa*. Since the salvation of the soul was seen as more important than the preservation of the body, the physical needs of the body often intentionally were neglected or even suppressed.

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. Conrad Bergendoff rightly notes that “The Gospels give no basis for a theory of redemption which saves souls apart from the bodies to which they belong. What God has joined together, philosophers and theologians should not put apart. But they have been guilty of divorcing the bodies and souls of men which God made one at creation, and their guilt is not diminished by their plea that thus salvation would be facilitated. Until we have a theory of redemption which meets the whole need of man we have failed to understand the purpose of Him who became incarnate that He might be able to save humanity.”¹³

Rise of Modern Secularism. Some scholars maintain that classical dualism has been instrumental in the rise of modern secularism and the progressive erosion of Christian influence on society and culture.¹⁴ They find a correlation between modern secularism which excludes religion from life, and the body-soul distinction of traditional Christianity. They also see a connection between secularism and the nature-grace distinction articulated especially by Thomas Aquinas. According to the latter natural reason is sufficient for living the natural life of this world, while grace is needed for living the spiritual life and attaining the goal of salvation. Thus, the scholastic body-soul distinction allowed for life to be divided into two different compartments: *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, or we might say *secular life* and *spiritual life*.

This distinction eventually led to the belief that Christianity should be concerned primarily with the salvation of the souls of people, while the state should be responsible for the care of the body. This means that the state, and not the church, should be concerned about education, science, technology, economic systems, social and political issues, or general culture and public values.

The outcome of the body-soul distinction is that Christians have surrendered vast areas of life, moral values, and knowledge to the forces of

secularism and humanism. Teaching methods and textbooks, even in the nation's Christian schools, reflect more humanistic philosophies than Biblical views. The total impact of the body-soul dualism is impossible to estimate. Dividing humans into body and soul has promoted all sorts of false dichotomies in human life.

Dualism in Liturgy. The influence of dualism can be seen even more often in many Christian hymns, prayers, and poems. The opening sentence of the burial prayer found in *The Book of Common Prayer* of the Church of England is starkly dualistic: "Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of His great mercy to take unto Himself the soul of our dear brother here departed, we therefore commit his body to the ground."¹⁵ A phrase in another prayer in the same Office betrays a clear dualistic contempt for physical existence: "With whom the souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, are in joy and felicity."

The Platonic notion of the release of the soul from the prison-house of the body is clearly set forth in the lines of the Christian poet, John Donne: "When bodies to their grave, souls from the graves remove."¹⁶ Many of our hymns are thinly disguised dualistic poems. How often we are asked to view this present life as a "weary pilgrimage" and to look for the eventual escape to heaven, "up above the sky."

Examples of hymns that manifest hostility toward this earthly life, religious escapism, and other-worldliness easily can be found in the hymnals of most Christian denominations. Some hymns portray this earth as a prison from which the believer is released to ascend to the heavenly home: "My Father's house is built on high, Far, far above the starry sky; When from this earthly prison free, That heav'nly mansion mine shall be." Other hymns describes the Christian as a stranger who can hardly wait to leave this world: "Here in this country so dark and dreary, I long have wandered forlorn and weary." "I'm but a stranger here, Heaven is my home; Earth is a desert drear, Heaven is my home." "I want to live above the world . . . on heaven's tableland."

Christians who believe the words of such hymns may be disappointed one day to discover that their eternal home is not "above the world . . . on heaven's tableland," but down here on this earth. This is the planet that God has created, redeemed, and ultimately will restore for our eternal habitation. The Biblical vision of the world to come is explored in chapter 7.

The far-reaching doctrinal and practical implications of the dualistic view of human nature that we have just considered should serve to impress the reader with the importance of the subject under consideration. What we

address in this book is not a mere academic question but a fundamental Biblical teaching that impacts directly or indirectly a host of Christian beliefs and practices.

3. Implications of Biblical Wholism

Positive View of Physical and Spiritual. Like classical dualism, Biblical wholism affects our understanding of ourselves, this present world, redemption, and our ultimate destiny. Since during the course of this study we examine at some length various doctrinal and practical implications of Biblical wholism, I only allude to some of them here.

The Biblical wholistic view of human nature, according to which our body and soul are an indissoluble unit, created and redeemed by God, challenges us to view positively both the physical and spiritual aspects of life. We honor 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). Scripture admonishes us to present our “bodies as a living sacrifice” (Rom 12:1). This means that the way we treat our bodies reflects the spiritual condition of our souls. If we pollute our bodies with tobacco, drugs, or unhealthy food, we cause not only the *physical pollution* of our bodies, but also the *spiritual pollution* of our souls.

Henlee H. Barnette notes that “what people do to, for, and with others and their environment depends largely upon what they think of God, nature, themselves, and their destiny.”¹⁷ When Christians view themselves and the present world wholistically as the object of God’s good creation and redemption, they will be both convinced and compelled to act as God’s stewards of their bodies as well as of the created order.

Concern for the Whole Person. Biblical wholism 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 the Biblical wholistic view of human nature means to opt for a *wholistic* approach in our evangelistic and missionary endeavors. This approach consists not only in saving the “souls” of people but also in improving their living conditions by working in such areas as health, diet, education. The aim should be 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.

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. Medical science recently has developed what is known as *holistic medicine*. Holistic health practitioners "emphasize the necessity for looking at the whole person, including physical condition, nutrition, emotional make up, spiritual state, life-style values, and environment."¹⁸ At the 1975 graduating exercise of Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Dr. Jerome D. Frank told the graduates: "Any treatment of an illness that does not also minister to the human spirit is grossly deficient."¹⁹ Healing and the maintenance of physical health must always involve the total person.

Cosmic Redemption. The Biblical wholistic view of human nature presupposes also a cosmic view of redemption that encompasses the body and the soul, the material and the spiritual world. The separation between body and soul or spirit has often paralleled the division between the realm of creation and the realm of redemption. The latter has been associated to a large extent in both Catholicism and Protestantism with the salvation of individual souls at the expense of the *physical* and *cosmic* dimensions of redemption. The saints often are portrayed as pilgrims who live on earth but detached from the world and whose souls at death immediately leave their material bodies to ascend to an abstract place called "heaven." This view reflects classical dualism but fails, as we shall see during the course of this study, to represent the wholistic Biblical view of the human and subhuman creation.

Previously we noted that traditional dualism has produced an attitude of contempt toward the body and the natural world. This other-worldliness reflected in such hymns as "This World Is Not My Home," "I'm a stranger here, Heaven is my home; Earth is a desert drear, Heaven is my home." Such an attitude of disdain toward our planet is absent from the Psalms, the Hebrew hymnal, where the central theme is the praise of God for His magnificent works. In Psalm 139:14, David says: "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth very well." Here the Psalmist praises God for his wonderful body, a fact well

known to his soul (mind). This is a good example of wholistic thinking, where body and soul are part of God's marvellous creation.

In Psalm 92, the Psalmist urges one to praise God with musical instruments, because, he says, "Thou, O Lord, hast made me glad by thy work; at the work of thy hands I sing for joy. How great are thy works, O Lord!" (Ps 92:4-5). The Psalmist's rejoicing over his wonderful body and marvelous creation is based upon his wholistic conception of the created world as an integral part of the whole drama of creation and redemption.

Biblical Realism. The Biblical wholistic view of human nature also impacts on our view of the world to come. In chapter 7 we learn that the Bible does not envision the world to come as an ethereal paradise where glorified souls will spend eternity wearing white robes, singing, plucking harps, praying, chasing clouds, and drinking milk of ambrosia. Instead, the Bible speaks of the resurrected saints inhabiting this planet earth, which will be purified, transformed, and perfected at and through the coming of the Lord (2 Pet 3:11-13; Rom 8:19-25; Rev 21:1). The "new heavens and a new earth" (Is 65:17) are not a remote and inconsequential spiritual retreat somewhere off in space; rather, they are the present heaven and earth renewed to their original perfection.

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.

Conclusion. Historically, two major, radically different views of human nature have been held. One is designated as classical dualism and the other as Biblical wholism. The dualistic view maintains that human nature consists of a material, mortal body and a spiritual, immortal soul. The latter survives the death of the body and transits to heaven, or purgatory, or hell. At the resurrection, the soul is reunited with the body. This dualistic concep-

tion has had an enormous impact on Christian life and thought, affecting people's view of human life, this present world, redemption, and the world to come.

In modern times, classical dualism has come under attack from Biblical scholars, church historians, philosophers, and scientists. Biblical scholars have examined the anthropological terms and texts and have concluded that the Biblical view of human nature is not dualistic at all; it is clearly wholistic. Many voices from different directions are affirming today that dualism is out and wholism is in.

The preceding survey of the ongoing debate over the Biblical view of human nature has shown the fundamental importance of this subject for the whole structure of Christian beliefs and practices. It is imperative, therefore, for us to diligently examine what the Bible actually teaches on this vital subject. This we proceed to do by investigating in chapters 2 and 3 the Biblical view of human nature, and in chapters 4 to 7 the Biblical teaching on human destiny.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. John A. T. Robinson, *The Body* (London, 1952), p. 16.
2. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York, 1941), pp. 4-17.
3. George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1974), p. 457.
4. John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting. Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, 1989), p. 3.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
7. Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the new Testament* (New York, 1958), p. 5.
8. Clark H. Pinnock, "The Conditional View," in *Four Views on Hell*, William Crockett, ed., (Grand Rapids, 1992), p. 161.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
10. John R. W. Stott and David Edwards, *Essentials, A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (London, 1988), pp. 319-320.

11. See *Christianity Today* (June 16, 1989), pp. 60-62. In the conference volume, John Ankerberg argues that to deny the traditional view of the immortality of the soul and of everlasting punishment in hell, is tantamount to denying the deity of Christ. (See K. S. Kantzer and Carl F. Henry, eds., *Evangelical Affirmations* (Grand Rapids, 1990).

12. 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.

13. Conrad Bergendoff, "Body and Spirit in Christian Thought," *The Lutheran Quarterly* 6 (August 1954), pp. 188-189.

14. An excellent survey of how body-soul dualism has contributed to the rise of modern secularism and the distinction between secular and spiritual or religious life is found in Brian Walsh and Richard Middleton, "The Development of Dualism" chapter 7 in *The Transforming Vision* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 1984).

15. Cited by D. R. G. Owen, *Body and Soul. A Study on the Christian View of Man* (Philadelphia, 1957), p. 28.

16. From John Donne's poem, "The Anniversary."

17. Henlee H. Barnette, *The Church and the Ecological Crisis* (New York, 1972), p. 65.

18. *Encyclopedia Americana*, 1983 ed., s. v. "Holistic Medicine," p. 294.

19. Cited by Norman Cousins, *Anatomy of an Illness* (New York, 1979), p. 133. Among the many books on holistic medicine, the following may be noted: David Allen et al., *Whole Person Medicine* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 1980); Ed Gaedwag, ed., *Inner Balance: The Power of Holistic Healing* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1979); Morton Walker, *Total Health: The Holistic Alternative to Traditional Medicine* (New York, 1979); Jack La Patra, *Healing the Coming Revolution in Holistic Medicine* (New York, 1978).

Chapter II

THE OLD TESTAMENT VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE

The question posed by the Psalmist, “What is man that thou art mindful of him?” (Ps 8:4), is one of the most fundamental questions that anyone could consider. It is fundamental because its answer determines the way we view ourselves, this world, redemption, and our ultimate destiny.

No age knows so much and so many things about human nature as does ours, yet no age knows less about what man really is. Having lost their awareness of God, many people today are concerned primarily with their present existence. The loss of awareness of God makes many people uncertain about the meaning of life, because it is only in reference to God and His revelation that the nature and destiny of human life can be truly understood.

The question of human nature has been a consistent concern in the history of Western thought. In chapter 1 we noted that, historically, most Christians have defined human nature dualistically, that it consists of a material, mortal body and an immaterial, immortal soul which survives the body at death. Beginning with the Enlightenment (a philosophic movement of the 18th century), attempts have been made to define man as a machine that is part of a giant cosmic machine. Human beings are trapped hopelessly within a deterministic universe and their behavior is determined by such impersonal and involuntary forces as genetic factors, chemical secretions, education, upbringing, and societal conditioning. People do not have an immaterial, immortal soul, only a mortal, material body that is conditioned by the determinism of the cosmic machine.

This depressing materialistic view that reduces human beings to the status of a machine or an animal negates the Biblical view of man created in the image of God. Instead of being “like God,” human beings are reduced to being “like an animal.” Perhaps as a response to this pessimistic view, various modern pseudo-pagan cults and ideologies (like the New Age) deify human beings. Man is neither “like an animal” or “like God,” he *is* god. He has inner divine power and resources that await to be unleashed. This new humanistic

gospel is popular today because it challenges people to seek salvation within themselves by tapping into and releasing the powers and resources that slumber within.

What we are experiencing today is a violent swing of the pendulum from an extreme materialistic view of human nature to an extreme mystic, deification view. In this context, people are confronted with two choices: Either human beings are nothing but preprogrammed machines, or they are divine with unlimited potential. The Christian response to this challenge is to be sought in the Holy Scriptures which provide the basis for defining our beliefs and practices. Our study shows that Scripture teaches we are neither preprogrammed machines nor divine beings with unlimited potential. We are creatures created in the image of God, and dependent upon Him for our existence in this world and in the world to come.

Objectives of the Chapter. This chapter seeks to understand the Old Testament view of human nature by examining four prominent anthropological terms, namely, *soul*, *body*, *heart*, and *spirit*. The various meanings and usages of these terms are analyzed to determine if any of them is ever used to denote an immaterial substance which functions independently of the body.

Our study indicates that the Old Testament does not distinguish between physical and spiritual organs, because the entire range of higher human functions such as feeling, thinking, knowing, loving, keeping God's commandments, praising, and praying is attributed not only to the "spiritual" organs of the soul and spirit but also to the physical organs of the heart and, occasionally, to the kidneys and viscera. The soul (*nephesh*) and the spirit (*ruach*) are used in the Old Testament to denote, not immaterial entities capable of surviving the body at death, but a whole spectrum of physical and psychological functions.

In undertaking this investigation we must keep in mind that Bible writers were not familiar with modern physiology or psychology. They did not necessarily know, for example, that the sensation we experience when our hand touches an object is caused by nerves that transmit the information to the brain. The word "brain" does not occur in the English Bible. Bible writers knew nothing of the nervous system or respiratory system. For the most part, they defined human nature in terms of what they saw and felt.

This chapter is divided into five major parts. The first part examines what the creation story tells us about the original make-up of human nature. The subsequent four parts analyze the four fundamental terms of human nature that we find in the Old Testament, namely, *soul*, *body*, *heart*, and the

spirit. Our investigation indicates that all these terms describe not wholly different substances each with its own distinct functions, but the interrelated and integrated capacities and functions of the same person. The fact that a person consists of various parts which are integrated, interrelated, and functionally united, leaves no room for the notion of the soul being distinct from the body and thus removing the basis for the belief in the survival of the soul at the death of the body.

PART I: HUMAN NATURE AT CREATION

Creation, Fall, and Redemption. In seeking to understand the Biblical view of human nature, we must recognize first that the meaning of human life is defined in Scripture in terms of creation, the fall into sin, and God's plan of redemption. These three basic truths are fundamental for understanding the Biblical view of human nature and destiny. Chronologically, these are the first three truths we encounter in Genesis 1 through 3, where we find the first account of creation, the Fall, and redemption. Thematically, everything else in Scripture is a development of these three concepts. They provide the prism through which human existence, with all its problems, is viewed and defined.

When Jesus addressed the question of marriage and divorce, He approached it first in terms of what marriage was meant to be at creation. Then He looked at it from the perspective of the Fall, because sin explains why allowance was made for divorce (Matt 19:1-8). Similarly, Paul appeals to creation, the Fall, and redemption to explain the role distinctions between men and women (1 Cor 11:3-12; 1 Tim 2:12-14) as well as their equality in Christ (Gal 3:28).

When we view human nature from the Biblical perspective of creation, the Fall, and redemption, we immediately see that creation tells us about the original make up of human nature, the Fall about its present condition, and redemption about the restoration being accomplished in the present and consummated in the future. Thus a comprehensive Biblical definition of human nature must take into consideration what human nature was at creation, what it became after the Fall, and what it is now and will become in the future as a result of redemption.

The Creation of Man. The logical starting point for the study of the Biblical view of human nature is the account of the creation of man. We use here the term "man" as used in Scripture, namely, including both man and woman. The first important Biblical statement is found in Genesis 1:26-27:

“Then God said: ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

This first account of man’s creation tells us that human life began not as a result of fortuitous natural forces or of a chance mutation in the animal world, but as a result of a personal creative act of God. It was after the Lord had called into existence the earth with all its vegetation and animals that He announced the making of man. It is as if people were the specific focus of God’s creation. The impression conveyed by the narrative is that when God came to the creation of man, He entered into something different and distinctive.

At the end of each stage of the world’s creation, God stopped to contemplate what He had wrought and to pronounce it “good” (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). Then God set out to create a being that could have lordship over His creation; a being with whom he could walk and talk. The adverb “*then*” at the beginning of verse 26 (RSV) suggests that the creation of man was something special. All the previous creative acts of God are presented as a continuous series linked together by the conjunction “and” (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24). But when the cosmic order of creation was finished and the earth was ready to sustain human life, *then* the Lord uttered His intention of making man. “*Then* God said, ‘Let us make man’” (Gen 1:26). After creating man, God pronounced His whole creation “very good” (Gen 1:31).

A Special Creation of God. This original, divine declaration suggests two fundamental truths: First, *man is a special creation of God whose life depends upon Him*. His life derives from God and continues only because of God’s mercy. This sense of continual human dependence on the Most High is basic to the Biblical understanding of human nature. God is the Creator and human beings are creatures dependent upon Him for the origin and continuance of their existence.

Second, *man is distinct from God*. Human beings have a temporal beginning, but God is eternal. The Lord is not man that He should die. Scripture emphasizes the contrast between the infinite attributes of God as Creator and the finite limitation of man as creature. This is an important consideration to keep in mind when defining the Biblical view of human nature. The whole divine revelation presents human beings as creatures dependent upon, but distinct from God (Is 45:11; 57:15; Job 10:8-10). Yet, despite the emphasis of man’s creaturely dependence upon God, he remains in a position of special relationship with the Creator. “The distinctive

character of his humanness sets him apart not only *from* God's other creatures but also *to* and *for* the loving and thankful service of his Creator."¹

In the Image of God. The distinctive characteristic of man's relation to God is expressed in the declaration of his creation in the image of God. "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1:26; cf. 5:1-3; 9:6). Elaborate attempts have been made to define what the "image of God" is in which man was created.² Some contend that it is a physical resemblance between God and man.³ The problem with this view is that it presupposes that God has a corporeal nature similar to that of human beings. This idea is discredited by Christ's statement that "God is Spirit" (John 4:24), which suggests that He is not bound by space or matter as we are. Moreover, the Biblical terms for the physical aspect of human nature (*bashar, sarx*—flesh, body) are never applied to God.

Others think the image of God is the non-material aspect of human nature, namely his spiritual soul. Thus R. Laird-Harris declares: "Man alone in the world is a spiritual, moral, and rational being. He has a God-given soul and the inference is that this soul, being made in the image of God, is not subject to the limits of time and space."⁴ In a similar vein, Calvin affirms: "It cannot be doubted that the proper seat of the image is the soul," though he adds that there is "no part of man, not even his body, which is not adorned with some rays of its glory."⁵ This view presupposes a dualism between body and soul which is not warranted by the Genesis account of creation. Man did not receive a soul from God; he was *made* a living soul. Moreover, in the creation story the animals also are spoken of as having within them a living soul, yet, they were not created in the image of God.

Some interpret the image of God in man as being the combination of human maleness and femaleness.⁶ The basis for this interpretation is primarily the proximity of the expression "male and female he created them" to the phrase "in the image of God he created him" (Gen 1:27). Undoubtedly, there is some theological truth in the notion that the image of God is reflected in the male-female fellowship as equals. But the problem with this interpretation is that it makes too much of too little by reducing the image of God exclusively to the male-female fellowship as equals.

The interpretation of the image of God as being the combination of human maleness and femaleness has led some to make God into an androgynous Being, half male and half female. This view is foreign to the Bible since God does not need a female counterpart to complete his identity. An *action of God* is sometimes compared to that of a compassionate mother (Is 49:15), but the *person of God* is revealed, especially through Jesus Christ, as that of our Father.

Image as Capacity to Reflect God. In our view, the image of God is associated not with man as male and female, or with an immortal soul given to our species, but rather with humankind's capacity to be and to do on a finite level what God is and does on an infinite level. The creation account seems to be saying that while the sun rules the day, the moon the night, and the fishes the sea, mankind images God by having dominion over all these realms (Gen 1:28-30).

In the New Testament, the image of God in humanity is never associated with male-female fellowship, or physical resemblance, or a nonmaterial, spiritual soul, but rather with moral and rational capacities: "Put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator" (Col 3:10; cf. Eph 4:24). Similarly, conformity to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49) is generally understood in terms of righteousness and holiness. None of these qualities is possessed by animals. What distinguishes people from animals is the fact that human nature inherently has godlike possibilities. By virtue of being created in the image of God, human beings are capable of reflecting His character in their own life.

Being created in the image of God means that we must view ourselves as intrinsically valuable and richly invested with meaning, potential, and responsibilities. It means that we have been created to reflect God in our thinking and actions. We are to be and to do on a finite scale what God is and does on an infinite scale.

The Bible never mentions immortality in connection with the image of God in man. The tree of life represented immortality in fellowship with the Creator, but as a result of sin, Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden, thus being deprived of access to the source of continuous life in His presence of God.

Why should the image be found in immortality any more than in omniscience, omnipotence, or omnipresence? None of these other divine attributes have been ascribed to man as part of the image of God, even before the Fall. Nothing in Scripture suggests that man images God by possessing divine attributes, like immortality. No valid reasons exist for singling out immortality as the one divine attribute intended by the phrase "image of God." On the contrary, much in Scripture denies it, as we shall see.

Genesis 2:7: "A Living Soul." The second important Biblical statement for understanding human nature is found in Genesis 2:7. It is not surprising that this text forms the basis of much of the discussion regarding human nature, since it provides the only Biblical account of how God created man. The text reads: "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 classical dualism. It has been assumed that the breath of life God breathed into man's nostrils was simply an immaterial, immortal soul that God implanted into the material body. And just as earthly life began with the implantation of an immortal soul into a physical body, so it ends when the soul departs from the body. Thus Genesis 2:7 has been historically interpreted on the basis of the traditional body-soul dualism.

What has led to this mistaken and misleading interpretation is the fact that the Hebrew word *nephesh*, translated "soul" in Genesis 2:7, has been understood according to the standard Webster's definition for soul: "The immaterial essence, animating principle, or actuating cause of an individual life." Or "The spiritual principle embodied in human beings."⁷ This standard definition reflects the Platonic view of the soul-*psyche* as being an immaterial, immortal essence that abides in the body, though it is not part of it.

This prevailing view causes people to read the Old Testament references to the soul-*nephesh* in the light of Platonic dualism rather than of Biblical wholism. As Claude Tresmontant puts it, "By applying to the Hebrew *nephesh* [soul] the characteristics of the Platonic *psyche* [soul], . . . we let the real meaning of *nephesh* [soul] escape us and furthermore, we are left with innumerable pseudo-problems."⁸

People who read the Old Testament references to *nephesh* (which in the King James version are translated 472 times as "soul") with a dualistic mind-set, will have great difficulty in understanding the Biblical wholistic view of human nature. According to this, the body and the soul are the same person seen from different perspectives. They will experience problems with accepting the Biblical meaning of the "soul" as the animating principle of both human and animal life. Furthermore, they will be at a loss to explain those passages that speak of a *dead person* as a *dead soul-nephesh* (Lev 19:28; 21:1, 11; 22:4; Num 5:2; 6:6,11; 9:6, 7, 10; 19:11, 13; Hag 2:13). For them it is inconceivable that an immortal soul could die with the body.

The Meaning of "Living Soul." The prevailing assumption that the human soul is immortal has led many to interpret the phrase "man *became* a living soul" (Gen 2:7 KJV) to mean that "man *obtained* a living soul." This interpretation has been challenged by numerous scholars who are sensitive to the confusion regarding the difference between the Greek-dualistic and the Biblical-wholistic conception of human nature.

Aubrey Johnson, for example, explains that *nephesh*-soul in Genesis 2:7 denotes the whole man, with an emphasis on his consciousness and vitality.⁹ Similarly, Johannes Pedersen, speaking of the creation of man in

his classic study *Israel*, writes: “The basis of his essence was the fragile corporeal substance, but by the breath of God it was transformed and became a *nephesh*, a soul. It is not said that man was supplied with a *nephesh*, and so the relation between body and soul is quite different from what it is to us. Such as he is, man in his total essence is a soul.”¹⁰

Pedersen continues by noting that “in the Old Testament we are constantly confronted with the fact that man, as such, is a soul. Abraham started for Canaan with his property and all the souls he had gotten (Gen 12:5), and when Abraham had taken booty on his warlike expedition against the great kings, the King of Sodom exhorted him to yield the souls and keep the goods (Gen 14:21). Seventy souls of the house of Jacob came to Egypt (Gen 46:27; Ex 1:5). Whenever a census is taken, the question always is: How many souls are there? In these and in numerous other places we may substitute persons for souls.”¹¹

Commenting on Genesis 2:7, Hans Walter Wolff asks: “What does *nephesh* [soul] mean here? Certainly not soul [in the traditional dualistic sense]. *Nephesh* was designed to be seen together with the whole form of man, and especially with his breath; moreover man does not *have nephesh* [soul], he *is nephesh* [soul], he lives as *nephesh* [soul].”¹² The fact that the soul in the Bible stands for the whole living person is recognized even by Catholic scholar Dom Wulstan Mork who expresses himself in similar terms: “It is *nephesh* [soul] that gives life to the *bashar* [body], but not as a distinct substance. Adam doesn’t 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].”¹³

From a Biblical perspective, the body and the soul are not two different substances (one mortal and the other immortal) abiding together within one human being, but two characteristics of the same person. Johannes Pedersen admirably sums up this point by a statement that has become proverbial: “The body is the soul in its outward form.”¹⁴ The same view is expressed by H. Wheeler Robinson in an equally famous statement: “The Hebrew idea of personality is that of an animated body, not (like the Greek) that of an incarnate soul.”¹⁵

Summing up, we can say that the expression “man became a living soul—*nephesh hayyah*” does not mean that at creation his body was endowed with an immortal soul, a separate entity, distinct from the body. Rather, it means that as a result of the divine inbreathing of the “breath of life” into the lifeless body, man 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.”

The practical implications of this definition are brought out in a suggestive way by Dom Wulstan Mork: “Man as *nephesh* [soul] means that it is his *nephesh* [soul] that goes to dinner, that tackles a steak and eats it. When I see another person, what I see is not merely his body, but his visible *nephesh* [soul], because, in the terms of Genesis 2:7, that is what man is—a living *nephesh*. The eyes have been called ‘the window of the soul.’ This is actually dichotomy. The eyes, as long as they belong to the living person, are *in themselves* the revelation of the soul.”¹⁶

Animals as “Living Souls.” The meaning of “living soul” as simply “living being” is supported by the use of the same phrase “living soul—*nephesh hayyah*” for animals. In our KJV Bible, this phrase appears for the first time in Genesis 2:7 when the creation of Adam is described. But we should note that this is not the first time that phrase occurs in the Hebrew Bible. We also find it in Genesis 1:20, 21, 24, and 30. In all four of these verses “living soul—*nephesh hayyah*” refers to animals, but translators of most English versions have chosen to translate it “living creature” rather than “living soul.” The same is true in several other passages after Genesis 2:7, where animals are referred to as “living creatures” rather than “living souls” (Gen 2:19; 9:10, 12, 15, 16; Lev 11:46).

Why do the translators of most English versions render the same Hebrew phrase *nephesh hayyah* as “living soul” when it refers to man and “living creatures” when it refers to animals? The reason is simple. They are conditioned by the belief that human beings have an immaterial, immortal soul which animals do not have. Consequently, they use the word “soul” for man and “creature” for animal to translate the same Hebrew *nephesh*. Norman Snaith finds this “most reprehensible” and says . . . “it is a grave reflection on the Revisers [translators of the Authorized version] that they retained this misleading difference in translation. . . . 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. The tendency to read ‘immortal soul’ into Hebrew *nephesh* and to translate accordingly is very ancient, and can be seen in the Septuagint . . .”¹⁷

Basil Atkinson, a former Librarian at Cambridge University, offers the same explanation. “Our translators [of the Authorized Version] have concealed this fact from us, presumably because they were so bound by current theological notions of the meaning of the word ‘soul,’ that they dared not translate by it a Hebrew word that referred to animals, although they have used it in the margin [of the Authorized Version] at verses 20 and 30. In these verses we find ‘the moving creature, even living soul’ (Heb.) (ver. 20); ‘every

living soul (Heb. *nephesh*) that moveth' (ver. 21); 'Let the earth bring forth the living soul (Heb. *nephesh*) after his kind' (ver. 24); 'and to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is living soul' (Heb. *nephesh*) (ver. 30)."¹⁸

The use of *nephesh*—soul in these verses to refer to all sorts of animals clearly shows that *nephesh* is not an immortal soul given to man, but the animating principle of life or “the life-breath” which is present in both man and animals. Both are characterized as souls in contradistinction to the plants. The reason plants are not souls is presumably because they do not have organs that allow them to breathe, to feel pain and joy, or to move about in search of food. 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.

The important point to note at this juncture is that both man and animal *are* souls. As Atkinson puts it, “They [man and animals] are not bipartite creatures consisting of a soul and a body which can separate and go on subsisting. Their soul is the whole of them and comprises their body as well as their mental powers. They are spoken of as *having* soul, that is, conscious being, to distinguish them from inanimate objects that have no life. In the same way we can say in English that a man or an animal *is* a conscious being and *has* conscious being.”¹⁹ The term soul—*nephesh* is used for both people and animals because both are conscious beings. They both share the same animating life-principle or “life-breath.”

Soul and Blood. In addition to the four passages we have considered in Genesis 1, there are 19 others in the Old Testament where the word *nephesh* is applied to animals. We want to look at two of them because they help to clarify further the meaning of “living soul” in Genesis 2:7. These passages are of special interest because they associate *nephesh* with blood. In Leviticus 17:11, we read: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood.” “Life” is a translation of the Hebrew *nephesh*, so the passage reads: “The *soul* of the flesh is in the blood.”

In verse 14 of the same chapter, we read: “For the life of every creature is the blood of it; therefore I have said to the people of Israel, You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood.” Here the word “life” is used in each instance to translate the Hebrew *nephesh*, so the passage should actually read, “For the *soul* of every creature is the blood of it; . . . for the *soul* of every creature is its blood” (see also Deut 12:23). The phrase “every creature” suggests that the references to blood apply to both man and animals. Thus, as Atkinson points out, “We have here a most

important insight revealed into the essence of human nature. Soul and blood are identical.”²⁰

The reason the soul—*nephesh* is equated with blood is presumably because the vitality of life—*nephesh* resides in the blood. In the sacrificial system, blood atoned for sin because of its association with *nephesh*—life. The sacrificial killing of an animal meant that a *nephesh*—life was sacrificed to atone for the sins of another *nephesh*—life.

Tory Hoff aptly observes that “The Hebrews relation between *nephesh* [life] and blood reveals that *nephesh* [life] conveyed a ‘sacred’ aspect to human living. *Nephesh* [life] was a work of God (Gen 2:7), was in God’s care (Prov 24:12), was in His hands (Job 12:10), and belonged to Him (Ez 18:4, 20). The Hebrews believed that they were forbidden to meddle or interfere with existence as *nephesh* [life] since it was a received existence beyond man. . . . The Hebrews were forbidden to eat meat still containing blood because the act meddled with *nephesh* [life] and therefore became offensive to God. The equation between blood and *nephesh* [life] meant consuming blood was a form of murder. One was sustaining one’s own *nephesh* [life] with the sacred *nephesh* [life] of another.”²¹

The preceding discussion of the association of *nephesh*—soul with animals and blood has served to clarify further the meaning of “living soul” (Gen 2:7) as applied to Adam. We have found that this phrase does not mean that at creation God endowed the human body with an immortal soul, but simply that man became a living being as a result of God’s breathing His breath of life into the lifeless body. This conclusion is supported by the fact that *nephesh* is also used to describe animals and blood. The latter was equated with *nephesh*—soul because it was seen as the tangible manifestation of the vitality of life. Before exploring further the meaning of *nephesh*—soul in the Old Testament, we need to look at the meaning of the “breath of life” in Genesis 2:7.

The Breath of Life. What is the “breath [*neshamah*] of life” that God breathed into Adam’s nostrils? Some assume that the “breath of life” is the immortal soul that God implanted into Adam’s material body. This interpretation cannot legitimately be supported by the Biblical meaning and usage of the “breath of life,” because nowhere in the Bible is “the breath of life” identified with an immortal soul.

In Scripture, the “breath [*neshamah*] of life” is the life-giving power that is associated with 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” suggests that the two are used interchangeably because they both refer to the gift of life imparted by God to His creatures. Another clear example is found in Isaiah 42:5: “Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, . . . who gives breath [*neshamah*] to the people upon it, and spirit [*ruach*] to those who walk in it.” Here, again, the parallelism shows that breath and spirit denote the same animating principle of life that God gives to His creatures.

The imagery of the “breath of life” describes in a suggestive way God’s gift of life to His creatures, because breathing is a vital sign of life. A person who no longer breathes is dead. Thus, it is not surprising that in Scripture the life-giving Spirit of God is characterized as the “breath of life.” After all, breathing is a tangible manifestation of life. 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 the Bible tells us that at death “the breath of life” returns to God. Life derives from God, is sustained by God, and returns to God. In describing death, Job says: “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 same 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.” Of the Flood we read: “And all flesh died that moved upon the earth . . . everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath [*neshamah*] of life died” (Gen 7:21-22).

The fact that death is characterized as the withdrawal of the breath of life 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” or spirit remains, human beings are “living souls.” But when the breath departs, they become dead souls.

The connection between the “breath of life” and “the living soul” becomes clear when we remember that, as Atkinson points out, “man’s soul is in his blood and indeed his blood is his soul. Thus he is kept in being [alive] as a living soul by the inhalation of oxygen out of the air, and medical science today knows, of course, a great deal about the connection between this intake of oxygen and the blood.”²² The cessation of breathing results in the death of the soul, because the blood, which is equated with the soul, no longer receives

the oxygen that is so vital for life. This explains why the Bible refers about 13 times 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).

In the light of the preceding discussion, we conclude that “man became a living soul” (KJV) at creation, not through the implantation of an immaterial, immortal soul into his material, mortal body, but through the animating principle of life (“breath of life”) conferred on him by God Himself. In the creation account, the “living soul” denotes the life principle or power that animates the human body and reveals itself in the form of conscious life.

PART II: HUMAN NATURE AS SOUL

So far, we have examined the Old Testament view of human nature in the light of man’s creation in the image of God as a living soul. We have found that the two fundamental texts of mankind’s creation, Genesis 1:26-27 and 2:7, do not allow for a dualistic interpretation of human nature with a mortal body and an immortal soul. On the contrary, the body, the breath of life, and the soul are present in man’s creation, not as separate entities, but as characteristics of the same person. Body is man as a concrete being; soul is man as a living individual; the breath of life or spirit is man as having his source in God. To test the validity of this initial conclusion, we now take a closer look at the broader Old Testament use of four key aspects of the human nature: *soul*, *body*, *heart*, and *spirit*.

Our initial study of the meaning of *nephesh*—soul in the context of creation has shown that the word is used to designate the animating principle of life as present in both human beings and animals. At this point, we wish to explore the broader use of *nephesh* in the Old Testament. Since *nephesh* occurs in the Old Testament 754 times and is rendered in 45 different ways,²³ our focus is on three main usages of the word that relate directly to the object of our investigation.

Soul as a Needy Person. In his state-of-the-art book *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, which is virtually undisputed among scholars of various theological persuasions, Hans Walter Wolff entitles the chapter on the soul as “*Nephesh*—Needy Man.”²⁴ The reason for this characterization of *nephesh* as “needy man” becomes evident when one reads the many texts which picture *nephesh*—soul in dangerous situations of life and death proportions.

Since it is God who made man “a living soul” and who sustains the human soul, the Hebrews when in danger appealed to God to deliver their

soul, that is, their life. David prayed: “Deliver my soul [*nephesh*] from the wicked” (Ps 17:13, KJV); “For thy righteousness sake, O Lord, bring my soul [*nephesh*] out of trouble” (Ps. 143:11, KJV). The Lord deserves to be praised, “for he has delivered the soul [*nephesh*] of the poor from the hand of the evildoers” (Jer 20:13).

People greatly feared for their souls [*nephesh*] (Jos 9:24) when others were seeking their souls [*nephesh*] (Ex 4:19; 1 Sam 23:15). They had to flee for their souls [*nephesh*] (2 Kings 7:7) or defend their souls [*nephesh*] (Esther 8:11); if they did not, their souls [*nephesh*] would be utterly destroyed (Jos 10:28, 30, 32, 35, 37, 39). “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ez 18:4, 20). Rahab asked the two Israelite spies to save her family and “deliver our souls [*nephesh*] from death” (Jos 2:13). In these instances, it is evident that the soul that was in danger and needed to be delivered was the life of the individual.

The soul experienced danger not only from enemies but also from lack of food. In lamenting the state of Jerusalem, Jeremiah says: “All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their pleasant things for meat to relieve the soul [*nephesh*]” (Lam 1:11). The Israelites grumbled in the wilderness because they no longer had meat as they had had in Egypt. “But now our soul [*nephesh*] is dried away: there is nothing at all, besides this manna, before our eyes” (Num 11:6).

Fasting had implications for the soul because it cut off nourishment that the soul needed. On the Day of Atonement, the Israelites were commanded to “afflict your souls” (Lev 16:29) by fasting. They abstained from food to demonstrate that their soul was dependent upon God for both physical nourishment and spiritual salvation. “Quite appropriately,” writes Tory Hoff, “they [the Israelites] were asked to fast on the Day of Atonement because it was their soul that was atoned for through the shedding of blood [of an innocent soul] and it was the providential God who sustained the soul despite the sin of the soul.”²⁵

The theme of danger and deliverance associated with the soul [*nephesh*] allows us to see that the soul in the Old Testament was viewed, not as an immortal component of human nature, but as the uncertain, insecure condition of life which sometimes was threatened unto death. Those situations which involved intense danger and deliverance reminded the Israelites that they were needy souls [*nephesh*], living persons whose life depended constantly upon God for protection and deliverance.

Soul as Seat of Emotions. Being the animating principle of human life, the soul functioned also as the center of emotional activities. In speaking of the Shunammite, 2 Kings 4:27 says: “Her soul [*nephesh*] is vexed within

her” (KJV). David cried to the Lord, seeking deliverance from his enemies, saying: “My soul [*nephesh*] is also sore vexed. . . . Return, O Lord, deliver my soul [*nephesh*]” (Ps 6:3-4).

While the people were waiting for God’s deliverance, their soul was losing vitality. Tory Hoff notes that “because the Psalmist often wrote from within this experience [of danger], the Psalms include phrases such as ‘their soul fainted in them’ (Ps 107:5), ‘my soul melts for sorrow’ (Ps 119:28), ‘my soul languishes for salvation’ (Ps 119:81), ‘my soul longs, yea, faints for thy courts’ (Ps 84:2), and ‘their soul melted away in their evil plight’ (Ps 107:26). Job asked, ‘How long will you torment my soul’ (Job 19:2). It was also the soul that would wait for deliverance. ‘For God does my soul wait in silence’ (Ps 62:1). ‘I wait for the Lord, my soul waits and in his word I hope’ (Ps 130:5). Since the Hebrew knew all deliverance came from God, his soul would ‘take refuge’ in God (Ps 57:1) and ‘thirst for him’ (Ps 42:2; 63:1). Once the danger had passed and the intense, precarious nature of the situation was over, the soul would praise God for deliverance received. ‘My soul makes its boast in the Lord, let the afflicted hear and be glad’ (Ps 34:2). ‘Then my soul shall rejoice in the Lord, exulting in his deliverance’ (Ps 35:9).”²⁶

These passages which speak of the soul as the seat of emotion are interpreted by some dualists as supporting the notion of the soul being an immaterial entity attached to the body and responsible for the emotional and intellectual life of the individual. The problem with this interpretation is, as Tory Hoff explains, that “the soul is *the* ‘seat of emotion’ no more than any other Hebrew anthropological term.”²⁷ We shall see that the soul is only one center of emotions because the body, the heart, the bowels, and other parts of the body also function as emotional centers. From the Biblical wholistic view of human nature, one part of the body can often represent the whole.

Wolff rightly observes that the emotional content of the soul is equated with the self or the person and is not an independent entity. He cites, as an example, Psalms 42:5, 11, and 43:5 in which the same song of lament and of self-exhortation is found: “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him.” “Here,” Wolff writes, “*nephesh* [soul] is the self of the needy life, thirsting with desire.”²⁸ There is nothing in these passages to suggest that the soul is an immaterial part of human nature that is equipped with personality and consciousness and is able to survive death. We shall note that the soul dies when the body dies.

The Soul as the Seat of Personality. The soul [*nephesh*] is seen in the Old Testament not only as the seat of emotions but also as the seat of

personality. The soul is the person as a responsible individual. In Micah 6:7 we read: “Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, and the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul [*nephesh*]?” The Hebrew word translated here as “body” is *beten*, which means belly or womb. The contrast here is not between body and soul. In commenting on this text, Dom Wulstan Mork writes: “The meaning is not that the soul is the human cause of sin, with the body as the soul’s instrument. Rather, the *nephesh*, the whole living person, is the cause of sin. Therefore, in this verse, responsibility for sin is attributed to the *nephesh* as the person.”²⁹

We find the same idea in several texts that discuss sin and guilt. “If a soul [*nephesh*] shall sin through ignorance . . .” (Lev 4:2, KJV); “And if a soul [*nephesh*] sins . . . he shall bear his iniquity” (Lev 5:1, KJV); “But the soul [*nephesh*] that doeth ought presumptuously . . . that soul [*nephesh*] shall be cut off from among his people” (Num 15:30, KJV). “Behold all souls [*nephesh*] are mine; . . . the soul [*nephesh*] that sinneth, it shall die” (Ez 18:4). It is evident that in texts such as these, the soul is the responsible person who thinks, wills, and is answerable for his conduct.

Any physical or psychical activity was performed by the soul because such activity presumed a living, thinking, and acting person. “The Hebrew did not divide and assign human activities. Any act was the whole *nephesh* in action, hence, the whole person.”³⁰ As aptly expressed by W. D. Stacey, “*Nephesh* sorrowed, hungered, and thought because each of these functions required the whole personality to perform it, and the distinction between emotional, physical, and mental was not made.”³¹

In the Old Testament the soul and the body are two manifestations of the same person. The soul includes and presumes the body. “In fact,” writes Mork, “the ancient Hebrews could not conceive of one without the other. Here was no Greek dichotomy of soul and body, of two opposing substances, but a unity, man, who is *bashar* [body] from one aspect and *nephesh* [soul] from another. *Bashar*, then, is the *concrete reality* of human existence, *nephesh* is the *personality* of human existence.”³²

The Soul and Death. The survival of the soul in the Old Testament is linked to the survival of the body, since the body is an outward manifestation of the soul. This explains why the death of a person is often described as the death of the soul. “When death occurs,” writes Johannes Pedersen, “then it is the soul that is deprived of life. Death cannot strike the body or any other parts of the soul without striking the entirety of the soul. Therefore it is also said to ‘kill a soul’ or ‘smite a soul’ (Num 31:19; 35:15,30; Jos 20:3, 9); it may also be called to ‘smite one as regards the soul,’ i. e. to smite one so that the

soul is killed (Gen 37:21; Deut 19:6, 11; Jer 40:14, 15). There can be no doubt that it is the soul which dies, and all theories attempting to deny this fact are false. It is deliberately said both that the soul dies (Judg 16:30; Num 23:10 et al.), that it is destroyed or consumed (Ez 22:25, 27), and that it is extinguished (Job 11:20).”³³

Readers of the English Bible may question the validity of Pedersen’s statement that the soul dies, because the word “soul” does not occur in the texts which he cites. For example, speaking of the cities of refuge, Numbers 35:15 says: “Anyone who kills any person [*nephesh*] without intent may flee there.” Since the word “soul–*nephesh*” does not occur in most English translations, some may argue that the text is speaking of the killing of the body and not of the soul. The truth of the matter is that *nephesh* is found in the Hebrew, but translators usually chose to render it with “person,” presumably because of their belief that the soul is immortal and cannot be killed.

In some instances, translators render *nephesh*–soul with personal pronouns. Readers of English versions have no way of knowing that the pronoun stands for the soul–*nephesh*. For example, one of the texts quoted by Pedersen is Deuteronomy 19:11, which in the RSV reads: “But if any man hates his neighbor, and lies in wait for him, and attacks him and wounds him [*nephesh*] mortally so that he dies. . . .” The phrase “wounds him mortally” in Hebrew reads “wounds the soul–*nephesh* mortally.” Pedersen quotes the texts from the Hebrew Bible and not from English translations. Thus, his statement that “the soul dies” accurately reflects what the Hebrew text says. Furthermore, there are texts even in the English version that clearly speak of the death of the soul. For example, Ezekiel 18:20 reads: “The soul that sins shall die” (See also Ex 18:4).

Death is seen in the Old Testament as the emptying out of the soul of all its vitality and strength. “He poured out his soul unto death” (Is 53:12). “He poured out” translates the Hebrew *arah* which means “to empty, to bare, or make naked.” This means that the Suffering Servant emptied himself of all the vitality and strength of the soul. In death, the soul no longer functions as the animating principle of life, but is at rest in the grave.

“The dead,” writes Pedersen, “is a soul bereft of strength. Therefore the dead are called ‘the weak’ (*rephaim*). ‘Now thou art become weak’ is the greeting with which the fallen king of the Babylonians is received in the realm of the dead (Is 14:10).”³⁴ The dead body is still a soul, but a soul without life. The Nazirites were not allowed to defile themselves by coming near “a dead body” (Num 6:6), or as the Hebrew text says: “the soul of one dead.” In the same manner, the priests were not to defile themselves by coming near the dead souls of their relatives (Lev 21:1, 11; Num 5:2; 9:6, 7, 10).

The fate of the soul is linked to the fate of the body. 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. “In the Bible,” writes Edmund Jacob, “*nephesh* refers only to the corpse prior to its final dissolution and while it has distinguishable features.”³⁵ When the body is destroyed and consumed so that its features are no longer recognizable, then the soul no longer exits, because “the body is the soul in its outward form.”³⁶ On the other hand, when the body is laid to rest in the grave with the fathers, the soul is also at rest and lies undisturbed (Gen 15:15; 25:8; Jud 8:32; 1 Chron 29:28).

The Old Testament view of the soul as ceasing to function at death as the animating life-principle of the body raises some interesting questions regarding Jesus’ statement: “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul” (Mat 10:28). This text seems to suggest that the death of the body does not necessarily entail the death of the soul. This text is examined in the next chapter dealing with the New Testament view of human nature.

The Departure of the Soul. In addition to those passages we have just considered in which the soul—*nephesh* is associated with death, at least two texts deserve special consideration because they speak of the departure and return of the soul. The first is Genesis 35:8, which says that Rachel’s soul was “departing” as she was dying, and the second is 1 Kings 17:21-22, which tells of the soul of the widow’s son returning to him. These two texts are used to support the view that at death the soul leaves the body and returns to the body at the resurrection.

In his book *Death and the Afterlife*, Robert A. Morey appeals to these two texts to support his belief in the survival of the soul upon the death of the body. He writes: “If the authors of Scripture did not believe that the soul left the body at death and would return to the body at the resurrection, they would not have used such a phraseology [departing and returning of the soul]. Their manner of speaking reveals that they believed that man ultimately survived the death of the body.”³⁷

Can this conclusion be derived legitimately from these two texts? Let us take a closer look at each of them. In describing Rachel’s hard labor, Genesis 35:18 says: “And as her soul was departing (for she died), she called his name Benoni; but his father called his name Benjamin.” To interpret the phrase “her soul was departing” as meaning that Rachel’s immortal soul was leaving her body while she was dying, runs contrary to the consistent teaching of the Old Testament that the soul dies with the body. As Hans Walter Wolff

rightly points out, “We must not fail to observe that the *nephesh* [soul] is never given the meaning of an indestructible core of being, in contradistinction to the physical life, and even capable of living when cut off from that life. When there is a mention of the ‘departing’ (Gen 35:18) of the *nephesh* from a man, or of its ‘return’ (Lam 1:11), the basic idea is the concrete notion of the ceasing and restoration of breathing.”³⁸

The phrase “her soul was departing” most likely means that “her breathing was stopping,” or we might say, she was taking her last sigh. It is important to note that the noun “soul–*nephesh*” derives from the verb by the same root which means “to breathe,” “to respire,” “to draw breath.” The inbreathing of the breath of life resulted in man becoming a living soul, a breathing organism. The departing of the breath of life results in a person becoming a dead soul (“for she died”). Thus, as Edmund Jacob explains, “The departure of *nephesh* is a metaphor for death; a dead man is one who has ceased to breathe.”³⁹

Tory Hoff offers a similar comment: “Through the concrete image of the departure of breath, the text communicates that Rachel was in the process of dying while she named her newborn son. She was not yet dead in the modern sense of the word, but was ebbing closer to death by the moment. She was losing the *nephesh* vitality that *ruah* [breath] sustained to the degree that she would soon depart from *nephesh* existence.”⁴⁰ We conclude that the departure of the soul is a metaphor for death, most likely associated with the interruption of the breathing process. This conclusion is supported by the second text, 1 Kings 17:21-22, which we now examine.

The Return of the Soul. In relating the story of the raising to life of the widow’s son at Zarephath by Elijah the prophet, 1 Kings 17:20-22 says: “Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried to the Lord, ‘O Lord my God, let this child’s soul come into him again.’ And the Lord hearkened to the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.” It must be granted that, taken in isolation, this text could be taken to mean that the soul leaves the body at death and in this instance was recalled by Elijah’s prayer. This conclusion obviously would support the belief that the soul is immortal and survives the death of the body.

Three major reasons cause us to reject this interpretation. First, neither in this passage nor anywhere else in the Bible is there any indication that the human soul is immortal. On the contrary, we have found that the soul is the animating principle of life manifested in the body as long as the body is alive.

Second, in verse 17, the death of the boy is described as the cessation of breathing: “There was no breath left in him.” This suggests that as the

cessation of breathing caused the departure of the soul—*nephesh*, so the revival of breathing caused the return of the soul. As Edmund Jacob puts it: “In 1 Kings 17:17 lack of *neshamah* [breath] causes the departure of *nephesh*, which returns when the prophet gives the child breath again, for *nephesh* alone is what makes a living creature into a living organism.”⁴¹ Since breathing is the outward manifestation of the soul, the cessation or restoration of breathing causes the departure or return of the soul.

Third, in Hebrew, verse 21 literally reads: “Let this child’s soul come into his inward parts again.” This reading, which is found in the margin of the AV, puts a different construction on the passage. What returns to the inward parts is breathing. The soul as such is never connected with some “inward” organs of the body. The return of breathing in the inner parts results in the revival of the body, or, we might say, in the body becoming again a living soul.

Basil Atkinson perceptively observes that “the writer did not think of the soul as being the real child or carrying his personality. The child was lying dead on the bed and the *soul* came back to the child. Elijah did not think or say such words as are sometimes heard at modern funerals, ‘I can’t think of him as *here* any longer.’”⁴²

In the light of the above considerations, we conclude that the statement “the soul of the child came into him again” simply means that the child came to life again or the child began breathing again. This is the way the translators of the NIV understood the phrase by rendering it as “the boy’s life returned to him.” This is a perfectly intelligible way of understanding the text and is consistent with the rest of the Old Testament teaching.

Conclusion. Our study of the meaning of *nephesh*—soul in the Old Testament has shown that never once is the word used to convey the idea of an immaterial, immortal entity capable of existing apart from the body. On the contrary, we have found that the soul—*nephesh* is the animating principle of life, the life-breath, which is present in both human beings and animals. The soul is identified with blood because the latter is seen as the tangible manifestation of the vitality of life. At death, the soul ceases to function as the animating life-principle of the body. The fate of the soul is connected inextricably with the fate of the body because the body is the outward manifestation of the soul.

PART III: HUMAN NATURE AS BODY AND FLESH

Our study of the Old Testament view of the soul has already established that body and soul are an indivisible unity, namely, man as seen from two different perspectives. The body is the *physical reality* of human existence, the soul is the *vitality and personality* of human existence.

It is unfortunate that during much of Christian history the physical aspect of human nature has been depreciated and even vilified as undesirable and evil. The word “flesh” has been associated with immorality. The “sins of the flesh” invariably means sinful indulgences. The reason for this negative view is that “flesh” is a synonym for the body, and the body, according to classical dualism, which has enormously influenced Christian life and thought throughout the centuries, is bad, or at least suspect.

It is true that in the Bible “the flesh” does not represent the highest and noblest aspect of human nature. Paul especially speaks of the enmity that exists between the flesh and the spirit. But this does not mean that Paul or the rest of the Bible condemns the flesh or the body as ethically evil per se. Rather, the flesh is used metaphorically to represent the whole unregenerated person acting according to his natural sinful desires and propensities.

Historically, much of Christian spirituality and piety has been influenced by a negative view of the body as the seat of sin. The mortification of the flesh by depriving the body of food, warm clothing, or even the physical pleasure of a warm bath has been seen as indispensable for cultivating the spiritual life.⁴³ Thus, to straighten our Christian spirituality, it is imperative to recover the Biblical wholistic view of human nature, especially the positive view of the physical aspect of our existence.

Body Created by God. The creation story provides the logical starting point for the study of the Biblical attitude toward the physical aspect of human nature. The story tells us that matter, including the human body, was created by God. Matter is not an eternal principle of evil antagonistic to God, as in Plato’s *Timaeus*, but part of God’s good creation to accomplish His eternal purpose. The whole physical order, including the human body, has been created by God according to His eternal purpose.

Repeatedly, throughout the creation story we are told that God looked at what He had created and “saw that it was good” (Gen 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25). After He created man in His own image God, admired everything He had created and declared it “very good” (Gen 1:31). On the basis of the Biblical account of creation, we can assert that this material world is God’s good creation and it has a fitting place in His eternal purpose.

It is important to note also that God created man not of some divine spiritual substance, but “of dust from the ground” (Gen 2:7) and “in the image of God” (Gen 1:27). “There is no part of man that is of divine origin and that comes down to take up temporary residence in the alien ‘body.’ Man in no way participates in the divine nature. He is made of the dust of the ground, and his relationship to God is not that of a spark to the fire or a drop of water to the ocean but rather that of an image to the original. Thus there is nothing in man that establishes an identity or even a continuity between him and God, as the rational ‘soul’ does in the ‘religious [dualistic]’ view. Instead of identity, there is merely likeness; instead of continuity, there is radical discontinuity, as between creature and Creator.”⁴⁴

Physical Body Is Not Evil. The fact that the human body was created out of the material substance of the earth does not mean that matter is the source of evil in human life. In Platonic dualism, matter is the source and origin of evil. Evil is identified with matter, which is an eternal principle independent of and antagonistic to the good God. The identification of evil with matter has led to a pessimistic view of the body and of physical existence. It is unfortunate that this pessimistic view of the body has greatly influenced Christian thought and practice.

In the creation account of Adam and Eve, there is not the slightest hint that the physical body is to be blamed for their disobedience and fall. One popular Christian tradition interprets the original sin as consisting of an illicit act of sexual intercourse. Such an interpretation is totally devoid of Biblical support. The temptation to which Adam and Eve yielded was not the desire to have sex but to act as though they were God. Sex is God’s good creation in the same way as all the other physiological functions of the human body.

The temptation was, “You will be like God” (Gen 3:5). The origin of sin in human life has nothing to do with sexual intercourse or any other physical act of the body. Rather, it is to be found in the fact that man succumbed to the temptation to try to be like God, instead of being a reflector of God’s image. This has been the fundamental manifestation of sin, namely, to place self, rather than God, at the center of everything.

In the Bible, the origin of sin is found not in some defect in the physical constitution of the human body, but in the wrong, self-centered choice made by free human beings. Humanity today is in a sinful condition because people live self-centered lives rather than a God-centered existence. Because of this self-centeredness, the tremendous possibilities inherent in our human nature created in the image of God have been realized in a disastrously wrong way. “What are godlike possibilities become demonic actualities.”⁴⁵

The Biblical account of the creation and Fall of mankind locates the origin of sin not in the body, but in the mind, namely, in the desire to act and to think of oneself as being God. Sin is volitional, an act of the will, and not a biological condition of the body. The Bible has a healthy view of the body as the object of God's creation and redemption. This point becomes clearer as we examine the Old Testament meaning and usage of "flesh-*bashar*."

The Flesh as the Substance of the Body. The precise Hebrew term for the *whole* body is *geviyyah*, which is rare. It is used a dozen times to refer to a living or dead body (Gen 47:18; 1 King 31:10,12; Ez 1:11, 23; 1 Sam 31:10, 12; Dan 10:6). The common term used in the Hebrew Bible to designate the body is *bashar*, which technically means "flesh." *Bashar* occurs 266 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. Its most common meaning is the "flesh" that constitutes the body. An example of this usage is Genesis 2:21-24: "So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon man, and while he slept he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh [*bashar*]; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh [*bashar*].'"

Another example is found in Psalm 79:2 where the Psalmist laments: "They have given the bodies of thy servants to the birds of the air for food, the flesh [*bashar*] of the saints to the beasts of the earth." The parallelism indicates that flesh [*bashar*] is used as a synonym for the body. *Bashar* denotes the fleshly substance that human beings have in common with animals. Both man and animals are flesh. The account of the flood bears this out: "For behold, I will bring a flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh [*bashar*] in which is the breath of life from under heaven" (Gen 6:17; cf. 6:19; ; 9:17). "Bring forth with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh [*bashar*]-birds and animals, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Gen 8:17).

The above examples indicate that "flesh-*bashar*" stood for the substance of the body which man has in common with the lower orders of animals. The flesh is created by God who can destroy it as well as heal and restore it.

The Flesh as the Whole Man. There are texts in which the flesh-*bashar* stands for the whole person, not only as a fleshly substance, but as a rational and emotional being. "O God, thou art my God, I seek thee; my soul thirsts for thee; my flesh [*bashar*] faints for thee" (Ps 63:1). "My soul longs, yea, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh [*bashar*] sing for joy to the living God" (Ps 84:2). Job says of him who lies on his sickbed: "His

flesh [*bashar*] upon him shall have pain, and his soul within him shall mourn” (Job 14:22, KJV).

The parallelism in these texts between soul and flesh indicates that the flesh, like the soul, can function as the seat of emotions. Flesh and soul are not two different forms of existence, but two manifestations of the same person. The Biblical wholistic view makes it possible to use flesh and soul interchangeably because they are part of the same organism.

Flesh is also used to denote the kinship that binds people together as blood relatives or as members of the human family. Thus Judah counsels his brothers not to kill Joseph, “for he is our brother, our own flesh [*bashar*]” (Gen 37:27). A frequent formula to express blood relationship is “my bone and my flesh” (Gen 29:14; Jud 9:2; 2 Sam 5:1; 19:12). In the Flood story, “all flesh” (Gen 6:17, 19) denotes the larger bond of the human family.

The Flesh as Human Nature in his Weakness. Flesh–*bashar* is also used in the Bible to characterize the weakness and frailty of human nature. Hans Walter Wolff entitled the chapter on “Flesh–*Bashar*” as “Man in His Infirmary.”⁴⁶ The title reflects the frequent use of “flesh” in the Old Testament to denote human “nothingness” in the eyes of God. We read in Job 34:14-15: “If he [God] should take back his spirit to himself, and gather to himself his breath, all flesh [*bashar*] would perish together, and man would return to dust.” Because human beings are flesh (weak and frail), God remembers them: “He [God], being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, . . . He remembered that they were but flesh [*bashar*], a wind that passes and comes not again” (Ps 78:38-39).

In relationship to God, man is flesh, a creature dependent upon Him for continued existence. “All flesh [*bashar*] is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field” (Is 40:6). Because human beings are flesh, they are powerless before God. “In God I trust without fear. What can flesh [*bashar*] do to me?” (Ps 56:4; cf. Is 31:3). Consequently, it is imperative for human beings to trust in God and not in their “flesh” (human resources). “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh [*bashar*] his arm” (Jer 17:5). In this text, “flesh–*bashar*” denotes human opposition to God. The flesh is not ethically evil intrinsically. It may be weak, but not inherently sinful per se. When a “heart of stone” is turned into a “heart of flesh,” it becomes a heart that obeys God (Ez 11:19). Because of its natural endowments, the flesh can become proud, self-deceptive, and consequently antagonistic to God. The latter meaning carries over into the New Testament where Paul develops it more than the others authors.

Conclusion. Our study of the meaning and use of “flesh-*bashar*” in the Old Testament shows that the word generally is used to describe the *concrete reality* of human existence from the perspective of its frailty and feebleness. Contrary to classical dualism, the Old Testament never sees the flesh and the soul as two different forms of existence. Rather, they are manifestations of the same person and, consequently, they often are used interchangeably. A good example is Psalm 84:2, where the soul, the heart, and flesh all express the same longing for God: “My soul longs, yea, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh [*bashar*] sing for joy to the living God.” In the Old Testament view of human nature there is *nothing* that is merely physical. Any physical part of the human body can express psychological functions as well.

The wholistic view of human nature made it possible for the Bible writers to see the body and the soul as expressions of the same organism. Pedersen rightly notes that “the proposition that the soul is flesh, is indissolubly connected with the converse, i. e., that the flesh is soul.”⁴⁷ The two are indissolubly connected because the body is the outward form of the soul and the soul the inward life of the body.

PART IV: HUMAN NATURE AS HEART

In the Biblical view of human nature, the heart is the central and unifying organ of personal life. The Hebrew words translated “heart” are *leb* and *lebab*, which are found together 858 times.⁴⁸ This makes the heart the most common of all the terms used to describe human nature. Walther Eichrodt notes that “there is hardly a spiritual process which could not be brought into some connection with the heart. It is made the organ equally of feeling, intellectual activities, and the working of the will.”⁴⁹

The heart in Biblical thought is the spring of individual life, the ultimate source of the physical, intellectual, emotional, and volitional energies, and, consequently, the part of the person that normally has contact with God. In the recesses of the heart are the thoughts, the attitudes, the fears, and the hopes which determine the personality or character of the individual. Many of the functions of the heart correspond to the functions of the soul. This is because in the Biblical view of human nature, no radical distinction exists among the various aspects of the individual.

The Heart as the Seat of Emotions. All the emotions of which a person is capable are attributed to the heart. “The heart can be glad (Prov 27:11; Acts 14:17), sad (Neh 2:2), troubled (2 Kings 6:11, KJV), courageous

(2 Sam 17:10), discouraged (Num 32:7), fearful (Is 35:4), envious (Prov 23:17), trustful (Prov 31:11), generous (2 Chron 29:31), moved by hatred (Lev 19:17) or love (Deut 13:3).”⁵⁰

The emotions of the heart are portrayed vividly and concretely. The heart is said to fail (Gen 42:28), to faint (Gen 45:26), to throb (Ps 38:10), to tremble (1 Sam 28:5), to be stirred up (Prov 23:17; Deut 19:6), to be sick (Prov 13:12). The state of the heart dominates every manifestation of life. “A glad heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken” (Prov 15:13). Even health is affected by the condition of the heart. “A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones” (Prov 17:22).

The Inner Parts as the Seat of Emotions. For the sake of clarity, we must add that the seat of emotions is found not only in the heart but also in the inner parts of the human body, referred to in Hebrew by the term *qereb*, “bowels.” What is striking is that the Old Testament views some of the inner parts of the body as the location or source of the higher human capacities. As Hans Walter Wolff observes, “The inner parts of the body and its organs are at the same time the bearer of man’s spiritual and ethical impulses.”⁵¹

A few examples will serve to illustrate this point. Jeremiah asks the people of Jerusalem: “How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you [*qereb*–bowels]?” (Jer 4:14). Here the “bowels” are the location of evil thoughts. Proverbs 23:16 pledges: “My reins [*kelayot*–kidneys] shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right things.” The Psalmist thanks God for counseling him and because “my reins [*kelayot*–kidneys] also instruct me in the night seasons” (Ps 16:7).

Elsewhere, the Psalmist associates the kidneys with the heart as the most sensitive organs: “Then my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins [*kelayot*–kidneys]” (Ps 73:21). Here the kidneys function as the conscience of the individual. The liver, too, can serve to express deep grief. Jeremiah laments: “My eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver [*kabed*] is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people” (Lam 2:11). This brief digression into the inner parts of the body was intended to show that these can sometimes function as the seat of emotions, in the same way as the heart. This is possible because in Biblical wholistic thought a part of the person can sometimes represent the whole organism.

The Heart as the Seat of the Intellect. In the greatest number of cases, the heart in the Bible denotes the center of intellectual life, precisely what we ascribe to the head or the brain. Contrary to our Western culture

where the heart is associated primarily with emotions and feelings, in the Bible the heart is the reasoning center of the person that determines what the person is: “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Prov 23:7, KJV).

Proverbs 15:14 describes the essential function of the heart in the Biblical sense: “The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge” (KJV). The heart seeks knowledge not merely for the sake of knowledge but to enable the individual to make moral, responsible decisions. It is highly significant that the term “heart—*leb*” occurs by far the most frequently in the wisdom literature (99 times in Proverbs alone, 42 times in Ecclesiastes, and 51 times in the strongly didactic book of Deuteronomy).⁵²

Solomon’s great wisdom consisted in the fact that he asked not for long life or riches, but for an understanding heart: “Give thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?” (1 King 3:9). The understanding heart Solomon asked for is what we would call a discerning mind. Because of its concrete character, the Hebrew language can hardly express the idea “to think,” except by the phrase “to say in the heart” (Gen 27:41; Ps 10:6). It is with the heart that a person plans (Prov 16:9, KJV), seeks knowledge, understands (Eccl 8:16), and meditates on the deep things of life (Ps 4:4).

Being the center of reason, the heart is also the center of the will and hence of the moral life. The heart can plan wicked things (Prov 6:18) and become perverted (Prov 11:20). It may be lifted up with pride (Deut 8:14), become hardened (Zech 7:12), be stubborn (Jer 3:17), or turned away from God (1 Kings 11:2). On the other hand, the good heart is perfect (1 Kings 8:61), or blameless (Ps 119:80), clean (Ps 51:10), and upright (Ps 32:11). The heart can be cleansed (Ps 73:13) or renewed (Ez 18:31). A new heart makes it possible to internalize the will of God as revealed in His law (Ez 11:19; 36:26).

The Heart Communicates with God. As the reasoning center of the human personality, the heart is capable of communicating with God. The heart speaks to God (Ps 27:8), receives His word (Deut 30:14), and trusts in Him (Ps 28:7). God can give man an understanding heart (1 Kings 3:9) or take all understanding away (Job 12:24). For His mysterious purposes, God can harden the heart (Ex 4:21) or can soften it (Ezra 6:22).

Since as a result of the Fall, the heart is inclined to evil, the transformation of the heart occurs by divine grace. God promises to write His law in human hearts (Jer 31:33) and to create a new heart in human beings (Ps 51:10). He will take away the hardened heart and replace it with a receptive heart (Ez

36:26). In the New Testament we are told that God has poured out His love in human hearts (Rom 5:5). Christ dwells in the human heart (Eph 3:17) and His peace reigns there (Col 3:15).

Conclusion. This brief survey of the functions of the heart in the Old Testament shows that the heart is the center and source of all religious, intellectual, and moral activities. More than any other Old Testament term, the heart stands for the deepest center of human existence, for what a person really is in the depth of his being. As stated in 1 Samuel 16:7: “Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

In many ways, the heart is the unifying center of the whole person, body and soul. Some of the functions of the heart overlap with those of the soul, but this is not surprising because from the Biblical wholistic perspective, there is no radical distinction between the soul and the heart. Jesus said: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Mat 22:37).

“The heart,” writes Pedersen, “is the totality of the soul as a character and operating power . . . *nephesh* is the soul in the sum of its totality, such as it appears; the heart is the soul in its inner value.”⁵³ What is said about the soul often can be applied to the heart. The functional unity we have found among body, soul, and heart negates the dualistic view of human nature, which detaches the soul from the body. The fact that the spiritual and moral functions of human nature, which dualists view as a prerogative of the soul, are most often attributed to the heart, shows that in the Bible the soul does not exist and function as a distinct, immaterial essence apart from the body.

PART V: HUMAN NATURE AS SPIRIT

So far, we have seen that the Old Testament defines human nature as a unity, man, who is *soul* (living being) from one aspect, *flesh* (physical being) from another aspect, and *heart* (rational being) from yet another aspect. There is one more important aspect to be considered, namely, man as spirit. The term “spirit” translates the Hebrew *ruach* and its New Testament equivalent *pneuma*. We study the latter in chapter 3 where we examine the New Testament view of human nature.

The study of the presence of God’s Spirit in human beings is important because dualists often identify God’s Spirit in a person with the soul given by God to each individual and returning to Him at death. Thus, our concern is to establish, first, the nature of God’s Spirit in a person, and second, whether the spirit in human beings is a distinct and separate component of human nature or an indivisible aspect of it.

A mere glance at the statistical use of the term “spirit–*ruach*” in the Old Testament shows that there are at least two unique things about this term that occurs a total of 389 times. First, no less than 113 times *ruach*–spirit denotes the natural power of the wind. Thus, it is a term associated with the manifestation of power. Second, 35 per cent of the time (136 times) *ruach*–Spirit refers to God. Only 33 per cent of the time (129 times) does it refer to men, animals, and false gods. This is surprising in view of the fact that “flesh–*bashar*” is never applied to God, and “soul–*nephesh*” only is applied to God in 3 per cent of the cases (21 times).⁵⁴

On the basis of this statistical data, Hans Walter Wolff rightly concludes that “*ruach* [spirit] must from the very beginning properly be called a theo-anthropological term,”⁵⁵ that is to say, a term with divine-human connotations. The Bible applies *ruach*–spirit to both God and man. It speaks of the Spirit of God and the spirit of man. To understand the Biblical concept of man’s spirit, it is important to understand the Biblical meaning of God’s Spirit. We shall endeavor to do this by examining especially how God’s Spirit works within human nature.

The Meaning of “Spirit–*Ruach*.” The Hebrew term generally translated “spirit” is *ruach*, which literally means “air in motion, wind.” Thus in Genesis 1:2, the Spirit–*ruach* of God moves over the waters and in Isaiah 7:2, “the trees of the forest shake before the wind [*ruach*].” Wolff points out that *ruach* does not mean static air but “moving air”⁵⁶ that generates considerable power. It is not surprising that the formidable power of the wind [*ruach*] is often seen as a manifestation of the power of God. The east wind [*ruach*] brings locusts (Ex 10:13). A powerful wind [*ruach*] dries up the Red Sea (Ex 14:21). A strong wind [*ruach*] blows over the earth and causes the flood waters to subside (Gen 8:1).

The power manifested by the wind is associated in Scripture with the breath of God, which is His creative and sustaining power. We encounter this usage for the first time in Genesis 2:7: “Then the Lord formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath [*neshamah*] of life, and man became a living soul.”

Earlier we examined this great text to ascertain the connection between “breath of life” and “living soul.” Now we seek to understand more fully what “the breath of life” is that caused man to become a living soul. The Hebrew word used for breath here is not *ruach*–spirit but the rarely used *neshamah*–breath. The meaning of the two terms is similar, as indicated by the fact that they appear in parallel in five passages (Is 42:5; Job 27:3; 32:8; 33:4; 34:14,15). Job 33:4 says: “The spirit [*ruach*] of God has made me, and

the breath [*neshamah*] of the Almighty gives me life.” Again, “If he 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 dust” (Job 34:14-15).

In these verses, *neshamah* and *ruach* are used as synonyms, yet there appears to be a slight difference between the two terms. *Neshamah* denotes calm, peaceful, physical breathing, while *ruach* describes a more active and dynamic form of breathing. *Ruach* appears also to be the agent that makes breathing possible. “As long as my breath [*neshamah*] is in me, and the spirit [*ruach*] of God is in my nostrils . . .” (Job 27:3). Here the breath–*neshamah* is in the person, while the spirit–*ruach* is in the breathing through the nostrils. “Thus says God, the Lord, . . . who gives breath [*neshamah*] to the people upon it, and spirit [*ruach*] to those who walk in it.” (Is 42:5). Here spirit–*ruach* means more than breathing because it is given only to “those who walk in it.” It would seem that the breath–*neshamah* is one of the manifestations of God’s Spirit–*ruach*. The latter has broader meanings and functions. One of the functions of God’s Spirit is to give and sustain life through the breathing process. “Man’s vital breath is God’s gift; he breathes by courtesy of God’s Spirit.”⁵⁷

It is interesting to note that the marginal reading of Genesis 7:22 in the Authorized Version translates “the breath of life” as “the breath of the spirit of life.” This literal translation of the Hebrew conveys the idea that the breath of life [*neshamah*] derives from the Spirit [*ruach*] which gives life. Commenting on this text, Basil Atkinson writes: “The *neshamah* [breath] seems to be a property or portion of the *ruach* [Spirit] and to be concerned with what we today would call the physical life. The *ruach* which is also a principle of life is much wider. It produces and sustains the inner as well as the outer life of man, his intellect, abstract thoughts, emotions and desires as well as covering the whole action of the *neshamah* on the physical life.”⁵⁸

The Spirit as Life Principle. The parallel use of *neshamah*–breath of life and *ruach*–Spirit in the cited texts shows that the “breath of life” is the life-giving Spirit of God manifested in the creation of human life and of the universe as a whole. “O Lord how manifold are thy works! . . . the earth is full of thy creatures. . . . When thou hidest thy face, they are dismayed; when thou takest away their breath [*ruach*], they die and return to their dust. When thou sendest forth thy Spirit [*ruach*], they are created, and thou renewest the face of the ground” (Ps 104:24, 29-30). “Breath” and “Spirit” here translate *ruach*, thus indicating that the “breath of life” is equated with the life-giving Spirit of God who creates and renews “the face of the ground.”

There are numerous texts in the Old Testament in which the spirit—*ruach* refers to the life principle present in human beings. In Isaiah 38:16, we find Hezekiah saying, “In all these things [that is, in the mercies of God] is the life of my spirit [*ruach*].” The phrase “the life of my spirit” most likely refers to Hezekiah’s recovery of his health, since the text continues, saying: “Oh, restore me to health and make me live!” (Is 38:16). Here the spirit—*ruach* is clearly identified with life. There is no suggestion that the spirit in man is an independent and immortal component of human nature. Rather, it is the animating principle of life visible through the breathing.

Idols which have no life are described as without “breath-*ruach*.” “Every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols; for his images are false, and there is no breath [*ruach*] in them” (Jer 10:14). “Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath [*ruach*] at all in it” (Hab 2:19). In both texts, *ruach* is translated “breath” because breathing is a manifestation of God’s Spirit in human nature. It is evident that idols are lifeless because they are without *ruach*, the animating principle of life that enables a person to breathe.

In describing the fate of King Zedekiah at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah uses an interesting and intelligible figure of speech: “The breath [*ruach*] of our nostrils, the Lord’s anointed, was taken in their [Babylonian] pits” (Lam 4:20). Here Zedekiah is thought of as the very life—*ruach* of the nation that was taken away when the king was led into captivity. We have here a clear example of *ruach* denoting the principle of life.

Speaking of Samson, Judges 15:19 says: “When he had drunk, his spirit [*ruach*] returned, and he revived” (Jud 15:19). This revival is not from death but from exhaustion. We find exactly the same use in 1 Samuel 30:12 and Daniel 10:17. In all these instances, the spirit-*ruach* denotes the physical renewal of life. Being the life-giving agent, the spirit-*ruach* fittingly can represent also the physical renewal of life. The connection between spirit-*ruach* and life is evident.

In his famous vision of the valley of dry bones, Ezekiel provides a most vivid example of the vivifying power of God’s Spirit—*ruach*: “Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath [*ruach*] to enter you, and you shall live . . . and you shall know that I am the Lord . . . ‘Come from the four winds, O breath [*ruach*], and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.’ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath [*ruach*] came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet” (Ezek 37:5, 6, 9-10). Here the breath of God is His life-giving Spirit, as in the creation of man. The life-giving Spirit is identified with God’s breath because its manifestation caused

dead bodies to come alive and breathe again. Breathing is a tangible manifestation of life and thus it provides a fitting metaphor for the animating life principle of the spirit.

The Spirit as God's Word. In Psalm 33:6 we find an interesting parallelism between God's breath and His Word: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath [*ruach*] of his mouth." Here God's breath—*ruach* acts as a synonym for God's Word, because both proceed from His mouth. The parallelism suggests that God's breath is more than moving air. It is the creative *power of life* manifested through the spoken word of God.

Another example in which God's word is associated with *ruach*—spirit is found in Psalm 147:18: "He sends forth his word, and melts them [the frozen waters]; he makes his wind [*ruach*] blow, and the waters flow." Here God's word is associated with *ruach*—breath or wind, presumably because speech is produced by breathing and proceeds from the mouth. God is described analogically in accordance with the human process of speaking through breathing.

We must never forget that the Hebrews described things as they saw them, concretely and not abstractly. They saw that speech was caused by breathing, so it was natural for them to associate God's breath with His word. Thus, God's breath should be understood not as moving air, but as the life-giving power manifested through His spoken word. When God speaks, things happen, because His word is not empty speech, but life-giving power.

The Spirit as Moral Renewal. The renewal or re-creation accomplished by God's Spirit is not only physical but also moral. David prayed: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit [*ruach*] within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit [*ruach*] from me" (Ps 51:10-11). The "new and right spirit [*ruach*]" is a person's right disposition toward God which is made possible by God's "holy Spirit [*ruach*]." Thus the spirit—*ruach* is both God's Spirit and man's spirit. God gives the Spirit to create and sustain life. Man receives the Spirit to live in accordance with God's will. Friedrich Baumgartel writes: "The Spirit of God is a creative, transforming power, and its purpose is to create a sphere of religion and morals."⁵⁹

In Ezekiel we find the spirit—*ruach* used three times for the new regenerate principle of life that God places within the believer when he is converted (Ez 11:19; 18:31; 36:26). "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit [*ruach*] I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ez 36:26). Here the "new spirit—

ruach” is associated with “a new heart,” because we have found that the heart is the mind, or reasoning center of the individual. The “new spirit—*ruach*” is an attitude of willing obedience to God’s commandments that comes from a renewal of the mind (Rom 12:2). This meaning is clarified by the very next verse: “And I will put my spirit [*ruach*] within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances” (Ez 36:27). It is through the enabling power of God’s Spirit that our mind is renewed, so that we can live in accordance with the moral principles God has revealed for our well-being.

The Spirit as God’s Enabling Power. The Spirit of God is manifested not only in creating and sustaining life, but also in equipping individuals for specific tasks. When God commissioned Gideon to deliver the Israelites from the tyranny of Midian, “The Spirit [*ruach*] of the Lord took possession of Gideon. . . .” (Jud 6:34) and enabled him to lead the Israelites to victory. It was the Spirit of the Lord that equipped Gideon for the task, because he questioned his own qualifications: “Pray, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family” (Jud 6:15).

The same thing happened to Jephthah: “The Spirit [*ruach*] of the Lord came upon Jephthah. . . . Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight them, and the Lord gave them into his hand” (Jud 11:29, 32). In such instances God’s Spirit enabled certain Israelite leaders to perform superhuman deeds at critical moments.

God’s Spirit was also given to national leaders to carry out God’s plan for Israel. When the “Spirit of the Lord” came upon Saul, he was “turned into another man” (1 Sam 10:6). Similarly, when Samuel anointed David to succeed Saul as king, “the Spirit [*ruach*] of the Lord came upon David from that day forward” (1 Sam 16:13). Note that when David was anointed king, “the Spirit [*ruach*] of the Lord departed from Saul” (1 Sam 16:14). The Spirit that departed from Saul could hardly have been his soul that went up to God, since he was still alive. The withdrawal of the Spirit disqualified Saul as king of Israel, while the giving of God’s Spirit to David qualified him to rule over the people.

It is evident that the Spirit God gave to Gideon and Jephthah to judge and to David to rule is not the same “breath of life” that is present in every human being. The latter is the principle of life that animates every human being, while the former is God’s Spirit given to chosen individuals to equip them for a special mission. In the case of Bezazel, for example, God’s Spirit equipped him with special skills for the building of the sanctuary. “I have filled him with the Spirit [*ruach*] of God, with ability and intelligence, with

knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for the work of every craft” (Ex 31:3-4).

God’s Spirit commissioned prophets to communicate special messages to the people. Ezekiel says: “When he spoke to me, the Spirit [*ruach*] entered into me and set me upon my feet; and I heard him speaking to me” (Ez 2:2). Repeatedly, the prophets say that the Spirit of the Lord came upon them. Zechariah speaks of “the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by his Spirit [*ruach*] through the former prophets” (Zech 7:12).

The giving of God’s Spirit is seen as an official divine commissioning. In Isaiah 61, the Servant of the Lord, the Messiah, is anointed by the Spirit for His mission: “The Spirit [*ruach*] of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound” (Is 61:1). Joel prophesied of the messianic time when God’s Spirit would be poured out on every believer: “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit [*ruach*] on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions” (Joel 2:28). In these instances, God’s Spirit functions not as the animating principle of physical life, but as the Agent that equips believers for service.

The Spirit as the Disposition of an Individual. The idea of power manifested by the spirit—*ruach* is carried over into what we would call the disposition or dominant impulse of an individual. A living person has drives or impulses that dominate him, or at least try to, and which he must overcome. This is often expressed in the Old Testament by the term spirit—*ruach*, and characterizes the human spirit often antagonistic to God. Hosea complains that “a spirit [*ruach*] of harlotry” has led the priests astray (Hos 4:12). Ezekiel denounced “the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit [*ruach*] and have seen nothing” (Ez 13:3). Psalm 78:8 speaks of the wilderness generation “whose spirit [*ruach*] was not faithful to God.” Proverbs 25:28 compares a man who cannot “rule over his own spirit [*ruach*]” to a city without walls. Ecclesiastes says that “the patient in spirit [*ruach*] is better than the proud in spirit [*ruach*].” In all these instances, the spirit denotes an attitude of obedience or disobedience to God. Thus, it is not to be confused with the life-giving function of God’s Spirit.

Sometimes the spirit—*ruach* is the seat of grief, generally referred to in Hebrew as “bitterness of spirit.” We are told that the people of Israel “did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit [*ruach*] and their cruel

bondage” (Ex 6:9). Hannah told the priest, “I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit [*ruach*]: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have poured out my soul before God” (1 Sam 1:15, KJV). Here the sorrowful spirit is compared to the emptying of the soul before God.

The spirit and the soul are mentioned together because both represent the vitality of life affected by sorrow. In Proverbs 15:13, we read that “by sorrow of the heart the spirit [*ruach*] is broken.” Here we find that the heart is the seat of sorrow, but the sorrow breaks the spirit or the inner life of a person. The interaction between spirit and soul, or heart and spirit, reminds us of the Biblical wholistic view of human nature, its various aspects all being part of the one, indivisible human being.

There are instances in which spirit–*ruach* is the seat of emotions. Proverbs 16:32 says: “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit [*ruach*] than he who takes a city.” To rule one’s spirit means to control one’s temper or anger. In several instances, *ruach* is translated as “anger” (Jud 8:3; Ez 3:14; Prov 14:29; 16:32; Ecc 7:9; 10:4). In other texts, *ruach* denotes courage: “And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no courage [*ruach*] left in any man, because of you [the people of Israel]” (Jos 2:11).

There are also passages in which spirit–*ruach* is used with the meaning of sadness: “For the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit [*ruach*]” (Is 54:6). “The Lord is near to the broken-hearted, and saves the crushed in spirit [*ruach*]” (Ps 34:18).⁶⁰ Spirit–*ruach* can also denote contrition and humility. Thus, we have the beautiful passage in Isaiah 57:15: “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit [*ruach*], to revive the spirit [*ruach*] of the humble.” Again in Isaiah 66:2: “But this is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit [*ruach*].”

This brief survey of the various usages of spirit–*ruach* in the Old Testament has shown that the spirit is a life principle deriving from God and maintaining human life. In a figurative way, the spirit–*ruach* is used to refer to the inner moral renewal, good and evil dispositions, dominant impulses, grief, courage, sadness, contrition, and humility. None of the usages we have studied suggests that the spirit retains consciousness or personality when it leaves a person at death. The function of the spirit as a life-giving and sustaining principle ceases when the person dies.

The Departure of the Spirit at Death. Eleven passages in the Old Testament speak of the departure or removal of the spirit at death.⁶¹ Of these, four deserve special attention because they are often used to support the belief

that at death the spirit goes to God, bearing with it the personality and consciousness of the individual who passed away.

In foreshadowing the Lord's death on the Cross, Psalm 31:5 says: "Into thy hand I commit my spirit [*ruach*]." The "spirit" that Christ committed into the hands of His Father was nothing else than His human life which He was leaving in the hands of His Father to await its resurrection. As the animating principle of His life left Him, the Lord died and sank into unconsciousness.

Speaking of marine creatures, the Psalmist says: "When thou takest away their breath [*ruach*] they die and return to their dust" (Ps 104:29). No one will argue that the spirit—*ruach* that God takes away from the fish at death carries consciousness and personality. We have reason to believe that the same is true for human beings, because the same expression is used for both. In fact, in the following verse, the creation of animals is described by means of God's life-giving Spirit, as is the creation of man: "When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created" (Ps 104:30).

As the creation of life is metaphorically represented by the sending forth of God's Spirit, so the termination of life, death, is described as the withdrawal or removal of God's breath. The latter is clearly expressed in Job 34:14-15: "If he 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 dust." Again, the same thought is expressed in the well-known passage of Ecclesiastes 12:7: "The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit [*ruach*] returns to God who gave it."

These last two texts are very important, because they are commonly quoted to support the belief that the "spirit—*ruach*" that returns to God is the soul that leaves the body at death carrying consciousness and personality. This interpretation lacks Biblical support for four major reasons. First, nowhere in the Bible is God's breath or Spirit identified with the human soul. The existence of the soul depends upon the presence of God's life-giving breath [*neshamah*] or spirit [*ruach*]. And when the life-giving spirit is withdrawn, a person ceases to be a living soul and becomes a dead soul. Thus the Psalmist says, "His breath [*ruach*] goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (Ps 146:4, KJV).

Second, nowhere does the Bible suggest that the life-giving spirit that returns to God continues to exist as the immaterial soul of the body that has died. On the contrary, the Bible teaches that when God withdraws his breath of life or spirit of life, the outcome is not the survival of the soul, but the death

of the total person. “His thoughts perish” (Ps 146:4), because there is no more consciousness. Death applies to both the body and the soul, because, as we have seen, the two are inseparable. The body is the outward form of the soul and the soul is the inner form of the body.

Third, the spirit that returns to God refers to all men (“all flesh”), not only to the godly. Those who argue that the spirit of all people, saved and unsaved, go to God for judgment ignore that Scriptures clearly teach that the judgment takes place not at death, but at the coming of the Lord at the end of the world.

Fourth, the Bible never suggests that the breath of life makes its possessor deathless or immortal. In not one of the 389 instances of the use of *ruach*–spirit in the Old Testament is there any suggestion that *ruach*–spirit is the intelligent entity of human nature capable of existence apart from a physical body. On the contrary, the Bible speaks of the death of those who possess the breath of life: “For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath [*ruach*] of life; everything that is on the earth shall die [*gava*–cease to breathe]” (Gen 6:17). “And all flesh died that moved upon the earth . . . everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath [*ruach*] of life died [*gava*–cease to breathe]” (Gen 7:21-22).

It is evident from texts such as these that to possess the breath or the spirit of life does not mean to have an immortal soul. The breath of life is simply the gift of life given to human beings and animals for the duration of their earthly existence. The spirit or the breath of life that returns to God at death is simply the life principle imparted by God to both human beings and animals. This point is clearly made in Ecclesiastes 3:19: “For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath [*ruach*], and man has no advantage over the beasts.” Those who argue that the animals do not have the spirit (*ruach*) of life but only the breath (*neshamah*) of life, ignore the point that both Ecclesiastes 3:21 and Genesis 7:15, 22 plainly state that animals possess the same spirit–*ruach* of life given to human beings.

There is no indication in the Bible that the spirit of life given to man at creation was a conscious entity before it was given. This gives us reason to believe that the spirit of life has no conscious personality when it returns to God. The spirit that returns to God is simply the animating life principle imparted by God to both human beings and animals for the duration of their earthly existence.

Conclusion. We have come to the end of our survey of four prominent terms used in the Old Testament to describe human nature, namely, *soul*, *body*, *heart*, and *spirit*. We have found that these terms represent not different entities, each with its own set of functions, but rather different functions that are interrelated and integrated within the same organism. The Old Testament views human nature as a unity, not a dichotomy. There is no contrast between the body and the soul, such as these terms may suggest to us.

The soul is not an immaterial, immortal part of human nature standing over against the body, but designates the vitality or life principle in human nature. The latter is composed of a form consisting of dust and a vital principle, called occasionally breath (*neshamah*) and usually spirit (*ruach*), breathed into him by God. The body and the divine breath together make the vital, active soul–*nephesh*. The seat of the soul is the blood, because it is seen as the tangible manifestation of the vitality of life.

From the principle of life the term “soul–*nephesh*” is extended to include the feeling, passions, will, and the personality of an individual. It then came to be used as a synonym for man himself. People are numbered as souls (Gen 12:5; 46:27). Death affects the soul–*nephesh* (Num 23:10) as well as the body.

The spirit–*ruach*, which literally means “air in motion, wind,” is often used of God. God’s spirit–*ruach* is His breath, that is, His power manifested in creating and sustaining life (Ps 33:6; 104:29-30). The human breath–*ruach* comes from God’s breath–*ruach* (Is 42:5; Job 27:3). In a figurative sense, the spirit–*ruach* is expanded to refer to the inner moral renewal, good and evil dispositions, emotional and volitional life, thus overlapping somewhat with the soul–*nephesh*. The difference between the soul–*nephesh* and spirit–*ruach* is that the former designates mostly a living person in relationship to other human beings, while the latter refers to a person in relationship to God. However, we have found that neither the soul nor the spirit is considered as a part of human nature capable of surviving the death of the body.

The Old Testament references to the flesh or the body never suggest that bodily functions are purely biological and independent of the psychological functions of the soul. There is no distinction in the Old Testament between physical and spiritual organs, because the entire roster of higher human functions such as feeling, thinking, knowing, loving, keeping God’s commandments, praising, and praying are equally attributed to the “spiritual” organs of the soul (or spirit) and to the “physical” organ of the heart and, occasionally, to the kidneys and viscera.

Bodily organs perform psychical functions. Thus the heart thinks, the kidneys rejoice, the liver grieves, and the bowels feel sympathy. This is possible because in the wholistic view of human nature a part of the person can sometimes represent the whole organism.

The references to the departure (Gen 35:18) and return (1 King 17:21-22) of the soul cannot be legitimately used to support the view that at death the soul leaves the body and returns to it at the resurrection. We have found that the departure of soul is a metaphor for death, indicating that the person has ceased to breathe. Similarly, the return of the soul is a metaphor for the restoration of life, indicating that the person has started breathing again. What is true of the soul is also true of the breath of life or spirit that returns to God at death. What returns to God is not an immortal soul, but simply the animating principle of life imparted by God to both human beings and animals for the duration of this earthly existence.

Ralph Walter Doermann essentially comes to the same conclusion in his doctoral dissertation “Sheol in the Old Testament,” presented in 1961 at Duke University. He wrote: “It is evident from the Hebrew view of the psychosomatic unity of man that there is little room for a belief in the ‘immortality of the soul.’ Either the whole person lived or the whole person went down to death, the weakest form of life. There was no independent existence for the *ruach* [spirit] or the *nephesh* [soul] apart from the body. With the death of the body, the impersonal *ruach* [spirit] ‘returned to God who gave it’ (Eccl 12:7) and the *nephesh* was destroyed, though it was present in a very weak sense in the bones and the blood. When these were buried or covered over, the little vitality that remained was nullified.”⁶³

Summing up our conclusion, we can say that the Old Testament wholistic view of human nature rules out the distinction between body and soul as two completely different realms of reality. Furthermore, it removes the basis for the belief in the survival of the soul at the death of the body. Our next step is to establish whether the New Testament supports or modifies the Old Testament wholistic view of human nature. This question is addressed in the following chapter.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. P. E. Hughes, *Hope for a Despairing World* (Grand Rapids, 1997), p. 50.
2. For a survey of the various interpretations of the image of God in man, see H. D. McDonald, *The Christian View of Man* (Westchester, Illinois, 1981), pp. 33-41.
3. For example, C. Ryder Smith asserts that both the Hebrew words and their Greek equivalents suggest a physical resemblance between God and man (*The Bible Doctrine of Man* [London, 1951], pp. 29-30). Similarly, H. Gunkel appeals to the stark anthropomorphic way in which God is described in the Old Testament (*The Legend of Genesis* [Chicago, 1901], pp. 8-10).
4. R. Laird-Harris, *Man—God's Eternal Creation: A Study of Old Testament Culture* (Chicago, 1971), p. 24.
5. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* I, XV, 3 (London, 1949), Vol. 1, pp. 162, 165.
6. This view is expressed by Paul Jewett, who follows Karl Barth in regarding the image of God in man as precisely that of male and female. He declares: "Genesis 1:27b ('male and female created he them') is an exposition of 1:27a ('in the image of God created he him')" (*Man: Male and Female* [Grand Rapids, 1975], p. 33).
7. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1974 ed., s.v. "Soul."
8. Claude Tresmontant, *A Study in Hebrew Thought* (New York, 1960), p. 94. This is a highly recommended book on the difference between Greek and Hebrew thought.
9. Aubrey Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel* (Cardiff, Wales, 1964), p. 19.
10. Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (London, 1926), Vol. 1, p. 99.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.
12. Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, 1974), p. 10.
13. Dom Wulstan Mork, *The Biblical Meaning of Man* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1967), p. 34.

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14. Johannes Pedersen (note 10), p. 171.
 15. H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Christian Doctrine of Man* (Edinburg, 1952), p. 27.
 16. Dom Wulstan Mork (note 13), p. 34.
 17. Norman Snaith, "Justice and Immortality," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 17, 3, (September 1964), pp. 312-313.
 18. Basil F. C. Atkinson, *Life and Immortality* (London, n. d.), pp.1-2.
 19. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
 20. *Ibid.*
 21. Tory Hoff, "Nephesh and the Fulfillment It Receives as *Psyche*," in *Toward a Biblical View of Man: Some Readings*, eds. Arnold H. De Graaff and James H. Olthuis (Toronto, 1978), p. 103.
 22. Basil F. C. Atkinson (note 18), p. 17.
 23. The tabulation is from Basil F. C. Atkinson (note 18), p. 3.
 24. Hans Walter Wolff (note 12), p. 10.
 25. Tory Hoff (note 21), p. 98.
 26. *Ibid.*
 27. *Ibid.*
 28. Hans Walter Wolff (note 12), p. 25.
 29. Dom Wulstan Mork (note 13), p. 40.
 30. *Ibid.*
 31. W. David Stacey, *The Pauline View of Man* (London, 1956), p. 87.
 32. Dom Wulstan Mork (note 13), p. 41.
 33. Johannes Pedersen (note 10), p. 179.
 34. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
 35. Edmund Jacob, "Nephesh," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, 1974), Vol. 9, p. 621.
 36. Johannes Pedersen (note 10), p. 171.
 37. Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis, 1984), p. 49.

38. Hans Walter Wolff (note 12), p. 20.

39. Edmund Jacob (note 35), p. 619.

40. Tory Hoff (note 21), p. 101.

41. Edmund Jacob (note 35), p. 618.

42. Basil F. C. Atkinson (note 18), p. 10.

43. The monastic rules clearly reveal how important it was to mortify the flesh by providing the body only with what was indispensable for survival, in order to cultivate the well-being of the soul. The Benedictine rule, for example, makes allowance for the use of baths to the sick, but restricts them to the healthy: "The use of baths shall be offered to the sick as often as necessary: to the healthy, and especially to youths, more rarely" (Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* [Oxford, 1967], p. 121).

44. D. R. G. Owen, *Body and Soul* (Philadelphia, 1956), p. 167.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

46. Hans Walter Wolff (note 12), pp. 26-31.

47. Johannes Pedersen (note 10), p. 178.

48. The tabulation is from Hans Walter Wolff (note 24), p. 40.

49. Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, 1967), Vol. 2, p. 143.

50. R. C. Dentan, "Heart," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, 1962), Vol. 2, p. 549.

51. Hans Walter Wolff (note 24), p. 66.

52. The tabulation is from Hans Walter Wolff (note 24), p. 40.

53. Johannes Pedersen (note 10), p. 104.

54. The tabulation is from Hans Walter Wolff (note 24), p. 32.

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*

57. Dom Wulstan Mork (note 13), p. 73.

58. Basil F. C. Atkinson (note 18), p. 18.

59. Friedrich Baumgartel, "Spirit of God," *Bible Key Words* (New York, 1961), p. 1.

60. See also Ez 21:12; Ex 6:9; Is 61:3; 65:14; Dan 7:15.

61. The Old Testament references to the departure or removal of the spirit at death are: Ps 31:5; 76:12; 104:29-30; 146:4; Job 34:14-15; Ecc 3:19-21; 8:8; 12:7.

63. Ralph Walter Doermann, "Sheol in the Old Testament" (Ph. D. dissertation, Duke University, 1961), p. 205.

Chapter III

THE NEW TESTAMENT VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE

In our Bibles, the first page of the New Testament follows immediately the last page of the Old Testament. This may suggest to uninformed readers that there is no time gap between the two Testaments. In reality, about four centuries separate them. During this inter-testamental period, the Jewish people were exposed, both at home in Palestine and abroad in the diaspora (dispersion), to the very influential Hellenistic (Greek) culture and philosophies. The impact of Hellenism on Judaism is evident in many areas, including the adoption of Greek dualism by some Jewish literary works produced at that time.

The Jewish literature produced during the inter-testamental period is generally known as apocryphal and the pseudepigraphal.¹ Most Christians do not regard these non-canonical books as divinely inspired and authoritative as the books of the Bible. This does not diminish their historical value, since they are a major source of information about historical and ideological developments of the time.

Regarding human nature and destiny, two major schools of Jewish thought developed during the inter-testamental period. The first, Palestinian Judaism, remained true to the Old Testament wholistic view of human nature and provides the major background for the understanding of the New Testament. Palestinian Judaism viewed death as an unconscious sleep of the whole person and emphasized the necessity of the final resurrection of the body. The importance of this view for the study of the New Testament may be illustrated by the apocryphal *Apocalypse of Baruch* (known as *2 Baruch*), which was written by a Palestinian Jew in the latter half of the first century of the Christian era. The author teaches that the dead “sleep in the earth” and when Messiah returns “all who have fallen asleep in hope of Him shall rise again.”² All the righteous will be gathered in a moment and the wicked will

grieve because the time of their torment has arrived.³ Such a view is strikingly similar to the New Testament teaching of the resurrection of the body which is part of the complex of ideas that was “foolishness” to the Greeks (1 Cor 1:23).

The second school of thought is Hellenistic Judaism, which was largely influenced by Greek dualism. Hellenistic Judaism flourished especially in Alexandria, the home of Philo, the well-known Jewish philosopher who attempted to work out a synthesis of Greek and Hebrew ideas. In the writings of Hellenistic Jews, we find clear references to the survival and immortality of the soul. Disembodied existence seems to be the eternal destiny of the saved. For example, the apocryphal *Book of Jubilees* (about 135 B. C.) teaches that “the bones” rest in the grave while the “spirits” live independently: “And their bones shall rest in the earth, and their spirits shall have much joy, and they shall know that it is the Lord who executes judgment, and shows mercy to . . . all that love Him” (23:31).⁴

In a similar vein *The Wisdom of Solomon*, written by a Hellenistic Jew between 50 and 30 B. C., says that “the souls of the righteous are in the hands of God, and no torment will ever touch them . . . they are at peace . . . their hope is full of immortality” (3:1, 3, 4).⁵ The same view is found in *4 Maccabees*, a philosophical treatise written by a Hellenistic Jew just before the Christian era. The righteous dead *ascend* immediately to eternal bliss,⁶ while the wicked *descend* to eternal torment, varying in intensity.⁷

In summation, during the inter-testamental period, as aptly expressed by Wheeler Robinson: “The dualistic interpretation of the relation of body and soul (or spirit) is found in the Hellenistic line of Judaism (Wisd. 9:15); but it is alien to the Palestinian line, which directly links the thought of the Old Testament with that of much of the New.”⁸

In approaching the study of the New Testament view of human nature, we cannot ignore the possible influence of Hellenistic Judaism on the writers of the New Testament books. After all, with the possible exception of Matthew, all the New Testament books were written in Greek and use the four great Greek anthropological words: *psyche*—soul, *pneuma*—spirit, *soma*—body, and *sarx*—flesh. These words were commonly used in New Testament times with a Greek dualistic meaning. The soul and spirit denoted the immaterial and immortal part of human nature, while the body and the flesh described the material and mortal part.

The question then is: To what extent is the dualistic meaning of these important Greek words reflected in the writings of the New Testament?

Surprisingly, as we shall see in this chapter, the dualistic meaning and usage of these terms is absent in the New Testament. Even those passages which appear to be dualistic in their contrast between flesh and spirit, upon closer scrutiny reveal a wholistic understanding of human nature. Flesh and spirit do not stand for two separate and opposing parts of human nature, but rather for two different kinds of lifestyle: self-centered versus God-centered.

The reason for the absence of dualistic influence in the New Testament is that its writers used the important Greek words of human nature in accordance to their original equivalents in the Old Testament, where the ideas originated, and not according to the meanings prevailing in Hellenistic society.

We need always to bear in mind that “the link between the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament is the great Septuagint (Greek) version of the Old Testament made at Alexandria in the third century B. C. The translation was made by Jews, who of course understood the meaning of the Hebrew words and intended the Greek they used to answer it. Thus the Septuagint follows the Hebrew and the New Testament follows the Septuagint. The Septuagint version was not inspired, but in the providence of God it provided this valuable linguistic link between the Old and New Testaments.”⁹

The assimilation of Greek dualism into the Christian tradition occurred after the New Testament was written. J. Robinson gives some excellent examples of how Paul used Greek words according to the meaning of the corresponding Hebrew words, and not according to the prevailing Greek usage. For example, Paul’s phrase “the mind of the flesh” (Col 2:18), made no sense to the Greek mind, because the mind (*nous*) was always associated with the soul (*psyche*) and never with the flesh. Similarly, Paul’s references to the *spiritual body* (1 Cor 15:44, 46) and to the defilement of flesh *and* spirit (2 Cor 7:1) “would have been an absurdity to the Greeks”¹⁰ because according to them the body was not spiritual and the spirit could not be defiled. Indications such as these show that the New Testament view of human nature reflects the Hebrew (Old Testament) and not the Greek way of thinking.

Objectives of the Chapter. This chapter seeks to understand the New Testament view of human nature by examining the four prominent anthropological terms, namely, *soul*, *spirit*, *body*, and *heart*. These are the same four terms that we examined in the previous chapter in our study of the Old Testament view of human nature. The various meanings and usages of these terms are studied to determine if they follow the meanings and usages of the corresponding Hebrew terms in the Old Testament.

Our study shows that a definite continuity exists between the Old and New Testaments in the wholistic understanding of human nature. The notion of the immortality of the soul, though popularly believed by others at the time the New Testament was written, is absent from the writings of the New Testament because its writers were faithful to the teachings of the Old Testament.

The New Testament reveals not only continuity with the Old Testament in the understanding of human nature and destiny, but also an expanded understanding in the light of the incarnation and teachings of Christ. After all, Christ is the real head of the human race, since Adam “was a type of the one who was to come” (Rom 5:14). While in the Old Testament human nature is related primarily to Adam by virtue of creation and the Fall, in the New Testament human nature is related to Christ by virtue of His incarnation and redemption. Christ is the fullness of revelation about human nature, meaning, and destiny. Christ gives a deeper meaning to the human soul, body, and spirit because the immediate effect of His redemption was the giving of His Spirit who “dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:17).

PART I: HUMAN NATURE AS SOUL

The Greek word *psyche*—soul is used in the New Testament in accordance with the basic meanings of the Hebrew *nephesh*—soul that we found in the Old Testament. We briefly review the basic meaning of *psyche*—soul, giving special attention to the expanded meaning of the word in the light of Christ’s teachings and redemptive ministry.

Soul as Person. The soul—*psyche* in the New Testament denotes the whole person in the same sense as *nephesh* in the Old Testament. For example, in his defense before the Sanhedrin, Stephen mentions that “seventy-five souls—[*psyche*]” of Jacob’s family went down to Egypt, a figure and usage found in the Old Testament (Gen 46:26-27; Ex 1:5; Deut 10:22). On the day of Pentecost, “three thousand souls—[*psyche*]” (Acts 2:41) were baptized and “fear came upon every soul—[*psyche*]” (Acts 2:43). Speaking of Noah’s family, Peter says that “eight souls—[*psyche*] were saved by water” (1 Pet 3:20). It is evident that in texts such as these the “soul-*psyche*” is used as a synonym for person.

Within this context, we mention Christ’s famous promise of rest to the “souls—[*psyche*]” of those who accept His yoke (Matt 11:28). The expression “rest for your souls—[*psyche*]” comes from Jeremiah 6:16, where rest for the

soul is promised to people who walk according to God's commandments. The rest which Christ gives to the soul, as Edward Schweizer points out, "differs completely from what we find in the Greek world, where the soul finds rest when it is liberated from the body, for here the unity and totality of man are upheld. It is in his physical acts in obedience that man finds God's rest."¹¹ Christ gives rest (inner peace and harmony) to the souls of those who accept His gracious provision of salvation ("Come to me") and live in accordance to the principles of life He taught and exemplified ("learn of me").

Soul as Life. The most frequent meaning of the word soul—*psyche* in the New Testament is "life." According to one reckoning, 46 times *psyche* is translated "life."¹² In these instances, "life" provides a fitting translation of the Greek *psyche* because it is used in reference to physical life. To facilitate the identification of the word soul—*psyche* found in the Greek text, *psyche* will be translated literally as "soul" in places where the RSV renders it as "life."

At the height of the storm, Paul reassured the members of the ship that "there will be no loss of souls [*psyche*] among you, but only of the ship" (Acts 27:22; cf. 27:10). In this context, the Greek *psyche* is correctly translated "life" because Paul is talking about the loss of lives. An angel told Joseph: "Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's soul [*psyche*] are dead" (Matt 2:20). This is one of the many references to the seeking, killing, and saving of the soul—*psyche*, all of which suggest that the soul is not an immortal part of human nature, but the physical life itself which can be in danger. In accordance with the Old Testament, the soul—*psyche* is put to death when the body dies.

Jesus associated the soul with food and drink. He said: "Do not be anxious about your soul [*psyche*], what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not the soul [*psyche*] more than food and the body more than clothing?" (Matt 6:25). Here the soul—*psyche* is associated with food and drink and the body (the visible exterior) with clothing. By associating the soul with food and drink, Jesus shows that the soul is the physical aspect of life, though He explains that there is more to life than food and drink. Believers can raise their desires and thoughts to heavenly things and live for Christ and eternity. Thus, Christ expanded the meaning of the "soul" by including the higher life or eternal life He came to offer mankind. The fact remains, however, that by associating the soul with food and drink, Christ shows that the soul is the physical aspect of our existence and not an immaterial component of our nature.

Saving the Soul by Losing It. In the Old Testament, we found that the soul—*nephesh* is used frequently to denote the uncertainty of life, constantly facing the possibility of harm or even destruction. Consequently, the ancient Israelites were concerned about saving their soul, delivering their soul, restoring their soul to safety, and sustaining their soul through provisions, especially food. In this context, it must have been perplexing for the Jews to hear Christ saying: “Whoever would save his soul [psyche] will lose it; and whoever loses his soul [psyche] for my sake and the gospel’s will save it” (Mark 8:35; cf. Matt 16:25; 10:39; Luke 9:24; 17:33; John 12:25).

The impact of Christ’s statement upon the Jews must have been dramatic, because He had the audacity to proclaim that their souls could be saved only by losing them for His sake. The notion of saving the soul through losing it was unknown to the Jews because it is not found in the Old Testament. Christ demonstrated His teaching by acting in a way that culminated in His own crucifixion. He came “to give his soul [psyche] as a ransom for many” (Matt 20:28). As the Good Shepherd, He “laid down his soul [psyche] for the sheep” (John 10:11). By teaching that in order to save one’s soul, it is necessary for one to lose it, to give it up, and to lay it down, Christ expanded the Old Testament meaning of *nephesh*—soul as physical life by making it inclusive of the eternal life received by those willing to sacrifice their present life (soul) for His sake.

We find confirmation for Christ’s expanded meaning of soul in John’s rendering of the same saying: “He who loves his soul [psyche] loses it, and he who hates his soul [psyche] in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:25). The correlation between “this world” and “eternal life” indicates that soul—*psyche* is used to refer to both earthly and eternal life. In John’s rendering of Christ’s saying, it is evident that the soul is not immortal, because, as Edward Schweizer points out, “otherwise we should not be called upon to hate it. *Psyche* is the life which is given to man by God and which through man’s attitude towards God receives its character as either mortal or eternal. . . . Hence we never read of the *psyche aionios* or *athanatos* [eternal or immortal soul], only of the *psyche* [soul] which is given by God and kept by Him to *zoe aionios* [life eternal]”¹³

The meaning of soul as eternal life appears also in Luke 21:19, where Christ says: “By your endurance you will gain your soul [psyche].” The context indicates that Christ is not speaking of the preservation of earthly life, because He predicts that some of his followers will be betrayed and put to death (v. 16). Here the soul—*psyche* is plainly understood as eternal life attained by those willing to make a total, sacrificial commitment to Christ.

The promise that the soul–life will be saved when it is sacrificed for Christ shows that what Christ had in view is the true and full life which He offers to those who accept Him as their Savior. The life in Christ does not differ from natural life because it is the life experienced by those who are freed from trying to preserve it. It is a released, liberated, and open life, which gives a sense of fulfillment to the natural life. This is the expanded meaning that Christ gave to the soul; a meaning which negates the notion of the soul as an immaterial, immortal entity that coexists with the body.

The Apostolic Church grasped this expanded meaning of the soul as denoting a life of total commitment to the Savior. Judas and Silas became men who “risked their soul [*psyche*] for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 15:26). Epaphroditus risked “his soul [*psyche*]” for the work of Christ (Phil 2:30). The Apostle Paul himself testified: “I do not account my soul [*psyche*] of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20: 24). If Paul believed that the soul is immortal, it is unlikely that he would have viewed it of no value and worth losing for the sake of the gospel. These texts show that the Apostolic Church lived out the new expanded meaning of the soul by living a life of total, sacrificial commitment to Christ. Believers understood that their soul as physical life could be saved only by consecrating it to the service of Christ.

The most foolish mistake anyone can make is “to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul [*psyche*]” (Mark 8:36). It is this soul–*psyche*, the life that transcends death, that is the primary object of redemption (Heb 10:39; 13:17; James 1:21; 1 Pet 1:9, 22). While the term “soul” is used considerably less frequently in the New Testament than in the Old Testament, these key passages indicate a significant expansion of its meaning. The term came to include the gift of eternal life received by those who are willing to sacrifice their present life for Christ’s sake.

In very few instances is the soul–*nephesh* used in the Old Testament to denote life that transcends death. An example is Psalm 49:15: “God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me.” It is this meaning of soul as life beyond death that is expanded in the teaching of Jesus about losing and finding the soul. The continuity between the present and the future life is guaranteed, not by the indwelling of an immortal soul in man but by the faithfulness of God who will give eternal life to believers.

The physical life and the eternal life are not two different realities, because they are both given by God. The soul encompasses both because

eternal life is the physical life lived for God. After all, the physical life is the only form of existence we know. But the ambivalent meaning of the soul serves to remind us that human life is not just health and wealth; it is a life lived in relationship with God.

The twofold Biblical meaning of the soul as physical and eternal life negates the Hellenistic distinction between body and soul, between the life of the body on earth and the life of the soul in heaven. From a Biblical perspective, the life of the body is the life of the soul, because the way a person lives this present life determines the destiny of the soul as either eternal life or eternal destruction. The soul, then, is not a substance which survives the body at death; it is the life we live by God's grace and which will be revealed and consummated by God at the Last Judgment.

The Soul and the Flesh. One important text in the New Testament makes the soul—*psyche* to stand in clear antithesis to the flesh—*sarx*. It is found in 1 Peter 2:11 where the Apostle says: “Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh [*sarx*] that wage war against your soul [*psyche*].” Edward Schweizer states that this is the most Hellenistic use of the soul in the New Testament, since the plain antithesis between soul—*psyche* and flesh—*sarx* can suggest a dualistic composition of human nature.¹⁴

A closer look at the text, however, shows that Peter was influenced not by Greek dualism but by the Old Testament understanding of the soul—*nephesh*. In the Old Testament, we found that the soul—*nephesh* was constantly in danger and needed to be protected. The same is true in Peter's admonition. The difference is that Peter is referring to an “internal” enemy that attacks the soul from within. The enemy is the carnal passions that wage war against the soul by causing a person to live only to satisfy the physical appetites.

Peter views the soul not as an immaterial entity that survives the body at death, but as the life of faith sanctified by obedience to God's revealed truth. He expresses this view in the same epistle saying: “As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls [*psyche*]” (1 Pet 1:9), “having purified your souls [*psyche*] by your obedience to the truth” (1 Pet 1:22). Since the salvation of the soul (eternal life) is the outcome of a life of faithful obedience to the truth, carnal passions threaten the soul (eternal life) because they cause a person to live unfaithfully and disobediently to the truth. Thus, the antithesis between flesh and soul in this passage is ethical and not ontological, that is, it is between a life of disobedience (flesh) and one of obedience (soul). We shall soon see that Paul expresses the same antithesis by contrasting the flesh with the spirit.

God Has Power to Destroy the Soul. This expanded meaning of the term soul–*psyche* helps us understand a well-known and yet much misunderstood saying of Christ: “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul [*psyche*]; rather fear him who can destroy both the soul [*psyche*] and the body in hell” (Matt 10:28; cf. Luke 12:4). Dualists find in this text support for the concept that the soul is an immaterial substance that is kept safe and survives the death of the body. Robert Morey, for example, contends that “Christ here [Matt 10:28] plainly says that while we can kill or cut off the physical life of a body, we cannot kill or harm the soul, i. e., the immaterial transcendent self, mind or ego. He employs the body/soul dichotomy which is found throughout the Scripture.”¹⁴

This interpretation reflects the Greek dualistic understanding of human nature and not the Biblical wholistic view. The reference to God’s power to destroy the soul [*psyche*] and the body in hell negates the notion of an immaterial, immortal soul. How can the soul be immortal if God destroys it with the body in the case of impenitent sinners? Oscar Cullmann rightly notes that “we hear in Jesus’ saying in Matthew 10:28 that the soul can be killed. The soul is not immortal.”¹⁵

In the preceding discussion, we have seen that Christ expanded the meaning of the soul–*psyche* to denote not only physical life but also eternal life received by those who are willing to make a sacrificial commitment to Him. If this text is read in the light of the expanded meaning given by Christ to the soul, the meaning of the saying is: “Do not fear those who can bring your earthly existence (body–*soma*) to an end, but cannot annihilate your eternal life in God; but fear God who is able to destroy your whole being eternally.”

The Death of the Soul Is Eternal Death. Christ’s warning hardly teaches the immortality of the soul. Rather it teaches that God can destroy the soul as well as the body. Edward Fudge rightly remarks that “unless Jesus is making idle threats, the very warning implies that God will execute such a sentence on those who persistently rebel against His authority and resist every overture of mercy.”¹⁶ Fudge continues by saying, “Our Lord’s warning is plain. Man’s power to kill stops with the body and the horizon of the Present Age. The death man inflicts is not final, for God will call forth the dead from the earth and give the righteous immortality. God’s ability to kill and destroy is without limit. It reaches deeper than the physical and further than the present. God can kill both body and soul, both now and hereafter.”¹⁷

Luke reports Christ’s saying, omitting the reference to the soul. “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I

will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after killing the body, has power to throw you into hell.” (Luke 12:4-5). Luke omits the word soul–*psyche*, referring instead to the whole person God can destroy in hell. It is possible that the omission of the term “soul–*psyche*” was intentional to prevent a misunderstanding in the mind of Gentile readers accustomed to think of the soul as an independent and immortal component that survives death. To make it clear that nothing survives God’s destruction of a person, Luke avoids using the term “soul–*psyche*” that could have confused his Gentile readers.

We find confirmation for this interpretation in Luke 9:25, where he again omits the term *psyche*–soul: “For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself [*eauton*].” Presumably, Luke used here the pronoun “himself” instead of soul–*psyche*, as used in Mark 8:36, because the latter, as Edward Schweizer suggests, “might be misconstrued [by Gentile readers] as the punishment of the soul after death.”¹⁸ By using instead the pronoun “himself,” Luke indicates that Jesus meant the loss of the whole person.

When we bear in mind Christ’s expanded meaning of the term “soul,” then the meaning of His saying becomes clear. To kill the body means to take the present life on earth. But this does not kill the soul, that is, the eternal life received by those who have accepted Christ’s provision of salvation. Taking the present life means putting a person to sleep, but a person is not finally destroyed until the second death, which, as we shall see, is equated in Scripture with hell.

The meaning of Christ’s saying in Matthew 10:28 is illustrated by His declaration that Jairus’ daughter was not dead but asleep (Matt 9:24). She was actually dead (“kill the body”), but, since she was going to wake up at the resurrection, she could rightly be said to be asleep. Her final destiny had not yet been decided. In the same way, since all the dead will be resurrected on the last day, as they lie in their graves their soul, that is, the life they have lived for or against Jesus Christ, is still awaiting its final destiny: eternal salvation for believers and eternal destruction for unbelievers. The latter is the destruction of body and soul in hell that Jesus warned about.

The preservation of the soul in Christ’s teaching is not an automatic process within the power of the soul itself, but a gift from God received by those who are willing to sacrifice their soul (present life) for Him. This expanded meaning of the soul is closely related to the character or personality of a believer. Evil people or forces can kill the body, the physical life, but they

cannot destroy the soul, the character, or personality of a believer. God has committed Himself to preserving the individuality, personality, and character of each believer. At His coming, Christ will resurrect those who have died in Him, restoring to them their soul, that is, their distinct character and personality.

The Soul of a Dead Body. In the light of the preceding discussion, we look now at another frequently misinterpreted statement made by Paul at the raising of Eutychus. During a farewell meeting at Troas where Paul spoke at length, a young man, Eutychus, sank into a deep sleep, fell from the third story, and died. In Acts 20:10, we read that “Paul went down and bent over him, and embracing him said, ‘Do not be alarmed, for his soul [*psyche*] is in him.’”

This event is parallel to the times when Elijah (1 King 17:17) and later Elisha (2 Kings 4:32-36) lay upon a child whose soul [*nephesh*] returned to him. Dualists interpret these episodes as indicating that the soul is an independent entity that can return after leaving the body. This interpretation is discredited by two major considerations. First, in the case of Eutychus, Paul said, “his soul [*psyche*] is in him,” though his body lay dead. This means that Paul did not believe that the soul is an immaterial entity that leaves the body at death. The soul was still in Eutychus, not because it had not yet departed, but because upon embracing the young man, Paul sensed that his breathing was returning and thus he was coming back to life. He was still a living soul.

Second, to understand what happened in the case of Eutychus and of the child raised by Elijah and Elisha, we need to remember that the Bible views death as creation in reverse. At creation, man became a living soul when the body made of the dust of the ground began to breathe as a result of the divine inbreathing of the breath of life. At death, a person ceases to be a living soul when the body takes the last breath and returns to dust. In the case of Eutychus and the children, their breathing miraculously returned and so they again became living souls.

Paul and the Soul. In comparison with the Old Testament, or even the Gospels, the use of the term soul–*psyche* in Paul’s writings is rare. He uses the term only 13 times¹⁹ (including quotations from the Old Testament) to refer to physical life (Rom 11:3; Phil 2:30; 1 Thes 2:8), a person (Rom 2:9; 13:1), and the seat of emotional life (Phil 1:27; Col 3:23; Eph 6:6). It is noteworthy that Paul never uses *psyche*–soul to denote the life that survives death. The reason could be Paul’s fear that the term *psyche*–soul might be understood by his Gentile converts according to the Greek view of innate immortality.

To ensure that the new life in Christ would be viewed wholly as a divine gift and not as an innate possession, Paul uses the term *pneuma*—spirit, instead of *psyche*—soul. Later in this chapter, we examine Paul’s use of the term “spirit.” The Apostle certainly acknowledges a continuity between the present life and the resurrection life, but since he sees it as God’s gift and not something found in human nature, he uses *pneuma*—spirit instead.²⁰

In his famous passage on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul shows that he uses soul—*psyche* in accordance with the Old Testament meaning of physical life. He explains that the first Adam became “a living soul [*psyche*]” and the last Adam (Christ) a “life-giving spirit [*pneuma*].” He applies the same distinction to the difference between the present body and the resurrection body. He writes: “It is sown a physical [*psychikon*] body, it is raised a spiritual [*pneumatikon*] body” (1 Cor 15:44). The present body is *psychikon*, literally “soul-ish” from *psyche*—soul, denoting a physical organism subject to the law of sin and death. The future, resurrected body is *pneumatikon*, literally “spiritual” from *pneuma*—spirit, meaning an organism controlled by God’s Spirit.

The resurrected body is called “spiritual,” not because it is nonphysical but because it is ruled by the Holy Spirit, instead of carnal impulses. This becomes evident when we note that Paul applies the same distinction between the natural—*psychikos* and the spiritual—*psychikos* to the present life in 1 Corinthians 2:14-15. Here Paul distinguishes between the natural man—*psychikos*, who is not guided by God’s Spirit, and the spiritual man [*psychikos*], who is guided by God’s Spirit.

No Natural Immortality. It is evident that for Paul the continuity between the present and the future body is to be found not in the expanded meaning of the soul that we have found in the Gospels, but in the role of the Spirit of God that renews us in newness of life both now and at the resurrection. By focusing on the role of the Spirit, Paul negates the immortality of the soul. For him it is very important to clarify that the new life of the believer both in the present and the future is wholly a gift of God’s Spirit. There is nothing inherently immortal in human nature.

The expression “immortality of the soul” does not occur in Scripture. The Greek word commonly translated “immortality” in our English versions of the Bible is *athanasia*. This term occurs only twice in the New Testament, the first time in connection with God “who alone has immortality [*athanasia*] and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see” (1Tim 6:16). Obviously, immortality here means more than endless exist-

ence. It means that God is the source of life (John 5:26) and all other beings receive eternal life from Him.

The second time, the word “immortality–*athanasia*” occurs in 1 Corinthians 15:53-54 in relation to mortal nature, which puts on immortality at the resurrection: “For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality [*athanasia*]. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality [*athanasia*], then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’” Paul is not speaking of the natural immortality of the soul, but of the transformation from mortality to immortality that believers will experience when Christ returns. The implications of this passage are clear: human nature is not endowed with any form of natural immortality, because it is perishable and mortal. Immortality is not a present possession; it is a gift to be bestowed upon believers at Christ’s coming.

In Plato’s philosophy, the soul is considered indestructible, because it partakes of an uncreated and eternal substance which the body does not possess. It is unfortunate that this Platonic dualism has blinded the mind of even such a great Reformer as Calvin, who went so far as saying that “hardly one, except Plato, has rightly affirmed [the soul’s] immortal substance.”²¹ He continues: “Indeed, from Scripture we have already taught that the soul is an incorporeal substance; now we must add that, although properly it is not spatially limited, still, set in the body, it dwells there as in a house; not only that it may animate all its parts and render its organs fit and useful for their actions, but also that it may hold the first place in ruling man’s life, not alone with respect to the duties of his earthly life, but at the same time to arouse him to honor God.”²²

It is hard to believe that so diligent a student of the Bible as Calvin could so grossly misinterpret the teachings of the Bible regarding human nature. This serves to remind us how easily the human mind can become so conditioned by error that it fails to discern Biblical truth. In the Bible, the soul is not an “incorporeal and immortal substance,” but the physical and regenerated life, created and sustained by God and dependent upon Him for its existence.

There is no inherent quality in human nature that can make a person indestructible. The Christian Hope is based not on the immortality of the soul but on the resurrection of the body. If we want to use the word “immortality” with reference to human nature, let us speak not of the immortality of the soul, but rather of the immortality of the body (whole person) by means of the

resurrection. It is the resurrection that bestows the gift of immortality on the body, that is, on the whole person of the believer.

Soul as the Mortal Aspect of Human Nature. Paul's definition of the present body as *psychikon*—physical (literally “soulish”), that is, corruptible and mortal, clearly shows that he identified the soul with the physical and mortal aspect of our human existence. This is in accordance with the Old Testament view of the soul—*nephesh* as the physical and mortal aspect of life. It is evident that the notion of the immortality of the soul is totally absent from Paul's teachings and from the Bible as a whole. But this definition of the soul poses a problem. How does one reconcile the notion that human beings are by nature mortal with Paul's statement in Romans 5:12 that death came into this world “through sin,” and not because of the mortal physical human nature?

The resolution of this apparent contradiction is to be found in recognizing that, as stated by Wheeler Robinson, “Paul conceived man to be mortal by his original nature, but with the prospect of immortality; this, however, he forfeited when he was driven forth from Eden, and therefore from the tree of life, which would have nourished immortality in him; thus came death through sin.”²³

Paul does not explain how man through disobedience forfeited the possibility of becoming immortal. His concern is to show how Christ has redeemed us from the tragic consequence of sin, death. Paul's teachings, however, support what he may have seen as two complementary truths: the actual mortality of human nature on the one hand and the justice of that mortality as a penalty for human disobedience.

Soul and Spirit. The distinction between soul and spirit appears in two other important New Testament passages that we need to consider briefly. The first is 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and the second, Hebrews 4:12. Writing to the Thessalonians Paul says: “May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:23).

Some appeal to this text to defend the view that man was made a tripartite being at creation, consisting of a body, soul, and spirit, each of which is a separate entity. Catholics reduce the three to two by merging the spirit with the soul. The new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* refers to this text to explain that “‘spirit’ signifies that from creation man is ordered to a supernatural end and that his soul can gratuitously be raised beyond all it deserves to communion with God.”²⁴ For Catholics, the spirit and the soul are

essentially one, because it is the spirit that creates each soul as a spiritual, immortal entity. As the *Catechism* puts it: “The Church teaches that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God – it is not ‘produced’ by the parents – and also it is immortal: it does not perish when it separates from the body at death.”²⁵

This traditional Catholic teaching ignores the fundamental Biblical wholistic view of human nature. According to the Bible, the soul is not an immortal substance that separates from the body at death, but the physical and mortal life, which can become immortal for those who accept God’s gift of eternal life. To make the Spirit subservient to the alleged “spiritual” and immortal nature of the soul means to ignore that a vital function of God’s Spirit is to give life to our mortal bodies: “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you” (Rom 8:11).

We should observe, first, that 1 Thessalonians 5:23 is not a doctrinal statement but a prayer. Paul prays that the Thessalonians may be totally sanctified and preserved blamelessly until the coming of Christ. It is evident that when the Apostle prays that the spirit, soul, and body of the Thessalonians may be preserved blamelessly he is not trying to split human nature into three parts, any more than Jesus intended to split human nature into four parts when He said: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30).

“Spirit, Soul, and Body.” The key to understanding Paul’s reference to the “spirit, soul, and body” in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 is the fact that the apostle is addressing believing Christians who, while they are still in the flesh (body), possess two natures: the original Adamic nature received at birth (the soul) and the new spiritual nature created within them by the enabling power of the Spirit. The Adamic nature, as we have seen earlier, is called “soul–*psyche*” and denotes the various aspects of the physical life associated with the soul in the Bible. The spiritual nature is called “spirit” because it is God’s Spirit that renews and transforms the human nature. The body is, of course, the outward, visible part of the person.

Paul’s prayer for the Thessalonians to keep their “soul–*psyche*” sound and blameless for Christ’s coming means that they were to live not only for the physical life (Matt 6:25; Acts 20:24), which is threatened by death, but also for the higher, eternal life that transcends death. Similarly, Paul’s prayer

for the Thessalonians to keep their body sound and blameless means that they would “not gratify the desires of the flesh (Gal 5:16) or produce “the works of the flesh” such as fornication, impurity, and licentiousness (Gal 5:19).

Finally, Paul’s prayer for them to keep their spirit sound and blameless means that they would be led by the Spirit (Gal 5:18) and produce “the fruit of the Spirit” such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness (Gal 5:22). Thus, Paul’s prayer for the Thessalonians to keep the body, soul, and spirit sound and blameless is not intended to list the structural components of the human nature, but to emphasize the total lifestyle of those who await Christ’s coming. The distinction between the three is ethical and not ontological.

The second text in which the same contrast appears between soul and spirit is found in Hebrews 4:12: “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing the division of soul [*psyche*] and spirit [*pneuma*], of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” The issue here is whether God’s Word separates the soul and spirit or whether it pierces them both. Edward Schweizer aptly observes that “since the parting of the bones and marrow is hard to imagine, the text is probably saying that the Word has penetrated the *pneuma* [spirit] and *psyche* [soul] as it has the bones and marrow.”²⁶

Keeping in mind that the soul and the spirit denote, respectively, the physical and spiritual aspects of human life, the text says that the Word of God penetrates and scrutinizes the whole human existence, even the very inwardness of our being. The study of the Scripture reveals to us whether our desires, aspirations, emotions, and thoughts are inspired by God’s Spirit or by carnal, selfish considerations. The text simply says that God’s Word penetrates into the innermost recesses of our being, bringing to light the secret motives for our actions.

In some ways, this passage is parallel to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:5: “The Lord will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.” Therefore, one has no reason to interpret Hebrew 4:12 as teaching a structural distinction in human nature between the soul and the spirit.

The above passages that distinguish between the soul and the spirit have nothing to say about the immortality of the soul. They do not suggest that one member of the pair could survive separation from the other at death or that they refer to different substances. On the contrary, the role of the Spirit of God

as the agent of moral renewal in this present life and of resurrection to eternal life at the end negates the notion of the immortality of the soul because the only immortality is that which is granted by God's Spirit at the end.

The Soul as the Place of Feeling and Reasoning. The preceding discussion has shown that the term "soul-*psyche*" is generally used in the New Testament to denote physical life which can become eternal life when lived by faith for Christ's sake. Few instances exist where the term soul-*psyche* is used as the seat of feeling and the source of thoughts and actions. The Christians in Antioch were troubled by false instructions coming from persons who "unsettled [their] soul-*psyche*" (Acts 15:24). Here the "soul-*psyche*" refers to the mind of the believers who were confused by misleading instructions.

A similar usage of the term is found in John 10:24 where the Jews ask Jesus: "How long will you keep our souls [*psyche*] in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Here the "soul-*psyche*" is the mind with which decisions are made for or against Christ. The soul as mind can be influenced toward the good as well as toward the bad. Thus, we read that Paul and Barnabas came to Antioch "strengthening the souls-*psyche* of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith" (Acts 14:22). In this instance, the souls are the persons who were influenced or moved in thought and feeling.

In Luke 12:19, we find an interesting example where the "soul" refers to both physical and psychical activities. The rich man whose land had brought forth plentifully said: "I will say to my soul-*psyche*, Soul-*psyche*, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry" (Luke 12:19). Although here the emphasis is on the physical aspect of life, such as eating, drinking, and being merry, the fact that the soul expresses self-satisfaction suggests a psychical function. In the following verse, God pronounces His judgement on such a self-satisfied soul: "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you'" (Luke 12:20). The text suggests that the life or death of the soul is ultimately the gift or punishment of God.

All the synoptic Gospels report the famous saying of Christ where the soul is used as a perfect parallel of the heart: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul [*psyche*], and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30; cf. Matt 22:37; Luke 10:37). In this saying, quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5, the heart, soul, mind, and strength are each used to express the emotional and rational love-commitment to God.

Conclusion. Our survey of the New Testament use of the term “soul–*psyche*” indicates that there is no support for the notion of the soul as an immaterial and immortal entity that survives the death of the body. There is nothing in the word *psyche*–soul that even remotely implies a conscious entity able to survive the death of the body. Not only does the New Testament fail to endorse the notion of the immortality of the soul, but it also clearly shows that the soul–*psyche* denotes the physical, emotional, and spiritual life. The soul is the person as a living being, with its personality, appetites, emotions, and thinking abilities. The soul describes the whole person as alive and thus inseparable from the body.

We found that though Christ expanded the meaning of soul–*psyche* to include the gift of eternal life received by those who are willing to sacrifice their earthly life for Him, He never suggested that the soul is an immaterial, immortal entity. On the contrary, Jesus taught that God can destroy the soul as well as the body (Matt 10:28) of impenitent sinners.

Paul never uses the term “soul–*psyche*” to denote the life that survives death. On the contrary, he identifies the soul with our physical organism (*psychikon*) which is subject to the law of sin and death (1 Cor 15:44). To ensure that his Gentile converts understood that there is nothing inherently immortal in human nature, Paul uses the term “spirit–*pneuma*” to describe the new life in Christ which the believer receives wholly as a gift of God’s Spirit both now and at the resurrection.

PART II: HUMAN NATURE AS SPIRIT

The preceding study of the New Testament view of the human soul–*psyche* has shown how Christ expanded the Old Testament meaning of *nephesh* as physical life to include also the gift of eternal life. What is true for the human soul is also true in many ways for the human spirit. The coming of Christ contributed to reveal the fuller meaning and function of the Old Testament spirit–*ruach* in the redemption of man. The meaning of the spirit–*pneuma* as life principle is expanded to include the new-life principle of moral regeneration made possible through Christ’s redemption.

The spirit–*pneuma* is largely synonymous with *psyche*, as the two words are often used interchangeably in the Old and New Testaments. Yet there appears to be a difference between the two. “Spirit” is often used for God while “soul” is never so used. The overall usage of the two words suggests that “spirit” represents mostly a person’s orientation toward God, while the

“soul” represents a person orientation toward fellow beings. To put it differently, the soul generally describes the physical aspect of human existence, while the spirit denotes the spiritual aspect of life (the inner self) that relates a person to the eternal world. To appreciate the New Testament meaning and function of the spirit—*pneuma* in human nature, it is important first to understand the role of the Spirit in Christ’s life and ministry.

Christ, the Man of the Spirit. The New Testament in some real sense identifies Christ with the Spirit in the work of salvation. As the second Adam, Christ became “a life-giving spirit” (1 Cor 15:45). The Spirit of God becomes the Spirit of Christ: “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our heart, crying ‘Abba! Father!’” (Gal 4:6). The “Spirit of God” dwelling in believers is seen to be interchangeable with the “Spirit of Christ” in Romans 8:9-10. The Spirit is so identified with Christ’s life and ministry that Paul can say: “The Lord is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:17).

The Spirit who abides in Christ also abides in the person who is “in Christ” (Rom 8:2). “It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God” (Rom 8:16). The immediate effect of redemption is the giving of the Spirit who “. . . dwells in you and will be with you” (John 14:17). The Spirit that dwells in a believer is not a detachable immortal soul, but a divine power that regenerates the present life, making the person into a new creature (Rom 7:6; Gal 6:8).

Christ is the Man of the Spirit par excellence. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matt 1:18,20; Luke 1:35). At His baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove (Mark 1:10; Acts 10:38). After His baptism, Christ “was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness” (Luke 4:1-2). In the Spirit, He confronted the Devil in the wilderness (Matt 4:1). Later “Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee” (Luke 4:14). In His inaugural speech, delivered at the synagogue of Nazareth, Christ applied to Himself Isaiah’s prediction of the anointing of the Messiah by the Holy Spirit: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. . . . Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:18, 21). Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Christ “went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil” (Acts 10:38).

God’s Spirit and the Human Spirit. How does God’s Spirit, mediated through Christ, relate to the human spirit? What is the relationship between the spirit as the animating principle of life, present in every living person, and the Spirit as the regenerating principle of moral life active in the life of believers? The answer to these questions is to be found by recognizing

that both the physical and the moral-spiritual aspects of life need the Spirit for their existence. It is because man is a living being animated by the breath of God's Spirit that he is capable of receiving the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament, we found numerous texts according to which the spirit—*ruach* is God's breath that gives and sustains human life. The same function of the spirit—*pneuma* is expressed in the New Testament. For example, James says: "For as the body without the spirit—*pneuma* is dead, so faith apart from works is dead" (James 2:26). Similarly, Revelation 11:11 speaks of the spirit—*pneuma* of life that entered dead bodies and they revived and stood up. Thus, every human being has the life-giving spirit of God within himself. When Jesus raised Jairus' daughter, "her spirit returned and she got up at once" (Luke 8:55). We noted already that the spirit which returned was God's breath of life that made the girl a living person again.

The spirit as the principle of the physical life eventually came to mean the source of psychical, rational life. Thus the spirit is used to represent the seat of insight, feeling, and reasoning, the inner disposition or character of the believer. This accounts for the many uses of the term "spirit" in the Old and New Testaments. "Man's spirit is stirred (Ez 2:2), or troubled (Gen 41:8); it rejoices (Luke 1:47), or is broken (Ex 6:9); it is willing (Matt 26:41), or it is hardened (Deut 2:30). A man may be patient in spirit (Ecc 7:8), proud in spirit, or poor in spirit (Matt 5:3). The necessity of ruling one's spirit is stated (Prov 25:28). It is the spirit of man that seeks God (Is 26:9), and to man's spirit that the indwelling Spirit of God bears witness (Rom 8:16)."²⁷

Spirit's Activity in Humanity. Since the spirit—*pneuma* is a person's true inner self, it is with the spirit that a believer serves God (Rom 1:9). A person as spirit is able to enjoy communion with God (1 Cor 6:17). Prayer and prophecy are exercises of the human spirit (1 Cor 14:32). God's grace is bestowed upon the believer in the sphere of the spirit (Gal 6:18). Renewal is experienced in the spirit (Eph 4:23). Through the Spirit, God witnesses to the believers' spirit that they are children of God (Rom 8:16).

Both the physical and psychical aspects of life need the spirit for their existence, and thus the term reasonably can be applied to both the general principle of physical life and the regenerating principle of moral life. The new nature is certainly a new life principle, but it is an essentially moral-life principle, manifesting itself in a holy disposition or character. It is difficult to establish the exact relationship between the spirit as life principle and the spirit as the regenerating principle of moral life.

For example, some passages in Romans 8 make it difficult to decide whether the term “Spirit” should be written with a capital “S” to designate the Holy Spirit, or with a small “s” to refer to the human spirit redeemed and renewed. Perhaps Paul intended to allow us to read his words either way. Verses 5 and 9 do not lose anything of their profound meaning if this interchange is allowed. “Those who live according to the spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit” (Rom 8:5). “You are not in the flesh, you are in the spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you” (Rom 8:9).

The connection between the two appears to be found in the fact that the spirit which every person possesses as the animating principle of life enables believers to be receptive and responsive to the working of the Holy Spirit in their life. In other words, it is the spirit as the seat of psychical and rational life (inner self), with which God has endowed every person, that makes it possible for the Spirit of God to dwell in human beings. W. D. Stacey makes this point, saying: “All men have *pneuma* [the spirit] from birth, but the Christian *pneuma* [spirit], in fellowship with the Spirit of God, takes on a new character and a new dignity (Rom 8:10).”²⁸

Human Spirit Capable of Receiving God’s Spirit. The human spirit has no power to regenerate itself. It is not a divine spark that can be fanned into a flame. Rather, it is a capacity God has given to every person to experience the regenerative power of His Spirit. When a person has been born again by the Spirit of God, his “natural” (*psychikos*) nature becomes “spiritual” (*pneumatikos*) (1 Cor 2:14-15).

The human spirit that is obedient to God experiences the guiding and transforming power of God’s Spirit. Fellowship with God is achieved by the human spirit through God’s Spirit. Claude Tresmontant describes this function of the spirit–*pneuma*: “Man’s spirit, his *pneuma*, is that within him which permits an encounter with the *Pneuma* [Spirit] of God. It is the part of a man that can enter into dialogue with God’s Spirit, not as a stranger but as a child: ‘The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirits that we are children of God’ (Rom 8:16).”²⁹

The human spirit enables a person to serve God: “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit–*pneuma* in the gospel of his Son . . .” (Rom 1:9). The phrase “serve with my spirit” suggests that the spirit is a mental and volitional capacity that enables a person to serve God. We might say that the human spirit is intended by God to be united with the Holy Spirit. It is because man is spirit–*pneuma*, meaning a living being animated by the breath of God’s Spirit (*ruach–pneuma*), that he is capable of receiving the Holy Spirit–*pneuma* and thus of coming into a close living relationship with God.

Henry Barclay Swete explains the human orientation toward the Holy Spirit: “The Holy Spirit does not create the ‘spirit’ in man; it is potentially present in every man, even if rudimentary and undeveloped. Every human being has affinities with the spiritual and eternal. In each individual of the race *the spirit of the man which is in him* (1 Cor 2:11) answers to the Spirit of God, in so far as the finite can correspond with the infinite; . . . But though the Spirit of God finds in man a spiritual nature on which it can work, the human spirit is in a so imperfect and depraved a condition that a complete renovation, even re-creation, is necessary (2 Cor 5:17).”³⁰

To allow the Spirit of God to renew and transform our life is not to renounce our own personality but to bring it into submission. In line with the Old Testament, the New Testament sees human nature wholistically, where body, soul, and spirit are integral parts of the same being. The spirit is a force, inseparable from breath and life (Luke 8:55; 23:46) that renews the mind (Eph 4:23) and enables a person to become a new creature, “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:24).

The Spirit as Spiritual Rebirth. The Spirit of God is the active agent of creation and re-creation. We have seen that in the Old Testament the creation of man is ascribed to the Spirit of God. Man exists as a living soul because of God’s breath (Gen 2:7). Re-creation in the moral order is also the work of the Spirit. We are reminded of Ezekiel’s vision of the dry bones that came to life through God’s Spirit. The dry bones, which represent “the whole house of Israel” (Ez 37:11) in her apostate condition were brought back to life, that is, to spiritual rebirth by God’s Spirit: “I will put my Spirit within you and you shall live” (Ez 37:14).

In the New Testament, the moral transformation accomplished by the Holy Spirit is described more fully than in the Old Testament, especially in the writings of John and Paul. The two apostles describe this process in different and yet complementary ways. John conceives of the inner moral transformation as *rebirth* and Paul as *new creation*. The two metaphors, as we shall see, are complementary, each designed to help us understand the new life brought about by the Holy Spirit.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus compares the moral transformation accomplished by the Holy Spirit to a rebirth. Speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus says: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Being born of the Spirit is contrasted with born of the flesh: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). The physical birth is according to the

flesh (*kata sarka*), placing a person on an horizontal level of natural existence. The spiritual birth is “from above” (John 3:3) by the Spirit, placing a person on a vertical level of living by the enabling power of the Spirit.

On the night of His resurrection, Jesus “breathed on them [the disciples], and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:22). This action, which marked the re-creation of the disciples, is parallel to the first creation of man, when God breathed the breath of life. 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). This is true of both the physical and spiritual life.

The Spirit is the immediate source of life that is mediated through Christ. “If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, ‘out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.’ Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:37-39). Christ is the meriting source of the Spirit, because through His atoning sacrifice He can give His life-giving Spirit to the believer. This is why Paul speaks of “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:2).

Summing up, we can say that although John does not mention the spirit of man as such, he envisions it as fulfilled and realized by the Spirit through whom Christ gives new life, a spiritual rebirth, to the believer. In a sense, the ultimate meaning of God’s breath as the source of physical life is revealed and fulfilled in the new life made possible by “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:2). Nowhere does John identify the life-giving Spirit with an immaterial, immortal soul capable of detaching itself from the body. The function of the spirit is simply to bring about a spiritual rebirth, that is, a moral transformation in the whole person of the believer. There is no dualism in John between a material, mortal body, and a spiritual, immortal soul, because the Spirit brings new life to the whole person.

The Spirit as New Creation. Paul describes the moral transformation accomplished by the Spirit, not as a rebirth, but as a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17; cf. 1 Cor 6:11; Gal 3:27; 6:15; Eph 4:24). The two metaphors essentially convey the same idea. Paul attributes vital importance to the role of the Spirit in the new life of the believer. 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. Wheeler Robinson rightly affirms that *pneuma*—spirit is “the most important word in Paul’s psychological vocabulary, perhaps in his vocabulary as a whole.”³¹ The reason is that Paul is concerned to show that salvation is

exclusively a divine gift of grace mediated by “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:2), and not a natural possession of an immortal soul.

Salvation is not the removal of the spirit or of the soul from the body or from the world in which the body lives, but rather the renewal of the body through the enabling power of the Spirit. Therefore, Paul’s description of the Christian life is largely in terms of the empowering of the Spirit for the believer to live according to God’s revealed will. The apostle explains that Christ came “in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:4).

To walk according to the Spirit means to set the mind “on the things of the Spirit” (Rom 8:5), that is, to live in conformity with the principles of life that God has revealed, rather than according to the desires of the flesh. “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Gal 5:16). To walk according to the flesh (*kata sarka*) means to perform “the works of the flesh” such as “fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like” (Gal 5:19-20). On the contrary, to walk according to the spirit (*kata pneuma*) means to produce “the fruit of the Spirit” such as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal 5:22-23).

The effects of the new creation accomplished in the believer’s life by the Holy Spirit are manifested especially in a sonship relationship; in an unshakable faith and hope; in a burning love for the brethren; and in a bold witness for Christ. Through the Spirit, we become members of God’s family. “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir” (Gal 4:6).

The Spirit instills in the believer faith and hope in Christ. “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Rom 15:13; cf. Gal 3:14; 5:5). The new life of the Spirit is manifested especially in the spirit of brotherly love that flows from Christ into the life of the believer. “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us” (Rom 5:5; cf. 15:30; Col 1:8; 2 Cor 6:6). The Spirit imparts strength to suffer for Christ’s sake. “If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you” (1 Pet 4:14).

Finally, the Spirit is the miraculous life-giving force of the third Person of the Godhead which will bring about the resurrection of the body. “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies through the Spirit which dwells in you” (Rom 8:11; cf. 1 Cor 6:14; 2 Cor 3:6; Gal 6:8). As the Spirit was at work in the first creation (Gen 2:7), so He will be at work in the final resurrection. In chapter 4 we see that the Bible nowhere suggests the resurrected body will be reattached to a disembodied soul. Instead, the Bible teaches that this earthly body will be raised into a “spiritual–*pneumatikos* body” (1 Cor 15:44), that is, a person wholly dominated by the life-force of the divine spirit.

The Flesh and the Spirit. The contrast that Paul makes between the flesh and the Spirit has led many to believe that the Apostle distinguishes between the material, mortal body and the spiritual, immortal soul.³² This interpretation ignores the fact that the Pauline antithesis between the flesh and the spirit is not a duality of metaphysical substances, but a contrast of ethical-religious orientation.

The most vivid contrast between flesh and spirit is found in the first part of Romans 8. Here Paul sharply contrasts those who “live according to the flesh” with those who “live according to the Spirit.” “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace” (Rom 8:5-6).

The first thing to point out in this and similar passages (Gal 5:16-26) is that Paul never uses the Greek words for “body” and “soul” (*soma* and *psyche*). Instead, he always employs a different set of terms, namely, *sarx* and *pneuma* which are translated “flesh” and “spirit.” If Paul had meant to emphasize the distinction between the mortal body and the immortal soul, he would have used the Greek words *soma* (body) and *psyche* (soul) that were standard in the Greek dualistic doctrine. But what Paul had in mind was something entirely different, consequently, he uses a different set of words to express it.

There can be no doubt that for Paul “the flesh” and “the Spirit” stand, not for two separate and opposing parts of human nature, but for two different ethical orientations. This becomes clear when one compares his list of the “works of the flesh” (Gal 5:19-20) with that of “the fruits of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22-23). Here again the two lists show that “flesh” and “Spirit” represent, not

two separate and opposing parts of human nature, but two different kinds of lifestyle. The sins ascribed to the flesh such as “idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissensions, party spirit, envy,” have nothing to do with physical impulses. “They could well be practiced by a disembodied spirit.”³³

Charles Davis clearly states the Biblical meaning of flesh and spirit, saying: “He [Paul] is thoroughly Hebrew in outlook; he saw man simply as a unity. Consequently his antithesis of flesh (*sarx*) and spirit (*pneuma*) is not an opposition between matter and spirit, between body and soul. ‘Flesh’ is not part of man; but the whole man in his weakness and mortality, in his distance from God, and in his solidarity with sinful and corrupt creation. ‘Spirit’ is man as open to the divine life and as belonging to the sphere of the divine, man under the influence and activity of the Spirit. Flesh and spirit are two active principles affecting man and struggling within him.”³⁴

In a similar vein, George Eldon Ladd writes that “flesh” refers “to man as a whole, seen in his fallenness, opposed to God. This usage is a natural development of the Old Testament use of *basar* [flesh], which is man viewed in his frailty and weakness before God. When this is applied to the ethical realm, it becomes man in his ethical weakness, i.e., sinfulness before God. *Sarx* [flesh] represents not a part of man but man as a whole – unregenerate, fallen, sinful man.”³⁵

Flesh and Spirit stand respectively for the power of death and the power of life that can operate within a person. Oscar Cullmann offers this insightful comparison between the two: “‘Flesh’ is the power of sin or the power of death. It seizes the outer and the inner man *together*. Spirit (*pneuma*) is its great antagonist: the power of creation. He also seizes the outer and inner man *together*. Flesh and spirit are active powers, and as such they work within us. The flesh, the power of death, entered man with the sin of Adam. It entered the whole man, inner and outer in such a way that it is very closely linked with the body. The inner man finds itself less closely connected with the flesh; although through guilt this power of death has more and more taken possession of the inner man. The spirit, on the other hand, is the great power of life, the element of the resurrection; God’s power of creation is given to us through the Holy Spirit.”³⁶ The quickening power of the Holy Spirit is manifested in this present life in “our inner nature [which] is being renewed every day” (2 Cor 4:16) by the transforming power of the Spirit (Eph 4:23-24).

The Flesh as Sinful Human Nature. The flesh—*sarx* represents the unregenerated, sinful human nature, but not because sin resides in the

physical nature of the body rather than in the “spiritual” nature of the soul. After all, the body of flesh is the temple of the Spirit (1 Cor 6:19), a member of Christ (1 Cor 6:15), and a means of glorifying God (1 Cor 6:20). The reason the flesh—*sarx* represents fallen, sinful human nature is that it stands for human frailty that can become an instrument of sin.

The meaning of “the flesh,” like the meaning of “the world,” is ambivalent in Paul as in the Bible generally. The flesh and the world, as created by God for the proper enjoyment of mankind, are good (Gen 1:18, 21, 25, 31). But when the flesh and the world deny their creaturely status and rebel against God by claiming independence and self-sufficiency, then they become bad. It is in this sense that the flesh (carnal nature) and worldliness are synonymous with sinfulness. We could say that “the flesh—*sarx*” is neutral when it refers to a person living in the world, but designates sinfulness when it describes a person living for the world and allowing the world to govern the whole life and conduct.

It is evident then that the antithesis between “the flesh” and “the Spirit” has nothing to do with body-soul dualism. The flesh *per se* does not stand for that part of human nature (the body) that is allegedly bad, and the spirit does not represent that part of human nature which is supposedly good (the soul). When used in a negative way, “the flesh” stands for the kind of person in whom the whole life, both physical and psychical, is misdirected, centered upon self rather than God. Similarly, “the spirit” represents not merely the spiritual part of human nature, but the kind of person in whom the whole life, both physical and psychical, is directed toward God rather than self. The contrast between “flesh” and “spirit” is ethical, not ontological.

It is unfortunate that many have misread Paul on this point. The reason for this is the failure to understand that for Paul, and the Bible as a whole, what corrupts a person is not the body or the flesh, but sin. The flesh can become an instrument of sin, and as such it affects the body and the soul, just as its counterpart, the Spirit, transforms the body and the soul.³⁷ “The ultimate enemy of the Spirit of God is not the flesh, but sin, of which the flesh has become the weak and corrupt instrument.”³⁸

Conclusion. Our study of the New Testament use of the term “spirit—*pneuma*” has shown that the spirit, like the soul, is not an independent, spiritual component of human nature which operates apart from the body. On the contrary, the spirit is the life principle that animates the physical body and regenerates the whole person.

We have found that the meaning and function of the Spirit are expanded with the coming of Christ, who is identified with the Spirit in the work of salvation. The meaning of the spirit—*pneuma* as life principle is expanded to include the new life principle of moral regeneration, made possible through Christ's redemption. The Spirit sustains both the physical and the moral-spiritual aspects of life.

The moral transformation accomplished by the Holy Spirit is described more fully in the New Testament than in the Old Testament. John and Paul describe this process with two different and yet complementary metaphors. John conceives of the inner moral transformation as *rebirth*; Paul, as *new creation*.

The “Spirit—*pneuma*” is the most important word of Paul's vocabulary because it serves to show that salvation is exclusively a divine gift of grace mediated by “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:2), and not the natural possession of an immortal soul. Nowhere does the New Testament identify the life-giving Spirit with an immaterial, immortal soul capable of detaching itself from the body.

The function of the Spirit is not to sustain a spiritual, immortal soul; it is to support both our physical and spiritual life. 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).

The Pauline antithesis between “the flesh” and “the Spirit” has nothing to do with body-soul dualism. The two stand, not for two separate and opposing parts of human nature, but for two different ethical orientations of a person: living a self-centered life versus living a God-centered life. Summing up, we can say that the spirit, like the soul, describes not a separate entity of human nature but an aspect of the totality of human nature.

PART III: HUMAN NATURE AS BODY

The meaning of the body—*soma* or the flesh—*sarx* in the New Testament is similar to the corresponding Old Testament words (body—*geviyyah* and flesh—*bashar*), examined in the previous chapter. In its literal use, the term “body” describes the concrete reality of human life consisting of flesh and blood. In the New Testament, however, “body—*soma*” is used mostly in a figurative way to denote the person as a whole (Rom 6:12; Heb 10:5), the corrupt human nature (Rom 6:12; 8:11; 2 Cor 4:11), the Church as the body

of Christ (Eph 1:23; Col 1:24), the resurrected body of the redeemed (1 Cor 15:44), and the spiritual presence of Christ symbolized by the bread and wine (1 Cor 11:27). For the purpose of our investigation, we focus primarily on the New Testament view of the human body in relation to the total person.

Christ and the Human Body. To appreciate the New Testament positive estimate of the human body, we need to reflect on its central doctrine of the incarnation. For example, the Gospel of John announces at the outset that the eternal Son of God “became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). The very idea that the eternal Son of God entered human time and space and assumed a full human nature, including a body, was incomprehensible to the Greek mind. In fact, Gnosticism, an influential sectarian Christian movement largely influenced by Greek dualism, openly rejected the incarnation of Christ. 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.

Anyone who fully accepts the New Testament doctrine of the incarnation can never accuse New Testament writers of denigrating the human body or the physical order. The fact that the divine Son of God took on a human body in order to live on this earth gives dignity and importance to the body and to the whole physical realm.

It is significant also to note that the same eternal Word through whom “all things were made” (John 1:3) at creation came into this world to redeem and restore, not just “the soul,” but the whole man and the whole world. “This is the significance of the strange doctrine of the resurrection of the body which more than anything else horrified and repelled the Greek world. This doctrine served to emphasize, in the strongest possible way, the New Testament view that it is not some part of man (his rational ‘soul’) that is destined for fulfillment in eternity; it is the whole person that has his place in God’s purpose.”³⁹

The doctrine of the resurrection of the body, which is examined in chapter 7, teaches that our physical nature and the material world which play a vital part in shaping our earthly existence have eternal significance in the divine scheme of things. This teaches us, as Ronald Hall aptly puts it, that “even in the afterlife, the body is no mere adornment of the spirit but an essential element in the being of the person. It is difficult to understand why Paul would have hinged faith on the belief in the resurrection if he thought otherwise. If he thought, for example, that salvation had to do only with a disembodied soul liberated from the body, he would certainly not have

pressed so hard for the resurrection of the body; he would have been content with the Greek notion of an immortal soul.”⁴⁰

The belief in the resurrection of the body is grounded in the bodily resurrection of Christ. “If Christ has not been raised,” Paul exclaims, “then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (1 Cor 15:17-18). Christ’s incarnation in a human body and resurrection in a glorified body (John 20:27) tells us that the body has eternal significance in God’s purpose for this world. It tells us that the body is not a temporary prison house or proving ground for “souls” destined for ultimate annihilation. Rather, it tells us that the body is our total personality that God is committed to preserve and bring back to life on the day of the resurrection.

The resurrection of the body is necessary for the life in the world to come because the New Testament never accepted the belief in the immortality of the soul. Life without the body is inconceivable. Since the body is our the concrete human existence, its resurrection is indispensable to ensure a full personality and life in the new earth.

Christian Faith Is “Materialistic.” At this point it is worth remembering that the Old Testament hope for the world to come is extremely “materialistic.” While the Greeks were looking forward to the eventual escape of the soul from this earth to an ethereal region, Old Testament believers were awaiting the establishment of God’s kingdom on this earth (Dan 2:44; 7:27). The Messianic kingdom will bring to consummation human history on this planet in accordance to God’s creative purpose.

The same belief is prominent in the New Testament. Christ came down to this earth to redeem both the human and subhuman creation (Rom 8:22-23) and He will return to this earth to establish a new physical order. “I saw a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21:1). The whole earth, including the human body, is not annihilated but perfected. “He [God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:4). “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (Rev 21:2).

The ultimate renovation of this earth is the cosmological counterpart of the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. Just as the individual believer at the end will not escape from the body but receive an imperishable body (1 Cor 15:53), so the redeemed will not be raptured away for ever from this earth to heaven, but will be established on this earth, restored to its original perfection as the place of God’s glorious and everlasting kingdom.

“There is no suggestion here,” writes D. R. G. Owen, “of disembodied ‘souls’ painfully making their way up to heaven, there to exist for all eternity as pure ‘spirit.’ Just the opposite: God comes down to man; the Word became flesh; heaven comes down to earth; the holy city comes down from God out of heaven. . . . Thus at the end of the Bible, in its doctrine of the last things, as at the beginning, in its doctrine of the first things, the eternal significance of the whole realm of the physical is unmistakably asserted.”⁴¹

Owen concludes by noting that “the implications of this Biblical materialism for Biblical anthropology—implications that are underlined by the doctrine of the resurrection of the body as opposed to the doctrine of the immortality of the separated soul—are as follows: first, the ‘body’ is an essential aspect of human personality and not a detachable part eventually to be cast aside; and secondly, the whole person, and not a disembodied ‘soul,’ is destined for eternal life.”⁴²

The Body as the Whole Person. In the New Testament, the body—*soma* is not something outward that clings to the real self of a person (the soul), but denotes the whole person. This leads Rudolf Bultmann to affirm: “Man does not have a *soma* [body]; he is a *soma* [body].”⁴³ While there are few passages where the body or the flesh are contrasted with the soul or the spirit, such contrasts are not intended to partition human nature into different entities. Rather, they describe different aspects of the whole person.

The body—*soma* can denote the whole person. For example, when Paul says: “If I deliver my body to be burned” (1 Cor 13:3), he is obviously referring to his whole person. Similarly, when he says, “I pommel my body and subdue it” (1 Cor 9:27), he means that he is bringing himself under control. The offering of the body as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1) means the surrender of one’s self to God. Paul’s desire that “Christ will be honored in my body” (Phil 1:20) means the honoring of Christ in his whole person. In references such as these, the body stands for the whole person as responsible for certain actions.

Bodily existence is the normal and proper mode of existence. Thus, the body is an essential element of human existence. The life of the body is not contrasted with the life of the soul or the spirit, as though body was an obstacle to the full realization of the higher life of the soul or spirit. The body can *become* an obstacle when it is used as an instrument of sin, but it is not a hindrance of itself. The body is not necessarily evil, because it is part of God’s good creation. This is also indicated by the fact that no evil was present in Christ, though he was a partaker of our human body.

The Body as an Instrument of Sin. Being corruptible and mortal (Rom 6:12; 8:11; 2 Cor 4:11), the body can become an instrument of sin. This explains why Paul speaks of “the body of death.” “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom 7:24). Here the picture in the mind of the Apostle is not physical but ethical. Death is the dominion of sin revealed in the physical life from which a person is delivered through regeneration, by faith in Christ. Since sin can reign in our mortal body (Rom 6:12), the body viewed as the instrument of sin can be called the “sinful body” (Rom 6:6) and the “body of death” (Rom 7:24). Thus it is necessary for a believer to “put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom 8:13) by living according to the Spirit. This is not the mortification of the body itself, but the renunciation of sinful acts.

Since the body can become an instrument of sin, the aim of the Christian life is to exercise self-control over it to prevent it from dominating one’s spiritual life. Paul sets forth this truth clearly in 1 Corinthians 9 where he compares himself to an athlete in training who exercises rigorous self-control to prevent his body from gaining the upper hand over his spiritual life. “I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” (1 Cor 9:27).

Self-control over the body is attained especially by consecrating it to God as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1). This is accomplished, not by ascetic practices and the mortification of the body itself, but rather by making it sensitive to the dictates of the Word of God. The Christian recognizes that his body is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). To cultivate the presence of the Spirit in one’s body means to make all our physical enjoyments and activities subservient to spiritual ends.

Conclusion. The body in the New Testament denotes the whole person, both literally, in the concrete reality of human existence, and figuratively, in one’s submission to the influence of sin or to the power of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament sees the body as an essential aspect of the whole person which is not detachable from the soul nor can be cast aside.

The meaning of the body in the New Testament is enhanced by the incarnation of Christ who took a human body in order to accomplish His redemptive mission on this earth. Christ’s incarnation in a human body and resurrection in a glorified body (John 20:27) tells us that the body has eternal significance in God’s creative and redemptive purpose. This is confirmed by the resurrection of the body, which tells us that even in the new earth, the body will be an essential part of human existence.

Figuratively, the body is used in the New Testament in an ambivalent way. On the one hand, it can become a “sinful body” (Rom 6:6) and the “body of death” (Rom 7:24), when it becomes an instrument of sin. On the other hand, it can become the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19) and the means of glorifying God (1 Cor 6:20), when it becomes an instrument in the service of Christ. Redemption means not the removal of the soul from the body, but the renewal of the body (whole person) in this present life and the resurrection of the body (whole person) in the world to come.

PART IV: HUMAN NATURE AS HEART

The heart—*kardia* in the New Testament is used with the same wide range of meaning that we have found in the Old Testament (*leb* and *lebab*). We do not need to be detained long in the study of the meaning and usages of the heart in the New Testament. Essentially, the heart—*kardia* stands for the whole inner life of a person in its various aspects. It denotes, like the spirit, the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual center of a person. The fact that the “heart” and the “spirit” are used in a similar way shows again the wholistic Biblical view of human nature, where a part of human nature can be used to refer to the person as a whole.

The Heart Is the Seat of Emotions. Both good and bad emotions spring from the heart. The heart feels joy (John 16:22; Acts 2:26; 14:17), fear (John 14:1), sorrow (John 16:6; 2 Cor 2:4), love (2 Cor 7:3; 6:11; Phil 1:7), lust (Rom 1:24), longing (Rom 10:1; Luke 24:32), and desire (Rom 1:24; Matt 5:28; James 3:14). Paul expressed his heart’s desire for the conversion of his fellow Jews (Rom 10:1). He wrote to the Corinthians in “anguish of heart” (2 Cor 2:4). He urged the Corinthians to open their hearts by receiving him and his companions in love (2 Cor 7:2).

The Heart Is the Seat of Intellectual Activity. Jesus said that “out of the heart of man come evil thoughts” (Mark 7:21) and “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt 12:34). Paul exhorts every man to give liberally “as he purposeth in his heart” (2 Cor 9:7). The “eyes of the heart” must be enlightened (Eph 1:18) to understand the Christian hope. Decisions have their origin in the heart (Luke 21:14; Acts 11:23).

Sometimes it is God who influences the decision of human hearts: “For God has put into their hearts to carry out his purpose” (Rev 17:17). Sometimes it is the devil who does so: “The devil had already put into the heart of Judah Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him” (John 13:2). Sometimes the

heart is synonymous with conscience: “Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God” (1 John 3:21). The Gentiles possess a law, written in their hearts that enables them to distinguish between good and evil (Rom 2:14-15).

The Heart Is the Seat of Religious Experience. God approaches a person in the heart. He searches the human heart and puts it to the test (Luke 16:15; Rom 8:27; 1 Thess 2:4). God writes His law in the human heart (Rom 2:15; 2 Cor 3:2; Heb 8:10). He opens the human heart (Luke 24:45; Acts 16:14). He shines in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:6). The peace of God keeps our hearts and minds in Christ (Phil 4:7). The Spirit of God is poured into our hearts (Rom 5:5; 2 Cor 1:22; Gal 4:6).

Christ dwells in our hearts and is active in them by means of faith (Eph 4:17-18). The Christian heart is purified and sanctified through faith and baptism (Acts 15:9; Heb 10:22). The heart is made clean (Matt 5:8) and strengthened by God (1 Thess 3:13). The peace of Christ can reign in the heart (Col 3:15). The heart receives the down payment of the Spirit (2 Cor 1:22).

Christian virtues are ascribed to the heart. Love is associated with the heart (2 Thess 3:5; 1 Pet 1:22). Obedience is linked to the heart (Rom 6:17; Col 3:22). Forgiveness comes from the heart (Matt 18:35). Thankfulness resides in the heart (Col 3:16). The peace of God dwells in the heart (Phil 4:7). Above all, love for God and for one’s neighbor comes from the heart (Mark 12:30-31; Luke 10:27; Matt 22:37-39).

The sampling of texts just cited clearly indicates that the word “heart” is used to describe the inner life of the whole person. This leads Karl Barth to conclude that “the heart is not merely *a* part but *the* reality of man, both wholly of soul and wholly of body.”⁴⁴ The fact that the heart stands for the whole inner life of a person very much in the same way as the spirit does, reveals again the Biblical wholistic view of human nature.

The dualistic view which attributes the spiritual and moral functions of human nature to the soul is discredited by the fact that such functions are equally ascribed to the heart and to the spirit. This is possible because, as we have seen, in the Bible human nature is an indissoluble unity and not a composite of different “parts.” The Biblical wholistic view of human nature negates the possibility for the soul to exist and function as a distinct, immaterial entity apart from the body.

Scholarly Support for Wholistic View. As a brief appendix to our survey of the Biblical view of human nature, I cite by way of example, a few of the numerous scholars of different persuasions who support the Biblical wholistic view of human nature, which negates the belief in the immortality of the soul.⁴⁵

In several of his books, William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, affirms the Biblical wholistic view of human nature and declares “unbiblical the notion of the natural indestruction of the individual soul.”⁴⁶ He wrote: “Man is not immortal by nature or of right; but he is capable of immortality and there is offered to him resurrection from the dead and life eternal if he will receive it from God and on God’s terms.”⁴⁷

At the 1955 “Ingersoll Lecture on the Immortality of Man,” delivered at the Andover Chapel of Harvard University, Swiss theologian Oscar Cullmann stressed the fundamental difference between the Christian doctrine of the resurrection and the Greek concept of the immortality of the soul. He said: “The soul is not immortal. There must be a resurrection for both [body and soul]; for since the Fall the whole man is ‘sown corruptible.’”⁴⁸ This famous lecture, which was later published in book form *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?*, provoked violent hostility on the part of some who accused Cullmann of being a “monster who delights in causing spiritual distress.”⁴⁹ One writer said: “The French people, dying for lack of the Bread of life, have been offered instead of bread, stones, if not serpents.”⁵⁰ Such violent reactions exemplify how difficult it is for people to reexamine their long-cherished beliefs.

In his book *Basic Christian Teachings*, Lutheran theologian Martin Heinechen rejects as “false dualism” the notion that at creation “God made a soul, which is the real person, and that He then gave this soul a temporary home in a body, made of dust of the earth. . . . Man must be considered a unity. . . . The Christian dualism is not that of soul and body, eternal mind and passing things, but the dualism of Creator and creature. Man is a person, a unified being, a center of responsibility, standing over against his Creator and Judge. He has no life or immortality within himself.”⁵¹

In *The Pocket Commentary of the Bible*, Basil F. C. Atkinson, Cambridge University librarian, writes in relation to Genesis 2:7: “It has sometimes been thought that the impartation of the life principle, as it is brought before us in this verse, entailed immortality of the spirit or soul. It has been said that to be made in the image of God involves immortality. The Bible never says so. If it involves immortality, why does it not also involve

omniscience or omnipresence, or any other quality or attribute of the Infinite? . . . Throughout the Bible man, apart from Christ, is conceived of as made of dust and ashes, a physical creature, to whom is lent by God a principle of life. The Greek thinkers tended to think of man as an immortal soul imprisoned in a body. The emphasis is the opposite to that of the Bible, but, has found a wide place in Christian thought.”⁵²

Some Catholic scholars also recognize that the traditional concept of the natural immortality of the soul is not a Biblical concept. Claude Tresmontant, a French Catholic Dominican scholar, contrasts the Biblical “resurrection” of the *whole* person with the traditional dualistic view. He writes: “But the Judeo-Christian teaching on the resurrection is quite a different matter. *It does not mean that a part of man—his soul—will be freed by discarding the other part—his material body*; biblical teaching implies that the whole man will be saved.”⁵³

In *The Biblical Meaning of Man*, Dom Wulstan Mork, who is also a Catholic Dominican scholar, challenges the traditional dualistic view of human nature and encourages the reader to recover the Biblical wholistic view. He writes: “Biblical man, hence man as he is revealed in the Bible, is a unity of flesh, soul, and spirit, not a trichotomy, nor a dichotomy of body and soul.” He goes on to note that the Bible sees “man as a whole, a healthy viewpoint for balanced, integral living, and radically related both to God, mankind, and all of creation. We need this viewpoint today, to counteract a still-lurking Platonic attitude, and to correct a too natural, secularized, acceptance of the human situation.”⁵⁴ Mork believes that a recovery of the Biblical wholistic view of human nature will contribute to “a healthier attitude toward the human person, and, indeed, toward matter in general.”⁵⁵

Reinhold Niebuhr, a renowned American theologian and long-time professor at Union Theological Seminary, contrasts the Biblical wholistic view of human nature with the classical dualistic view. He concludes: “All the plausible and implausible proofs for the immortality of the soul are efforts on the part of the human mind to master and control the consummation of life. They all try to prove in one way or another that an eternal element in the nature of man is worthy and capable of survival beyond death. But every mystic or rational technique which seeks to extricate the eternal element tends to deny the meaningfulness of the historical *unity of body and soul*; and with it the meaningfulness of the whole historical process with its infinite elaborations of that unity.”⁵⁶

In his book *The Christian Hope*, Lutheran theologian T. A. Kantonen notes that “it has been characteristic of Western thought ever since Plato to distinguish sharply between the soul and the body. The body is supposed to be composed of matter, and the soul of spirit. The body is a prison from which the soul is liberated at death to carry on its own proper nonphysical existence. Hence the question of life after death has been the question of demonstrating the immortality, the death-defying capacity, of the soul. The body is of little consequence. This way of thinking is entirely foreign to the Bible. True to the Scripture and definitely rejecting the Greek view, the Christian creed says, not ‘I believe in the immortality of the soul,’ but ‘I believe in the resurrection of the body.’”⁵⁷

In his impressive study on the Biblical view of human nature titled *Body and Soul*, R. G. Owen, former provost of Trinity College, University of Toronto, offers a penetrating analysis of the contrast between the Greek dualistic view and the Biblical wholistic view of human nature. Owens finds that man in the Bible is a “unified psychosomatic whole” and that “there can be no detachable part of man that survives physical death.”⁵⁸ “The Bible,” he writes, “assumes that human nature is a unity; in the New Testament it teaches that man’s ultimate destiny involves the ‘resurrection of the body.’”⁵⁹ Owens proposes that “the old doctrine of the immortality of the separated soul must now itself be gently ushered into the place of departed spirits.”⁶⁰

Emil Brunner, a well-known Swiss theologian, finds the dualistic view of human nature irreconcilable with the Biblical wholistic view. He writes: “Somewhere in the Christian faith there must have been some opening through which this foreign doctrine could penetrate. Assuredly, from the Biblical standpoint, it is God alone who possesses immortality. The opinion that we men are immortal because our soul is of an indestructible, because divine, essence is, once for all, *irreconcilable with the Biblical view of God and man.*”⁶¹

Brunner discusses several negative implications of the dualistic conception of human nature. First, he points out that the effect of dualism “is not merely to make death innocuous but also to rob evil of its sting. Just as death affects only the lower part of man, so also does evil. The latter consists only in the sensual and impulsive. I myself am not truly responsible for evil, only my baser part, which is as it were fastened on to my better higher and true being. Evil is thus no act of the spirit, no rebellious revolt of the ego against the Creator, but merely a sensual or impulsive nature which has not been tamed by mind. In brief, evil is the absence of mind, not sin.”⁶²

A second implication is that “man in his spiritual and higher being is divine, not creaturely. God is not his creator, God is the all of which the human spirit is but a part. Man is a participator in the divine in the most direct and literal sense. Hence, since this mode of robbing evil of its sting runs necessarily parallel with the rendering innocuous of death through the teaching about immortality, this solution of the problem of death stands in irreconcilable opposition to Christian thought.”⁶³

In his book *I Believe in the Second Advent*, Stephen H. Travis, a respected British theologian, acknowledges that if he were pressed to choose between “eternal punishment” and “conditional immortality,” he would opt for the latter. The first reason he gives is that the “immortality of the soul is a non-biblical doctrine derived from Greek philosophy. In Biblical teaching man is ‘conditionally immortal’—that is, he has the possibility of becoming immortal if he receives resurrection or immortality as a *gift* from God. This would imply that God grants resurrection to those who love him, but those who resist him go out of existence.”⁶⁴

Travis notes that “The old concept of the soul, which used to safeguard the continuity of the person from this life to the next, has been largely abandoned in modern thought. Man’s nature is thought of as a unity; he does not consist of two parts, a physical body which dies and a soul which lives on for ever. His ‘soul’ or ‘self’ or ‘personality’ is simply a function of the brain. So when the brain dies, the person dies, and there is nothing left to enter upon another life.”⁶⁵

Bruce Reichenbach, an American philosopher, probes into human nature in his book *Is Man the Phoenix?* He concludes that “the doctrine that man as a person [soul] does not die poses particular difficulties for the *Christian* dualist. For one thing, it is apparently contrary to the teachings of Scripture. . . . [He cites several texts] Each of these and numerous other passages indicate that each of us, as a person, must die. There is no hint that the only thing spoken about is the destruction of the physical organism, and that the real person, the soul, does not die but lives on.”⁶⁶

Donald Bloesch, a leading evangelical scholar, underscores the same conclusion, saying: “There is no inherent immortality of the soul. The person who dies, even the one who dies in Christ, undergoes the death of both body and soul.”⁶⁷ Anthony Hoekema, a Calvinistic theologian, agrees: “We cannot point to any inherent quality in man or in any aspect of man which makes him indestructible.”⁶⁸ F. F. Bruce, a respected British New Testament scholar, warns that “our traditional thinking about the ‘never-dying soul,’ which owes

so much to our Graeco-Roman heritage, makes it difficult for us to appreciate Paul's [wholistic] point of view."⁶⁹

Murray Harris, an American Biblical scholar, concludes his article on "Resurrection and Immortality" saying: "Man is not immortal because he possesses or is a soul. He becomes immortal because God transforms him by raising him from the dead."⁷⁰ He explains that while Platonic thought made immortality "an inalienable attribute of the soul, . . . the Bible contains no definition of the soul's constitution that implies its indestructibility."⁷¹

In his doctoral dissertation on "Sheol in the Old Testament," Ralph Walter Doermann concludes his analysis of the Old Testament view of human nature by saying: "It is evident from the Hebrew view of the psychosomatic unity of man that there was little room for the belief in the 'immortality of the soul.' Either the whole person lived or the whole person went down to death . . . There was no independent existence for the *ruach* [spirit] or the *nephesh* [soul] apart from the body. With the death of the body the impersonal *ruach* [spirit] 'returned to God who gave it' (Eccl 12:7) and the *nephesh* [soul] was destroyed, though it was still present, in a very weak sense, in the bones and the blood."⁷²

H. Dooyeweerd, a Dutch Calvinistic philosopher, sharply criticises the dualistic view of human nature. He rejects such a view not only because "the idea of a substance centered in human reason (i.e., the soul) is in conflict with the confession of the radical corruption of human nature, but also because the separability of the soul from the body raises various problems." One of the problems he mentions is the impossibility for the "soul" to carry out activities once it is separated from the body, because psychic functions are indissolubly connected with the total temporal relationship and functions of the body.⁷³

Conclusion. We have come to the end of our survey of four prominent words used in the New Testament to describe human nature, namely, *soul*, *spirit*, *body*, and *heart*. We have found that the New Testament expands the Old Testament meaning of these terms in the light of the teachings and redemptive ministry of Christ.

In the New Testament, the "soul-*psyche*" is not an immaterial and immortal entity that survives the death of the body, but the whole person as a living body, with its personality, appetites, emotions, and thinking abilities. The soul-*psyche* denotes the physical, emotional, and spiritual life.

Christ expanded the meaning of soul–*psyche* to include the gift of eternal life received by those who are willing to sacrifice their earthly life for Him, but He never suggested that the soul is an immaterial, immortal entity. On the contrary, Jesus taught that God can destroy the soul as well as the body (Matt 10:28) of impenitent sinners.

Paul never uses the term “soul–*psyche*” to denote the life that survives death. Instead, he identified the soul with our physical nature (*psychikon*), which is subject to the law of sin and death (1 Cor 15:44). To ensure that his Gentile converts understood that there is nothing immortal in human nature per se, Paul used the term “spirit–*pneuma*” to describe the new life in Christ, which the believer receives wholly as a gift of God’s Spirit both now and at the resurrection.

The “spirit–*pneuma*,” like the soul, is not an independent, spiritual component of human nature that operates apart from the body, but the life principle that animates the physical body and regenerates the whole person. We have found that the meaning and function of the Spirit are expanded with the coming of Christ, who is identified with the Spirit in the work of salvation. The meaning of the spirit–*pneuma* as life principle is expanded to include the new-life principle of moral regeneration made possible through Christ’s redemption.

The Spirit sustains both the physical and the moral-spiritual aspects of life. The moral transformation accomplished by the Holy Spirit is described more fully in the New Testament than in the Old Testament. John and Paul describe this process with the two different, yet complementary metaphors of *rebirth* and *new creation*.

The Spirit–*pneuma* is the most important word in Paul’s vocabulary of this topic, because it serves to show that salvation is exclusively a divine gift of grace mediated by “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:2) and not a natural possession of an immortal soul. Nowhere does the New Testament identify the life-giving Spirit with an immaterial, immortal soul capable of detaching itself from the body.

The function of the Spirit is not to sustain a spiritual, immortal soul, but to support both our physical and spiritual life. Both creation and recreation, birth and rebirth, are acts of the Spirit because Jesus explained, “It is the Spirit that gives life” (John 6:63). The spirit, like the soul, describes not a separate entity of human nature, but the whole person as sustained and transformed by God’s Spirit.

The body in the New Testament denotes the whole person, both literally, in the concrete reality of human existence, and figuratively, in the submission of oneself to the influence of sin or to the power of the Holy Spirit. The meaning of the human body in the New Testament is enhanced by Christ's incarnation in a human body and by His resurrection in a glorified body (John 20:27).

The body has eternal significance in God's creative and redemptive purpose. Redemption means not the removal of the soul from the body, but the renewal of the body as the whole person in this present life and the resurrection of the body as the whole person in the world to come. "The body is not a tomb for the soul, but a temple of the Holy Spirit; man is not complete apart from the body."⁷⁴ Thus, even on the new earth, the body will be an essential part of human existence because the redeemed will exist not as disembodied souls but as resurrected corporeal persons.

The heart, in the New Testament, stands for the whole inner life of a person. It denotes, like the Spirit, the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual functions of a person. The fact that such functions are equally ascribed to the heart and to the spirit shows that the New Testament, like the Old Testament, views human nature as an indissoluble unity and not as a composite of different "parts."

Summing up our survey of the Old and New Testament view of human nature, we can say that the Bible is consistent in teaching that human nature is an indissoluble unity, where the body, soul, and spirit represent different aspects of the same person, and not different substances or entities functioning independently. This wholistic view of human nature removes the basis for the belief in the survival of the soul at the death of the body.

The wholistic view of human nature that we have found in the Bible poses some important questions: What happens when a person dies? Does the whole person, body, soul, and spirit perish at death so that nothing survives? If so, why does the Bible speak of the resurrection of the dead? What is the state of the dead between death and resurrection, a period generally known as the intermediate state? What is the nature of the resurrected body? Will it be similar or different from the present body? These are some of the questions we must address in the following chapters.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. A most comprehensive survey of the inter-testamental literature dealing with human nature and destiny is by H. C. C. Cavalin, *Life after Death: Paul's Argument for the Resurrection of the Dead in 1 Corinthians; Part I: An Inquiry into the Jewish Background* (Lund: Holland 1974). Another scholarly study is by George Nickelsburg, Jr., *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Inter-testamentary Judaism* (Cambridge, 1972).

2.2 *Baruch* 30, cited from R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English with Introductory and Critical Explanatory Notes to the Several Books* (Oxford, 1913), p. 498.

3. Commenting on this text, R. H. Charles wrote: "This conditional immortality of man appears also in 1 Enoch 69:11; Wisdom 1:13, 14; 2 Enoch 30:16, 17; 4 Ezra 3:7" (Ibid., p. 477).

4. Ibid., p. 49. According to R. H. Charles, "This is the earliest attested instance of this expectation in the last two centuries B. C." (Ibid., p. 10).

5. Ibid., p. 538.

6. See *4 Maccabees* 10:15; 13:17; 18:18; 18:23.

7. See *4 Maccabees* 9:8, 32; 10:11, 15; 12:19; 13:15.

8. H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Christian Doctrine of Man* (Edinburgh, 1952), p. 74.

9. Basil F. C. Atkinson, *Life and Immortality* (Taunton, England, N. D.), p. 12.

10. John A. T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study of Pauline Theology* (London, 1966), p. 23.

11. Edward Schweizer, "Psyche," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed., Gerhard Friedrich, (Grand Rapids, 1974), Vol. 9, p. 640.

12. The figure is given by Basil F. C. Atkinson (note 9), p. 14.

13. Edward Schweizer (note 11), p. 644.

14. Ibid., p. 653.

14. Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis, 1984), p. 152.

15. Oscar Cullmann, "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?" in *Immortality and Resurrection. Death in the Western World: Two Conflicting Currents of Thought*, ed. Krister Stendahl (New York, 1968), pp. 36-37.

16. Edward William Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes* (Houston, 1989), p. 173.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

18. Edward Schweizer (note 11), p. 646.

19. The number is given by Edward Schweizer (note 11), p. 648, n. 188.

20. This view is expressed by Edward Schweizer (note 11), p. 650. Similarly, Tony Hoff notes that "Paul never used *psyche* for a life that survives death . . . [because] he was aware of the possibility of this very distortion during this time. He knew the presence of a Platonic tradition would be particularly confusing to the Gentile converts" ("*Nephesh* and the Fulfillment It Receives as *Psyche*" in *Toward a Biblical View of Man: Some Readings*, ed. Arnold H. De Graff and James H. Olthuis [Toronto, 1978], p. 114).

21. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. F. L. Battles (Philadelphia, 1960), Vol. 1, p. 192.

22. *Ibid.*

23. H. Wheeler Robinson (note 8), p. 122.

24. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Rome, 1994), pp. 93-94.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

26. Edward Schweizer (note 11), p. 651.

27. W. White, "Spirit," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, 1978), Vol. 5, p. 505.

28. David W. Stacey, *The Pauline View of Man* (London, 1956), p. 135.

29. Claude Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought* (New York, 1960), p. 107.

30. Henry Barclay Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (London, 1910), p. 342.

31. H. Wheeler Robinson (note 8), p. 109.

32. See for example, Robert A. Morey (note 14), p. 62; W. Morgan, *The Religion and Theology of Paul* (New York, 1917), pp. 17ff. A classic presentation of the dualistic interpretation of flesh and Spirit is found in O. Pfleiderer, *Primitive Christianity* (New York, 1906), Vol. 1, pp. 280 ff. See also the essay of Mary E. White, "The Greek and Roman Contribution," in *The Heritage of Western Culture*, ed. R. C. Chalmers (Toronto, 1952), pp. 19-21. She argues that the contrast between flesh and spirit derives from Greek dualism and "has resulted in many centuries of mortification of the flesh before the balance was restored" (p. 21).

33. D. E. H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul* (Grand Rapids, 1964), p. 39.

34. Charles Davis, "The Resurrection of the Body," *Theology Digest* (1960), p. 100.

35. George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1974), p. 472.

36. Oscar Cullmann (note 15), pp. 25-26.

37. For an insightful discussion of the misunderstanding of Paul's dualism, see Ronald L. Hall, "Dualism and Christianity: A Reconsideration," *Center Journal* (Fall 1982), pp. 43-55.

38. H. Wheeler Robinson (note 8), p. 117.

39. D. R. G. Owen, *Body and Soul* (Philadelphia, 1956), p. 171.

40. Ronald Hall (note 37), p. 50.

41. D. R. G. Owen (note 39), p. 174.

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 174-175.

43. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York, 1951), p. 194.

44. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh, 1960), Vol 3, part 2, p. 436.

45. For a comprehensive survey of church leaders and scholars who through Christian history held to the wholistic view of human nature and thus to conditional immortality, see the monumental two volumes by LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of our Fathers: The Conflict of the Ages over the Nature and Destiny of Man* (Washington, D. C., 1965).

46. William Temple, *Christian Faith and Life* (London, 1954), p. 81.

47. William Temple, *Man, Nature and God* (London, 1953), p. 472.

48. Oscar Cullmann (note 36), p. 28.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

50. *Ibid.*

51. Martin J. Heineken, *Basic Christian Teachings* (Philadelphia, 1949), pp. 37, 133.

52. Basil F. C. Atkinson, *The Pocket Commentary of the Bible* (London, 1954), Part 1, p. 32.

53. Claude Tremontant, *St. Paul and the Mystery of Christ* (New York, 1957), pp. 132-133. Italics supplied. In a similar vein, Y. B. Tremel, French Dominican scholar, makes a remarkable admission that "The New Testament obviously does not conceive of man's life after death philosophically or in terms of the natural immortality of the soul. The sacred writers do not think of the life to come as the term of a natural process. On the contrary, for them it is always the result of salvation and redemption; it depends on the will of God and on the victory of Christ" ("Man Between Death and Resurrection," *Theology Digest* [Autumn 1957], p. 151).

54. Dom Wulstan Mork, *The Biblical Meaning of Man* (Milwaukee, WI, 1967), pp. x.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

56. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York, 1964), p. 295. Italics supplied.

57. T. A. Kantonen, *The Christian Hope* (Philadelphia, 1954), p. 28.

58. Derwyn R. G. Owen, *Body and Soul: A Study of the Christian View of Man* (Philadelphia, 1956), p. 27.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

61. Emil Brunner, *Eternal Hope* (Philadelphia, 1954), p. 106. Italic supplied.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

63. Ibid.

64. Stephen H. Travis, *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 198.

65. Ibid., p. 163.

66. Bruce R. Reichenbach, *Is Man the Phoenix? A Study of Immortality* (Grand Rapids, 1978), p. 54.

67. Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco, 1979), Vol. 2, p. 188.

68. Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 90.

69. F. F. Bruce, "Paul on Immortality," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 24, 4 (November 1971), p. 469.

70. Murray Harris, "Resurrection and Immortality: Eight Theses," *Themelios* 1, no. 2 (Spring, 1976), p. 53.

71. Ibid.

72. Ralph Walter Doermann, "Sheol in the Old Testament," (Doctoral dissertation, Duke University, 1961), p. 205.

73. H. Dooyeweerd, "Kuypers Wetenschapsleer," *Philosophia Reformata*, IV, pp. 199-201, as cited by G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids, 1972), pp. 255-256.

74. Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 91.

Chapter IV

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF DEATH

Throughout human history, people have refused to accept the finality that death brings to life. Death brings an unacceptable, sudden interruption to one's work, plans, and relationships. Though the inscription on many tomb stones often reads "Rest in Peace," the truth of the matter is that most people do not welcome the peaceful rest of the grave. They would rather be alive and productive. Thus, it is not surprising that the subject of death and afterlife always has been a matter of intense concern and speculation. After all, the death rate is still one per person. Each of us at the appointed time will face the grim reality of death.

Today we live in a death-denying culture. People live as if death did not exist. Doctors and hospital personnel generally think that death is something that should not happen. Regardless of how miserable people may feel, they usually respond to "How are you?" with an artificial smile, saying: "Just fine." When we can no longer maintain the facade, we begin to wonder, "What is going to happen to me now?"

Even at the end of life, we tend to deny the reality of death by embalming the dead and using cosmetics to restore the corpse to a natural, healthy look. We dress the dead in suits and gowns as if they were going to a party instead of returning to dust. A special mourning color that has been prevalent in most countries, such as white or black, is gradually disappearing, because people do not want to believe that death is an intrusion that terminates their life.

In recent years, courses on death and dying have been introduced in many colleges and high schools. Some colleges and universities also offer courses on the occult and other phenomena such as near-death experiences which allegedly offer scientific evidence for life beyond death. All of these trends suggest there is a renewed interest today to unravel the mystery of death and to gain reassurance about some form of life after death.

Objectives of This Chapter. This chapter pursues two major objectives. First, we briefly review the history of the belief in the survival of the soul, focusing especially on recent developments that have revived the notion of conscious existence after death. We shall see that spiritualism, the study of near-death experiences, and the channeling (promoted by the New Age Movement, especially through the influence of actress Shirley Maclaine) have all contributed to promoting the view that death is not the cessation of life, but a transition to a different form of existence.

Second, we examine the Biblical understanding of the nature of death. Does the Bible teach that death is the separation of the immortal soul from the mortal body? Or, does the Bible teach that death is the termination of life for the whole person, body and soul? In other words, is death according to the Bible the cessation of life for the whole person or the transition to a new form of life for the immortal component of our being?

To find answers to these questions, we will search the Scriptures examining all the pertinent passages. We have followed this procedure in the previous chapters when studying the Biblical view of human nature. Scripture must always be allowed to interpret the Scripture. Passages which pose some problems must be interpreted in the light of those that are clear. By following this principle known as the analogy of faith, we can resolve the apparent contradictions we find in the Bible.

PART I: A HISTORICAL GLIMPSE OF THE BELIEF IN THE SURVIVAL OF THE SOUL

“You Will Not Die.” To set the stage for the study of the Biblical view of death in this chapter and of the state of the dead in the following chapter, it may be helpful to look briefly at the history of the belief in the survival of the soul after death. The serpent’s lie, “You will not die” (Gen 3:4) has lived on throughout human history to our time. The belief in some form of life after death has been held in practically every society. The need for reassurance and certainty in the light of the challenge that death poses to human life has led people in every culture to formulate beliefs in some form of afterlife.

In the history of Christianity, death has been defined generally as the separation of the immortal soul from the mortal body. This belief in the survival of the soul at the death of the body has been expressed in various ways and given rise to such corollary doctrines as prayer for the dead, indulgences, purgatory, intercession of the saints, the eternal torment of hell, etc. Since the

time of Augustine (A. D. 354-430), Christians have been taught that between death and resurrection—a period known as “the intermediate state”—the souls of the dead either enjoy the beatitude of Paradise or suffer the affliction of Purgatory or Hell. The disembodied condition of the soul is supposed to continue until the resurrection of the body which will bring completion to the salvation of the saints and to the damnation of the wicked.

During the Middle Ages, the fear of death and speculation about what happens to the soul after death gripped the imagination of people and inspired literary and theological works. Dante’s *Divina Commedia* is only a small fragment of the immense literary and artistic works which graphically depict the torments of the sinners’ soul in Purgatory or Hell, and the blessedness of the saints’ soul in Paradise.

The belief in the survival of the soul contributed to the development of the doctrine of Purgatory, a place where the souls of the dead are purified by suffering the temporal punishment of their sins before ascending to Paradise. This widely believed doctrine burdened the living with emotional and financial stress. As Ray Anderson puts it, “Not only did one have to earn enough to live, but also to pay off the ‘spiritual mortgage’ for the dead as well.”¹

Reformers’ Rejection of Purgatory. The Protestant Reformation started largely as a reaction against the medieval superstitious beliefs about the afterlife in Purgatory. The Reformers rejected as unbiblical and unreasonable the practice of buying and selling indulgences to reduce the stay of the souls of departed relatives in Purgatory. However, they continued to believe in the conscious existence of souls either in Paradise or Hell during the intermediate state. Calvin expressed this belief far more aggressively than Luther.² In his treatise *Psychopannychia*,³ which he wrote against the Anabaptists who taught that souls simply sleep between death and resurrection, Calvin argues that during the intermediate state the souls of the believers enjoy the bliss of heaven; those of the unbelievers suffer the torments of hell. At the resurrection, the body is reunited with the soul, thus intensifying the pleasure of paradise or the pain of hell. Since that time, this doctrine of the intermediate state has been accepted by most Protestant churches and is reflected in various Confessions.⁴

The Westminster Confession (1646), regarded as the definitive statement of Presbyterian beliefs in the English-speaking world, states: “The body of men after death return to dust, and see corruption; but their souls (which neither die nor sleep) having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them. The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in

holiness, are received unto the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies: and the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torment and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day.”⁵ The confession continues declaring as unbiblical the belief in purgatory.

By rejecting as unbiblical the popular superstitions regarding the suffering of souls in purgatory, the Reformers paved the way for a reexamination of human nature by the rationalistic philosophers of the Enlightenment. These philosophers did not immediately abandon the notion of the immortality of the soul. The first significant attack on the belief in the survival of life after death came from David Hume (A. D. 1711-1776), an English philosopher and historian. He questioned the immortality of the soul, because he believed that all knowledge comes from the sensory perceptions of the body.⁶ Since the death of the body marks the end of all sensory perception, it is impossible for the soul to have conscious existence after the death of the body.

The decline in the belief in an afterlife reached its climax by the mid-eighteenth century as atheism, skepticism, and rationalism spread in France, England, and America. The publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859) inflicted another blow on supernaturalism and especially on the immortality of the soul. If human life is the product of spontaneous generation, then human beings have no divine spirit or immortal soul in them. Darwin’s theories challenged people to seek “scientific” evidence for supernatural phenomena, such as the survival of the soul.

Spiritualism and the Revival of Interest in the Soul. Public interest in the life of the soul after death was soon revived with the publication of *The Coming Race* (1860) by Bulmer-Lytton. This book influenced a host of writers who contributed to making occult practices fashionable in British society. In America, the public interest in communicating with the souls of the dead was ignited by the séances held by the Fox sisters who lived in Hydesdale, New York. On March 31, 1848, they conducted a séance in which the alleged spirit of a murdered man, who called himself William Duesler, informed them that if they dug in the basement, they would find his corpse. This proved to be true; a body was found.

Since the spirits of the dead at the Fox house communicated by a rapping sound on the table, “table rapping” séances became fashionable all across America and England as a way of communicating with the spirit of the dead. This phenomenon attracted the attention of numerous learned persons, who in 1882 organized the Society for Psychical Research (SPR). Henry Sedgwich, a noted philosopher at Cambridge, became instrumental in gath-

ering into the society some of the most influential people of the day, including William Gladstone (former British prime minister) and Arthur Balfour (future prime minister).

An important outcome of the SPR movement is represented by the work of Joseph Banks Rhine, who in 1930 began researching conscious life after death. Rhine was trained as a biologist at the University of Chicago and later became involved with the SPR while teaching at Harvard University. He redefined and relabeled the subjects that the SPR had researched for years by coining such terms as “extrasensory perception” (ESP), “para-normal psychology,” or “parapsychology.” This was designed to give scientific credibility to the study of the afterlife. Later Rhine, together with William McDougal who served as president for both the British and American SPR groups, set up a Department for Psychic Studies at Duke University. The Russians conducted their own psychic experiments. Their findings were published in a popularized form in *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain* by Sheila Ostrander and Lynn Schroeder (1970).

In the late 1960s, the late Episcopal bishop James A. Pike gave new and widespread attention to the idea of communicating with the spirits of the dead by communicating on a regular basis with his deceased son. Today our society is flooded with mediums and psychics who advertise their services nationwide through TV, magazines, radio, and newspapers. In their book *At the Hour of Death*, K. Osis and E. Haraldson write: “Spontaneous experiences of contact with the dead are surprisingly widespread. In a national opinion poll . . . 27 per cent of the American population said they had encounters with dead relatives, . . . widows and widowers . . . reported encounters with their dead spouses twice as often—51 per cent.”⁷ Communication with the spirits of the dead is not just an American phenomenon. Surveys conducted in other countries reveal a similar high percentage of people who engage the services of mediums to communicate with the spirit of their deceased loved ones.⁸

In their book *Immortality or Extinction?* Paul and Linda Badham, both professors at St. David University in Wales, devote a chapter to “The Evidence from Psychical Research” to support their belief in conscious life after death. They wrote: “Some people believe that direct contact with the dead can be achieved through mediums who allegedly have the ability, while in a state of trance, to transmit messages between the dead and the living. Belief in the reality of such communications is the lifeblood of the Spiritualist Churches, and mourners who consult mediums are often impressed by the convincing descriptions of departed loved-ones which the mediums give. On occasion a medium may also show knowledge of the deceased’s former life.”⁹

The Badhams acknowledge that in many cases mediums are charlatans who base their communications on “acute observation and intelligent guesswork.”¹⁰ Yet, they believe that there is “genuine evidence for the human personality’s survival of bodily death.”¹¹ They support their belief by reporting the cases of several members of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), who after their death began sending messages to living members of the SPR to prove that they had survived death.¹²

It is not our intent to dispute the ability of some mediums to receive and transmit messages from spirits. The question is whether such messages are from the spirits of the dead or from the spirits of Satan. We address this question later in this chapter, in conjunction with our study of King Saul’s consultation of the medium of Endor (1 Sam 28:7-25). At this juncture, it suffices to note that spiritualism still plays a major role today in fostering the belief in the survival of the soul after death. People who through mediums have been able to communicate with the alleged spirits of their deceased loved ones have reason to believe in the immortality of the soul.

Near-Death Experiences. Another significant development of our time, which has contributed to promote belief in the survival of the soul, is the study of “near-death experiences.” Such studies are based on reports from people who have been resuscitated from a close encounter with death, and from doctors and nurses who have recorded the deathbed experiences of some of their patients.

The experiences reported by persons who have had a close encounter with death often parallel what many believe to be the life of the soul in Paradise. Though no two reports are the same, some of the common characteristics are: the impression of peacefulness, the sensation of being pulled very rapidly through a dark space of some kind, floating in a weightless, spiritual body, the awareness of being in the presence of a spiritual being, an encounter with a bright light, often identified with Jesus Christ or an angel, and a vision of a city of light.¹³ Such experiences are interpreted as proof that at death the soul leaves the body and lives in a disembodied condition.

Reports of near-death experiences are not new. They can be found in Classical literature, such as the *History of the English Church and People* by the Venerable Bede, the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, *Primitive Culture* by Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, and the *Republic* by Plato.¹⁴ In the *Republic*, Plato gives a remarkable account of a near-death experience, which he uses to substantiate the belief in the immortality of the soul.

He wrote: “Er, the son of Armenius, by race a Pamphylian. He once upon a time was slain in battle, and when the corpses were taken up on the

tenth day already decayed, was found intact, and having been brought home, at the moment of his funeral, on the twelfth day as he lay upon the pyre, revived, and after coming to life related what, he said, he had seen in the world beyond. He said that when his soul went forth from his body he journeyed with a great company and that they came to a mysterious region where there were two openings side by side in the earth, and above and over against them in the heaven two others, and that judges were sitting between these, and that after every judgment they bade the righteous journey to the right and upward through the heaven with tokens attached to them in front of the judgment passed upon them, and the unjust to take the road to the left and downward, they too wearing behind signs of all that had befallen them, and that when he himself drew near they told him that he must be the messenger to mankind to tell them of that other world, and they charged him to give ear and to observe everything in the place. . . . Yet how and in what way he returned to the body he said he did not know, but suddenly recovering his sight he saw himself at dawn lying on the funeral pyre.”¹⁵

Plato concludes his story with this revealing comment: “So the tale was saved. . . . And it will save us if we believe it . . . that the soul is immortal and capable of enduring all the extremes of good and evil.”¹⁶ One wonders what kind of salvation the belief in the immortality of the soul can offer to a person. Survival as a disembodied soul or spirit in an ethereal world hardly compares with the Biblical hope of the resurrection of the whole person to a real life on this planet earth renewed to its original perfection. To this question we return in the final chapter which examines the Biblical vision of the world to come.

Studies of Near-Death Experiences. In our time, the study of near-death experiences was largely pioneered by American psychiatrist Raymond A. Moody. His two seminal books, *Life after Life* (1975) and *Reflections on Life after Life* (1977) have generated a multitude of books, articles, and debates that address out-of-body experiences.¹⁷ “More recently, a bibliography of books and articles relevant to near-death experiences has been published, listing two and a half thousand titles.”¹⁸

Moody studied 150 persons who had near-death experiences and, in some cases, who clinically were dead. The question is how the data should be interpreted. Moody’s publisher asserts that the reports are “actual case histories that reveal there is life after death.”¹⁹ Moody himself, however, is far more cautious. He explicitly denies that he tried “to construct a proof of survival of bodily death,” even though he regards the data as “highly significant” for such a belief.²⁰ He leaves open the possibility of conceiving of near-death experiences as intimations of immortality or merely as the result of terminal physiological events.

It is not our intent to examine the alleged probative value of near-death experiences for the belief in the survival of the soul. Our normative authority for defining human nature is not the subjective near-death experiences of people, but the objective revelation God has provided us in His Word (2 Pet 1:19). Thus, only three basic observations about near-death experiences are considered here.

First, there is the problem of defining death. The Editor of *Lancet*, a journal dedicated to medical research, points out that “only a deliberate use of obsolete definitions of death can enable one to claim that anybody has, under clinical conditions, returned to tell us what lies beyond death, for by working definition, periodically updated, death is just beyond the point from which anybody can return to tell us anything.”²¹ Similarly, Professor Paul Kurts comments, “We have no hard evidence that the subjects had in fact died. Such a proof is not impossible to obtain: rigor mortis is one sign and brain death is another. What the accounts actually describe is ‘dying process or near-death experience, *not* death itself.”²²

Second, we need to remember, as Paul and Linda Badham observe, that “any person hovering between life and death must be suffering profound physical and psychological stress. A brain starved of oxygen, drugged by hallucinatory painkillers, or excited by fever is hardly likely to function properly and who knows what visions could be accounted for by its disturbed conditions?”²³ Some research has shown the similarity that exists between near-death experiences and the effects caused by psychedelic drugs. “Modern consciousness-research has shown that these similarities can be reproduced by drugs in psychedelic sessions. These experiences, thus, tend to belong to the continuum of psychic experiences, which have proved, not life after death, but that the relation between the conscious self and the embodied self is more complex than previously thought.”²⁴

Lastly, how can it be established that near-death experiences are “real experiences,” rather than the product of the patients’ own mind? And why is it that nearly all the reports of near-death experiences concern happiness and heavenly fulfillment, but no glimpses of the fiery torments of hell? It is evident that when people are dying they prefer to dream about the bliss of heaven rather than the suffering of hell. But even the vision of heaven depends largely upon one’s religious background.

Karlis Osis and Erlendur Haraldsson evaluated the reports of more than 1,000 deathbed experiences in the USA and India. They found that the vision of the Hindu patients was typically Indian, while that of the American was Western and Christian. For example, one college-educated Hindu woman had the experience of being brought to heaven on a cow, while an American

patient who had prayed to St. Joseph encountered her patron saint in the experience.²⁵ Such reports about afterlife experiences reflect the personal beliefs of the patients. What they experienced in the process of dying was most likely conditioned by their personal beliefs.

We should always remember that deathbed or near-death experiences are experiences of people who are still alive or whose mind have regained consciousness. Whatever they experience under such circumstances is still part of their present life and not of life after death. The Bible does report the cases of seven of people who were raised from the dead (1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:25-37; Luke 7:11-15; 8:41-56; Acts 9:36-41; 20:9-11), but none of them had an afterlife experience to share.

Lazarus was brought back to life after being clinically dead for four days did not report any exciting out-of-the-body experiences. The reason is simple. Death according to the Bible is the cessation of life of the whole person, body and soul. There is no form of conscious existence between death and resurrection. The dead rest unconsciously in their tombs until Christ will call them forth on the glorious day of His coming.

New Age Movement. The belief in conscious life after death is popularized today especially by the New Age Movement.²⁶ Defining this popular movement is not easy, because it represents a network of organizations and individuals who share common values and a common vision. These values are derived from Eastern/occult mysticism and a pantheistic world view according to which all share in the One who is God. They envision a coming “new age” of peace and mass enlightenment, known as the “Age of Aquarius.”

New Agers may differ on when and how the New Age begins, but they all agree that they can hasten the new order by becoming involved in the political, economic, social, and spiritual life. According to some social analysts, the New Age Movement has become a major cultural trend of our time. Elliot Miller defines it as “a *third major social force* vying with traditional Judeo-Christian religion and secular humanism for cultural dominance.”²⁷

For the New Agers, the ultimate reality is a pantheistic God manifested as an impersonal, infinite consciousness, and force. Human beings are part of the divine consciousness and are separated from God only in their own consciousness. By means of specific techniques, like meditation, chanting, ecstatic dancing, and sensory deprivations, New Agers seek to experience oneness with God. Thus, salvation for the New Ager is equated with self-realization through special spiritual techniques.

The Channeling Craze. An important aspect of the New Age Movement is the alleged communication with departed human and extra-human intelligences. This phenomenon is known as “channeling,” but it has been rightly called “Spiritism New Age Style.”²⁸ Miller rightly notes that “spiritism has played a part historically in virtually all forms of paganism. Those who have allowed spirits to use their bodies in this way have been called a variety of names, including ‘shaman,’ ‘witch doctor,’ ‘medicine man,’ ‘oracle,’ ‘fortune-teller,’ and ‘seer.’ In our culture, the common term has been ‘medium,’ but in recent years it has been largely abandoned in favor of ‘channel’ or ‘channeler,’ reflecting, in part, a desire to break free from negative stereotypes that have come to be associated with mediums over the years.”²⁹

A “channeler” is essentially a person who claims to be the recipient of teachings and wisdom from the great spirits of the past. The channeling business is booming in all the major American cities. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, in a decade the number of known professional channelers in Los Angeles has increased from two to over one thousand in a decade.³⁰ This is compelling channelers to employ Madison Avenue psychology to sell their services.

An advertisement by Taryn Krive, a popular channeler, gives a good idea of the services they provide: “Through Taryn, a number of Spirit Guides bring forth their teachings and messages. They will answer your questions regarding this life and other lives. They will help you identify your life lessons and unblock your highest potential for living and loving. . . . Meet your Spirit Guides. Learn to recall your past lives and release their influences from the present. Develop your channeling abilities (conscious channeling, automatic writing, trance channeling).”³¹

The person who has played a leading role in promoting the New Age Movement, especially channeling, is the famous actress Shirley Maclaine. Her books have sold over five million copies. The *Out on a Limb* mini-series sparked an unprecedented interest in channeling. MacLaine takes seriously her role as the chief evangelist of the New Age. Following her TV mini-series, she held two-day, nationwide seminars called “Connecting with the Higher Self.” Later she used the proceeds from the seminars to establish a 300 acre spiritual center near Pueblo, Colorado. The purpose of the center is to provide a trusted place where people can communicate with higher Spirits.³²

An important factor which has contributed to the success of the New Age is its claim to connect people not only with their deceased loved ones, but also with the Great Spirits of the past. As parapsychologist and channel Alan Vaughan points out: “The thrill, the immediacy of that contact with another

consciousness, may be the driving force behind the phenomenal growth of the practice of channeling.”³³

Death as Transition to Higher Existence. Communicating with the spirits of the dead is based on the belief that death is not the end of life, but merely a transition to a higher plane of existence which makes it possible in time to reincarnate either on earth or elsewhere. Virginia Essene, who claims to be speaking as a channel for “Jesus,” states: “Death is an automatic and nearly immediate entrance into a greater sphere of learning, growth, and service to which you are well-accustomed already. You simply live at that higher level of purpose, joy and understanding.”³⁴

In many ways, the New Age’s view of death as the immediate entrance into a higher sphere of living reflects the traditional Christian belief in the conscious survival of the soul at death. Both beliefs can be traced back to the first lie uttered by the serpent in the Garden of Eden: “You will not die” (Gen 3:4). This lie has lived on through the centuries with devastating effects on both Christian and non-Christian religions.

In his penetrating analysis of the New Age Movement, Elliot Miller keenly observes: “It has been rightly noted by many Christian observers that the core New Age/channeling doctrines, ‘You can be as God,’ and ‘You shall not die,’ were first uttered by the serpent in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:4-5). Embraced then, this ‘gospel’ produced all of the world’s misery. Embraced now, it will make all that God has done in Christ to remedy the situation of no avail to the individual in question.”³⁵

Miller is right in noting that the belief in innate immortality promoted by the New Age today makes of no avail Christ’s provision of salvation, since people think they already have the resources to enter into a higher level of existence after death. Unfortunately, Miller fails to realize that the success of the New Age in promoting such a belief is largely due to the traditional Christian dualistic view of human nature. Christians who believe that the body is mortal and the soul immortal have no major difficulty in accepting the New Age view of death as the transition into a higher sphere of living. After all, the latter largely corresponds to the belief in the conscious existence of the saints’ souls in the bliss of Paradise.

Conclusion. The preceding survey shows how Satan’s lie, “You shall not die” (Gen 3:4) has lived on in different forms throughout human history until our time. While during the Middle Ages, belief in the afterlife was promoted through literary and artistic, superstitious representations of the bliss of the saints and the torments of the sinners, today such a belief is propagated in a more sophisticated way through mediums, psychics, “scien-

tific” research into near-death experiences, and New Age channeling with the spirits of the past. Satan’s methods have changed, but his objective is still the same: make people believe the lie that no matter what they do they will not die but become like gods by living for ever. Our only protection against such a deception is through a clear understanding of what the Bible teaches about the nature of death and the state of the dead. To these questions we now turn our attention.

PART II: THE NATURE OF DEATH

The Death of Socrates and of Christ. To illustrate the Biblical view of death, Oscar Cullmann contrasts the death of Socrates with that of Jesus.³⁶ In his book *Phaedo*, Plato offers an impressive description of the death of Socrates. On the day of his death, Socrates taught his disciples the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and showed them how to live out such a belief in dying. He explained to his disciples how to liberate the soul from the prison of the body by occupying oneself with the eternal truths of philosophy. Since death completes the process of liberating of the soul, Plato tells us that Socrates went to his death by drinking the hemlock in complete peace and composure. For Socrates, death was the soul’s greatest friend because it sets the soul free from the shackles of the body.

How different was Jesus’ attitude toward death! On the eve of His death in Gethsemane, Jesus was “greatly distressed and troubled” (Mark 14:33) and said to His disciples, “My soul is very sorrowful, even unto death” (Mark 14:34). For Jesus, death was not a great friend but a dreadful enemy, because it would separate Him from His Father. He did not face death with the composure of Socrates who met death peacefully as a friend. When confronted with the reality of death, Jesus cried to God saying: “Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt” (Mark 14:36).

Jesus knew that to die meant to be separated from God. Thus, He cried to God because He did not want to be forsaken by the Father or even by His disciples. What a contrast between Socrates and Jesus in their understanding and experience of death! Cullmann notes that “The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews . . . writes that Jesus ‘with loud cries and tears offered up prayers and supplications to him who was able to save him’ (Heb 5: 7). Thus, according to the Epistle of Hebrews, Jesus wept and cried in the face of death. There is Socrates, calmly and composedly speaking of the immortality of the soul; here Jesus, weeping and crying.”³⁷

The contrast is evident, especially in the death-scene. Socrates drank the hemlock with sublime calm. Jesus cried: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). This is not “death as a friend,” but as an enemy. Paul rightly calls it “the last enemy” (1 Cor 15:26), which at the end will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:14).

If death released the soul from the body and thus made it possible for the soul to enjoy communion with God, then Christ would have welcomed death for offering Him the opportunity to be reunited with His Father. But Jesus saw death as separation from God, who is life and the Creator of all life. He sensed this separation more than any other human being, because He was and still is closely connected to God. He experienced death in all its horror, not only in the body but also in His soul. This is why He cried: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46).

The contrast between the death of Socrates and the death of Jesus helps us to appreciate the Biblical view of death. In Greek thought, the death of the body was not in any sense the destruction of the true life. In Biblical thought, death is the destruction of *all* life created by God. “Therefore it is death and not the body which must be conquered by the resurrection.”³⁸ This is why the resurrection of Jesus is so fundamental to the Christian faith. It provides the needed reassurance that death has been conquered for those who accept Christ’s provision of salvation.

Cullmann points out that “belief in the immortality of the soul is not belief in a revolutionary event. Immortality, in fact, is only a *negative* assertion: the soul does *not* die, but simply lives on. Resurrection is a positive assertion: the whole man, who has really died, is recalled to life by a new act of creation of God. Something has happened—a miracle of creation! For something has also happened previously, something fearful: life formed by God has been destroyed.”³⁹

Sin and Death. To understand the Biblical view of death, we need to go back to the account of creation where death is presented, not as a natural process willed by God, but as something unnatural opposed to God. The Genesis narrative teaches us that death came into the world as a result of sin. God commanded Adam not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and added the warning: “In the day that you eat of it you shall die” (Gen 2:17). The fact that Adam and Eve did not die on the day of their transgression has led some to conclude that human beings do not actually die because they have a conscious soul that survives the death of the body.

This figurative 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. From a state in which it was possible for them 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 by the tree of life. 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. In the prophetic vision of the New Earth, the tree of life is found on both sides of the river as a symbol of the gift of eternal life bestowed upon the redeemed (Rev 21:2).

The divine pronouncement found in Genesis 2:17 places a clear connection between human death and the transgression of God's commandment. Thus, life and death in the Bible have religious and ethical significance because they are dependent upon human obedience or disobedience to God. This is a fundamental teaching of the Bible, namely, that death came into this world as a result of human disobedience (Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:21). This does not diminish the responsibility of the individual for his participation in sin (Ez 18:4, 20). The Bible, however, makes a distinction between the first death, which every human being experiences as a result of Adam's sin (Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:21), and the second death experienced after the resurrection (Rev 20:6) as the wages for sins personally committed (Rom 6:23).

Death as the Separation of the Soul from the Body. A major question we need to address at this point is the Biblical view of the nature of death. To be specific: Is death the separation of the immortal soul from the mortal body, so that when the body dies the soul lives on? Or, is death the cessation of existence of the whole person, body and soul?

Historically, Christians have been taught that death is the separation of the immortal soul from the mortal body, so that the soul survives the body in a disembodied state. 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."⁴⁰ Augustus Strong defines death in similar terms in his well-known *Systematic Theology*: "Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body. We distinguish it from spiritual death, or the separation of the soul from God."⁴¹

In his *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (widely used as a textbook), Calvinistic theologian Henry Clarence Thiessen expresses himself in a similar way: "Physical death relates to the physical body; the soul is immortal and as such does not die."⁴² In his *Christian Dogmatics*, Francis Pieper, a conservative Lutheran theologian, states most clearly the historic view of

death: “Temporal death is nothing other than a tearing asunder of men, the separation of the soul from the body, the unnatural disruption of the union of soul and body which has been created by God to be one.”⁴³ Statements like these could be multiplied, since they are found in most systematic theology textbooks and in all major confessional documents.

The above historical view of the nature of death as the separation of the soul from the body has come under a massive attack by many modern scholars. A few examples suffice to illustrate this point. Lutheran theologian Paul Althaus writes: “Death is more than a departure of the soul from the body. The 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.”⁴⁴

Althaus argues that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul does not do justice to the seriousness of death, since the soul passes through death unscathed.⁴⁵ Moreover, the notion that a person can be totally happy and blessed without the body denies the significance of the body and empties the resurrection of its meaning.⁴⁶ If believers are already blessed in heaven and the wicked are already tormented in hell, why is the final judgment still necessary?⁴⁷ Althaus concludes that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul rips apart what belongs together: the body and the soul, the destiny of the individual and that of the world.⁴⁸

In his book *The Body*, John A. T. Robinson states: “The soul does not survive a man—it simply goes out, draining away with the blood.”⁴⁹ In his monograph *Life after Death*, Taito Kantonen makes this pointed statement: “The Christian view of death is in full accord with the view of natural science as far as the latter goes. When we die we are really dead. Our hopes and desires cannot change this fact. Man does not differ from the rest of creation by having a soul that cannot die.”⁵⁰

Even the liberal *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, in its article on death explicitly states: “The ‘departure’ of the *nephesh* [soul] must be viewed as a figure of speech, for it does not continue to exist independently of the body, but dies with it (Num 31:19; Jud 16:30; Ez 13:19). 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, but a gift of God which returns to him at the time of death (Eccl 12:7).”⁵¹

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia acknowledges that “we are influenced always more or less by the Greek, Platonic idea, that the body dies, yet the soul is immortal. Such an idea is utterly contrary to the Israelite consciousness and is nowhere found in the Old Testament. The *whole man* dies, when in death the spirit (Ps 146:4; Eccl 12:7), or soul (Gen 35:18; 2 Sam 1:9; 1 Kings 17:21; Jonah 4:3), goes out of a man. Not only his body, but his soul also returns to a state of death and belongs to the nether-world; therefore the Old Testament can speak of a death of one’s soul (Gen 37:21; Num 23:10; Deut 22:21; Jud 16:30; Job 36:14; Ps 78:50).”⁵²

This challenge of modern scholarship to the traditional view of death as the separation of the soul from the body has been long overdue. It is hard to believe that for most of its history, Christianity by and large has held to a view of human death and destiny which has been largely influenced by Greek thought, rather than by the teachings of Scripture. What is even more surprising is that no amount of Biblical scholarship will change the traditional belief held by most churches on the intermediate state. The reason is simple. While individual scholars can and will change their doctrinal views without suffering devastating consequences, the same is not true for well-established churches.

A church that introduces radical changes in its historical doctrinal beliefs undermines the faith of its members and thus the stability of the institution. A case in point is the Worldwide Church of God which lost over half of its members when doctrinal changes were introduced by its leaders early in 1995. The high cost of rectifying denominational religious beliefs should not deter Bible-believing Christians who are committed, not to preserve traditional beliefs for tradition’s sake, but to constantly seek for a fuller understanding of the teachings of Word of God on issues relevant to their lives.

Death as Cessation of Life. When we search the Bible for a description of the nature of death, we find many clear statements that need little or no interpretation. In the first place, Scripture describes death as a return to the elements from which man originally was made. In pronouncing sentence upon Adam after his 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 termination of one’s life, which results in the decay and decomposition of the body. “Since man is created of perishable matter, his natural condition is mortality (Gen 3:19).”⁵³

A study of the words “to die,” “death,” and “dead” in Hebrew and Greek reveals that death is perceived in the Bible as the deprivation or cessation of life. The ordinary Hebrew word meaning “to die” is *muth*, which occurs in the Old Testament over 800 times. In the vast majority of cases, *muth* is used in the simple sense of the death of men and animals. There is no hint in its usage of any distinction between the two. A clear example is found in Ecclesiastes 3:19, which says: “For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other.”

The Hebrew *muth* “to die” is sometimes used, as in English, in a figurative way to denote the destruction or elimination of a nation (Is 65:15; Hos 2:3; Am 2:2), a tribe (Deut 33:6; Hos 13:1), or a city (2 Sam 20:19). None of these figurative uses supports the idea of individual survival. On the contrary, we find that the word *muth* [“to die”] is used in Deuteronomy 2:16 in parallel with *tamam*, which means “to be consumed” or “to be finished.” The parallelism suggests that death is seen as the end of life.

The corresponding, ordinary Greek word meaning “to die” is *apothanein* which is used 77 times in the New Testament. With few exceptions, the verb denotes the cessation of life. The exceptions are mostly figurative uses which depend upon the literal meaning. For example, Paul says: “We are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died” (2 Cor 5:14). It is evident that this is not referring to physical death but to the effects of Christ’s death on the believer’s position before God. We could translate “therefore all have died” as “therefore all are counted to have died.” None of the literal or figurative uses of the Hebrew *muth* or of the Greek *apothanein* suggests that the “soul” or “spirit” survives the death of an individual.

Old Testament Descriptions of Death. We have just noted that the Hebrew and Greek verbs used in Scripture for “to die” do not really explain the meaning and nature of death, except to tell us that the death of men and animals is identical. More revealing is the use of the Hebrew noun *maveth* which is used about 150 times and is generally translated “death.” From the use of *maveth* in the Old Testament, we learn three important things about the nature of death.

First, there is no remembrance of the Lord in death: “For in death [*maveth*] there is no remembrance of thee; in Sheol who can give thee praise” (Ps 6:5). The reason for no remembrance in death is simply because the thinking process stops when the body with its brain dies. “His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that day his thoughts perish” (Ps 146:4). Since at death the “thoughts perish,” it is evident there is no conscious soul

that survives the death of the body. If the thinking process, which is generally associated with the soul, survived the death of the body, then the thoughts of the saints would not perish. They would be able to remember God. But the fact is that “the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing” (Eccl 9:5).

Second, no praise of God is possible in death or in the grave. “What profit is there in my death [*maveth*], if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise thee? Will it tell of thy faithfulness?” (Ps 30:9). By comparing death with dust, the Psalmist clearly shows that there is no consciousness in death because dust cannot think. The same thought is expressed in Psalm 115:17: “The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any that go down into silence.” Here the Psalmist describes death as a state of “silence.” What a contrast with the “noisy” popular vision of the afterlife where the saints praise God in Heaven and the wicked cry in agony in Hell!

Third, death is described as a “sleep.” “Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; lighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death” (Ps 13:3). This characterization of death as “sleep” occurs frequently in the Old and New Testaments because it fittingly represents the state of unconsciousness in death. Shortly we examine the significance of the “sleep” metaphor for understanding the nature of death.

Some argue that the intent of the passages we have just quoted and which describe death as an unconscious state “is not to teach that the soul of man is unconscious when he dies,” but rather that “in the state of death man can no longer take part in the activities of the present world.”⁵⁴ In other words, a dead person is unconscious as far as this world is concerned, but his soul is conscious as far as the world of the spirits is concerned. The problem with this interpretation is that it is based on the gratuitous assumption that the soul survives the death of the body, an assumption which is clearly negated in the Old Testament. We have found that in the Old Testament the death of the body, is the death of the soul because the body is the outer form of the soul.

In several places, *maveth* [death] is used with reference to the second death. “As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ez 33:11; cf. 18:23, 32). Here “the death of the wicked” is evidently not the natural death that every person experiences, but the death inflicted by God at the End on unpenitent sinners. None of the literal descriptions or figurative references to death in the Old Testament suggests the conscious survival of the soul or spirit apart from the body. Death is the cessation of life for the total person.

New Testament References to Death. The New Testament references to “death,” a term rendered by the Greek *thanatos*, are not as informative regarding the nature of death as those found in the Old Testament. The reason is partly due to the fact that in the Old Testament many of the references to death are found in the poetic or wisdom books like Psalms, Job, and Ecclesiastes. This kind of literature is absent in the New Testament. More important is the fact that death is seen in the New Testament from the perspective of Christ’s victory over death. This is a dominant theme in the New Testament which conditions the Christian view of death.

Through His victory over death, Christ has neutralized the sting of death (1 Cor 15:55); He has abolished death (2 Tim 1:10); He has overcome the devil who had power over death (Heb 2:14); He has in His hand the keys of the kingdom of death (Rev 1:18); He is the head of a new humanity as the first-born from the dead (Col 1:18); He causes believers to be born anew to a living hope through His resurrection from the dead (1 Pet 1:3).

Christ’s victory over death affects the believer’s understanding of physical, spiritual, and eternal death. The believer can face physical death with the confidence that Christ has swallowed up death in victory and will awaken the sleeping saints at His coming (1 Cor 15:51-56).

Believers who were spiritually “dead through trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1; cf. 4:17-19; Matt 8:22) have been regenerated into a new life in Christ (Eph 4:24). Unbelievers who remain spiritually dead throughout their lives and do not accept Christ’s provision for their salvation (John 8:21, 24), on the Day of Judgment will experience the second death (Rev 20:6; 21:8). This is the final, eternal death from which there is no return.

The figurative meanings of the word *thanatos*—death depend entirely on the literal meaning as cessation of life. To argue for the conscious existence of the soul on the basis of figurative meaning of death is to attribute to the word a meaning which is foreign to it. This runs contrary to literary and grammatical rules and destroys the connections among physical, spiritual, and eternal death.

Death as Sleep in the Old Testament. In both the Old and New Testaments, death is often described as “sleep.” Before attempting to explain the reason for the Biblical use of the metaphor of “sleep” for death, let us look at a few examples. In the Old Testament, three Hebrew words meaning “sleep” are used to describe death.

The most common word, *shachav*, is used in the frequently occurring expression so-and-so “slept with his fathers” (Gen 28:11; Deut 31:16; 2 Sam

7:12; 1 Kings 2:10). Beginning with its initial application to Moses (“Behold, you are about to sleep with your fathers” – Deut 31:16), and then to David (“Thou shall sleep with thy fathers” – 2 Sam 7:12, KJV), and Job (“Now I shall sleep in the dust” – Job 7:21, KJV), we find this beautiful euphemism for death running like an unbroken thread all through the Old and New Testaments, ending with Peter’s statement that “the fathers fell asleep” (2 Pet 3:4). Commenting on these references, Basil Atkinsom aptly observes: “Thus the kings and others who died are said to sleep with their fathers. If their spirits were alive in another world, could this possibly be regularly said without a hint that the real person was not sleeping at all?”⁵⁵

Another Hebrew word for “sleep” is *yashen*. This word occurs both as a verb, “to sleep” (Jer 51:39, 57; Ps 13:3) and as a noun, “sleep.” The latter is found in the well-known verse of Daniel 12:2: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” Notice that in this passage both the godly and ungodly are sleeping in the dust of the earth and both will be resurrected at the End.

A third Hebrew word used for the sleep of death is *shenah*. Job asks this rhetorical question: “But man dies and is laid low; man breathes his last, and where is he?” (Job 14:10). His answer is: “As waters fail from a lake, and a river wastes away and dries up, so man lies down and rises not again; till the heavens are no more he will not awake, or be roused out of his sleep [*shenah*]” (Job 14:11-12; cf. Ps 76:5; 90:5). Here is a graphic description of death. When a person takes the last breath, “where is he?” that is, “what is left of him?” Nothing. He does not exist any more. He becomes like a lake or river whose water has dried up. He sleeps in the grave and “will not awake” till the end of the world.

One wonders, would Job have given us such a negative description of death if he believed that his soul would survive death? If death introduced Job’s soul into the immediate presence of God in heaven, why does he speak of waiting “till the heavens are no more” (John 14:11) and “till my release should come” (Job 14:14)? It is evident that neither Job nor any other Old Testament believer knew of a conscious existence after death.

Death as a Sleep in the New Testament. Death is described as sleep in the New Testament more frequently than in the Old. The reason may be that the hope of the resurrection, which is clarified and strengthened by Christ’s resurrection, gives new meaning to the sleep of death from which believers will awaken at Christ’s coming. As Christ slept in the tomb prior to His resurrection, so believers sleep in the grave while awaiting their resurrection.

There are two Greek words meaning “sleep” which are used in the New Testament. The first is *koimao* which is used fourteen times for the sleep of death. A derivative of this Greek noun is *koimeeterion*, from which comes our word *cemetery*. Incidentally, the root of this word is also the root of the word “home—*oikos*.” So the home and the cemetery are connected because both are a sleeping-place. The second Greek word is *katheudein*, which is generally used for ordinary sleep. In the New Testament it is used four times for the sleep of death (Matt 9:24; Mark 5:39; Luke 8:52; Eph 5:14; 1 Thess 4:14).

At the time of Christ’s crucifixion, “many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep [*kekoimemenon*] were raised” (Matt 27:52). In the original, the text reads: “Many bodies of the sleeping saints were raised.” It is evident that what was resurrected was the whole person and not just the bodies. There is no reference to their souls being reunited with their bodies, obviously because this concept is foreign to the Bible.

Speaking figuratively of Lazarus’ death, Jesus said: “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep [*kekoimetai*], but I go to awake him out of sleep” (John 11:11). When Jesus perceived that He was misunderstood, He “told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead’” (John 11:14). Then Jesus hastened to reassure Martha: “Your brother will rise again” (John 11:23).

This episode is significant, first of all, because Jesus plainly describes death as “sleep” from which the dead will awaken at the sound of His voice. Lazarus’ condition in death was similar to a sleep from which one awakens. Christ said: “I go to awake him out of sleep” (John 11:11). The Lord carried out His promise by going to the tomb to awaken Lazarus by calling: “‘Lazarus, come out.’ And the dead man came out” (John 11:43-44).

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). “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a *shout*, with the *voice* of the archangel, . . . And the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thess 4:16). 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 two expressions corroborate the notion that death is an unconscious state like sleeping, from which believers will awake on the day of Christ’s coming.

Lazarus Had No Afterlife Experience. Lazarus' experience is also significant because he spent four days in the grave. This was not a near-death experience, but a real death experience. If, as popularly believed, the soul at death leaves the body and goes to heaven, then Lazarus would have had an amazing experience to share about the four days he would have spent in paradise. The religious leaders and the people would have done all in their power to elicit from Lazarus as much information as possible about the unseen world. As Robertson Nichol puts it, "Had he [Lazarus] learned anything of the spirit world, it must have oozed out."⁵⁶ Such information would have provided valuable answers to the question of life after death which was so hotly debated among the Sadducees and Pharisees (Matt 22:23, 28; Mark 12:18, 23; Luke 20:27, 33).

But Lazarus had nothing to share about life after death, because during the four days he spent in the tomb he slept the unconscious sleep of death. What is true of Lazarus is also true of six other persons who were raised from the dead: The widow's son (1 Kings 17:17-24); the Shunammite's son (2 Kings 4:18-37); the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11-15); the daughter of Jairus (Luke 8:41, 42, 49-56); Tabitha (Acts 9:36-41); and Eutychus (Acts 20:9-12). Each of these persons came out of death as if it were out of a profound sleep, with the same feeling and individuality, but with no afterlife experience to share.

There are no indications that the soul of Lazarus, or of the other six persons raised from the dead, had gone to heaven. None of them had a "heavenly experience" to share. The reason being that none of them had ascended to heaven. This is confirmed by Peter's reference to David in his speech on the day of Pentecost: "Brethren, I may say to you confidently of the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is still with us to this day" (Acts 2:29). Some could argue that what was in the grave was David's body, not his soul which had gone to heaven. But this interpretation is negated by Peter's explicit words: "For *David did not ascend into the heavens*" (Acts 2:34). The Knox translation renders it, "*David never went up to heaven.*" The Cambridge Bible has the following note: "*For David is not ascended. Better ascended not. He went down to the grave and 'slept with his fathers.'*" What sleeps in the grave, according to the Bible, is not merely the body but the whole person who awaits the resurrection awakening.

Paul and the Sleeping Saints. In the two great chapters on the resurrection in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15, Paul repeatedly speaks of those who have fallen "asleep" in Christ (1 Thess 4:13, 14, 15; 1 Cor 15:6, 18, 20). A look at some of Paul's statements sheds light on what Paul meant by characterizing death as sleep.

In writing to the Thessalonians, who were grieving over their loved ones who had fallen asleep before experiencing the coming of Christ, Paul reassures them that as God raised Jesus from the dead, so He will through Christ “bring with him those who have fallen asleep” (1 Thess 4:14). Some maintain that Paul is here speaking of disembodied souls, which allegedly ascended to heaven at death and which will return with Christ when He descends to this earth at His return.

This interpretation ignores three major things. First, our study has shown that the Bible nowhere teaches that the soul at death ascends to heaven. Second, in the context, Paul is not speaking of immortal souls but of “those who are asleep” (1 Thess 4:13; cf. v. 14) and of “the dead in Christ” (1 Thess 4:16). “The dead in Christ will *rise* first” from their graves (1 Thess 4:16) and will not descend from heaven. There is no hint that the bodies *rise* from the graves and the souls *descend* from heaven to be reunited with the bodies. Such a dualistic notion is foreign to the Bible. Leon Morris’ comments that “Paul says *will bring*, not ‘will raise’”⁵⁸ is inaccurate, because Paul says both: Christ will raise the dead and bring them with Him. Thus, the context suggests that Christ brings with Him the dead which are raised first, that is, prior to the translation of the living believers.

Third, if Paul really believed that “the dead in Christ” were not really dead in the grave but alive in heaven as disembodied souls, he would have capitalized on their blissful condition in heaven to explain to the Thessalonians that their grieving was senseless. Why should they grieve for their loved ones if they were already enjoying the bliss of heaven? The reason Paul did not give such an encouragement is obviously because he knew that sleeping saints were not in heaven but in their graves.

This conclusion is supported by the assurance Paul gave to his readers that living Christians would not meet Christ at His coming before those who had fallen asleep. “We who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep” (1 Thess 4:15). The reason is that “the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess 4:16-17).

The fact that the living saints will meet with Christ at the same time as the sleeping saints indicates that the latter have not yet been united with Christ in heaven. If the souls of the sleeping saints were already enjoying fellowship with Christ in heaven and were to descend with Christ to earth at His second Advent, then obviously they would have an unmistakable priority over the living saints. But the truth is that both sleeping and living believers are awaiting their longed-for union with the Savior; a union which both will experience at the same time on the day of Christ’s coming.

Paul's discussion of the sleeping saints in 1 Corinthians 15 confirms much of what we have already found in 1 Thessalonians 4. After affirming the fundamental importance of Christ's resurrection for the Christian faith and hope, Paul explains that "if Christ had not been raised . . . Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished" (1 Cor 15:18-19). Paul could hardly have said that the sleeping saints would have perished without the guarantee of Christ's resurrection, if he believed that their souls were immortal and were already enjoying the bliss of Paradise. If Paul believed the latter, he probably would have said that without Christ's resurrection the soul of the sleeping saints would remain disembodied for all eternity. But Paul makes no allusion to such a possibility, because he believed that the whole person, body and soul, would have "perished" without the guarantee of Christ's resurrection.

It is significant that in the whole chapter which is devoted to the importance and dynamics of the resurrection, Paul never hints at the alleged reunification of the body with the soul at the resurrection. If Paul had held such a belief, he hardly could have avoided making some allusions to the reattachment of the body to the soul, especially in his discussions of the transformation of the believers from a mortal to an immortal state at Christ's coming. But the only "mystery" that Paul reveals is that "we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed" (1 Cor 15:51). This change from a perishable to an imperishable nature occurs for all, living and dead, at the same time, namely, at the sounding of "the last trumpet" (1 Cor 15:52). The change has nothing to do with disembodied souls regaining possession of their resurrected bodies. Rather, it is a change from mortal to immortal life for both the living and the dead in Christ: "The mortal puts on immortality" (1 Cor 15:54).

The Significance of the "Sleep" Metaphor. The popular use of the "sleep" metaphor to describe the state of the dead in Christ raises the question of its implications for the nature of death. Specifically, why is this metaphor used and what insights can we legitimately derive from it about the nature of death? There are three major reasons for the use of the "sleep" metaphor in the Bible. First, there is a 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. Thus, the "sleep" metaphor fittingly represents the unconscious state of the dead and their awakening on the day of Christ's return.

A second reason for the use of the "sleep" metaphor is suggested by the fact that it is a hope-inspiring figure of speech to represent death. It implies the assurance of a later awakening. As a person goes to sleep at night in the

hope of awakening in the morning, so the believer falls asleep in the Lord in the assurance of being awakened by Christ on resurrection morning. Albert Barnes aptly remarks: "In the Scripture sleep is used to intimate that death will not be *final*: that there will be an awakening out of this sleep, or a resurrection. It is a beautiful and tender expression, removing all that is dreadful in death, and filling the mind with the idea of calm repose after a life of toil, with a reference to a future resurrection in increased vigor and renovated powers."⁵⁹

When we hear or say that a person is dead, we automatically think that there is no more hope of bringing him/her back to life. But when we say that a person is sleeping in the Lord, we express the hope for his or her restoration to life on the day of the resurrection. Bruce Reichenbach notes that the "sleep" metaphor is not only a nice way to speak about death, but more important still, "it strongly suggests that death is not the end of human existence. Just as a person who is sleeping can be raised, so too the dead, as 'sleeping,' have the possibility of being re-created and living again. This is perhaps the significance of the difficult account in Matthew 9:24ff where Jesus says that the girl is not dead, but only sleeping. People who considered her dead had no hope for her. But because Jesus considered her sleeping, He saw that there was hope indeed that she could be resurrected to live again. He saw a potentiality in her that the others, unaware of the power of God, could not see. The metaphor 'sleep,' then, does not describe the ontological state of the dead [that is, the sleeping condition], but rather refers to the possibility of the deceased: that though they now no longer exist, by the power of God they can be recreated to live again."⁶⁰

The Sleep of Death as Unconsciousness. A third reason for the use of the "sleep" metaphor is suggested by the fact that there is no consciousness of the elapse of time in sleep. Thus, the metaphor provides a fitting representation of the unconscious state of the deceased between death and resurrection. They have no awareness of the passing of time. In his early writings, Luther expressed this thought in a most graphic way: "Just as one who falls asleep and reaches morning unexpected when he awakes, without knowing what has happened to him, so shall we suddenly rise on the last day without knowing how we have come into death and through death."⁶¹ Again Luther wrote: "We shall sleep until He comes and knocks on the little grave and says, Doctor Martin, get up! Then I shall rise in a moment and be happy with Him forever."⁶²

For the sake of accuracy, it must be pointed out that later in life Luther largely rejected the notion of the unconscious sleep of the dead, apparently because of Calvin's strong attack against this doctrine. In his *Commentary on*

Genesis, which he wrote in 1537, Luther remarks: “The departed soul does not sleep in this manner [regular sleep]; it is, more properly speaking, awake and has vision and conversation with the angels and God.”⁶³ The change in Luther’s position from the unconscious to the conscious state of the dead only serves to show that even influential reformers were not exempted from the theological pressures of their time.

Like Luther, most Christians today believe that the “sleep” metaphor is used in the Bible to teach, not the unconscious state of the dead, but that “there is a resurrection, an awakening.”⁶⁴ Some scholars argue that death is compared to a sleep, “not because a person is unconscious, but because the dead do not return to this earth nor are aware of what is happening where they once lived.”⁶⁸ In other words, the dead are unconscious as far as what happens on the earth, but are very conscious as far as their life in Heaven or Hell.

This conclusion is not based on Scripture, but on the use of the “sleep” metaphor in intertestamental literature. For example, *1 Enoch*, dated about 200 B. C., speaks of the righteous as having “a long sleep” (100:5), but their souls are conscious and active in heaven (102:4-5; cf. *2 Baruch* 36:11; *2 Esdras* 7:32). After examining this literature, John Cooper concludes: “The metaphors of sleep and rest are used of persons in the intermediate state who are conscious and active, but not in earthly, bodily ways.”⁶⁶

The Biblical meaning of the “sleep” metaphor cannot be decided on the basis of its use in the intertestamental literature, because, as we have seen, during that period, Hellenistic Jews tried to harmonize the teachings of the Old Testament with the Greek dualistic philosophy of their time. The outcome was the adoption of such beliefs as the immortality of the soul, the reward or punishment given immediately after death, and prayers for the dead. Such beliefs are foreign to the Bible.

Our study of the “sleep” metaphor in the Old and New Testaments has shown that the metaphor implies a state of unconsciousness that will last until the awakening at the resurrection. It is worth noting that in *1 Corinthians* 15 sixteen times Paul uses the verb *egeiro*, which literally means “to wake up” from sleep.⁶⁷ The reiterated contrast between sleeping and awakening is impressive. The Bible uses the term “sleep” frequently because it enshrines a vital truth, namely, the dead who sleep in Christ are unconscious of any lapse of time until their resurrection. The believer who dies in Christ falls asleep and rests unconscious, until he awakes when Christ calls him back to life at His coming.

The Meaning and Ground of Immortality. Immortality in the Bible is not an innate human possession but a divine attribute. We noted already that the term “immortality” comes from the Greek *athanasia*, which means “deathlessness,” and hence unending existence. This term occurs only twice; first in connection with God “who alone has immortality” (1 Tim 6:16) and second in relation to human mortality which must put on immortality (1 Cor 15:53) at the time of the resurrection. The latter reference negates the notion of a natural immortality of the soul, because it says that immortality is something that the resurrected saints will “put on.” It is not something that they already possess.

“The ground of immortality,” as Vern Hannah puts it, “is soteriological and not anthropological.”⁷¹ What this means is that immortality is a divine gift to the saved and not a natural human possession. As P. T. Forsyth said, “a sure belief in immortality does not rest where philosophy puts it, but where religion puts it. It is not founded on the nature of the psychic organism, but on its relation to Another.”⁷² The “Another” is Jesus Christ “who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim 1:10).

Nowhere the Bible suggests that immortality is a natural quality or right of human beings. The presence of the “tree of life” in the garden of Eden indicates that immortality was *conditional* to the partaking of the fruit of such tree. Scripture teaches that “immortality is to be *sought* (Rom 2:7) and “put on” (1 Cor 15:53). It is, as ‘eternal life,’ the *gift* of God (Rom 6:23) to be *inherited* (Matt 19:29) by *knowing* God (John 17:3) *through Christ* (John 14:19; 17:2; Rom 6:23). In Paul’s view immortality is tied solely to the resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor 15) as the ground and pledge of the believer’s hope.”⁷³ Those who insist in finding the philosophical idea of the immortality of the soul in the Bible, ignore God’s revelation and insert dualistic Greek ideas into the Biblical faith.

Conclusion. The traditional and popular belief that death is not the cessation of life for the whole person, but the separation of the immortal soul from the mortal body can be traced back to Satan’s lie, “You shall not die” (Gen 3:4). This lie has lived on in different forms throughout human history until our time. Today, belief in the survival of the soul either in paradise or hell is promoted, not through the superstitious and gruesome literary and artistic representations of the Middle Ages, but through the polished image of mediums, psychics, the sophisticated “scientific” research into near-death experiences, and the popular New Age channeling with the spirits of the past. Satan’s methods have changed, but his objective is still the same: make people believe the lie that no matter what they do they will not die but will become like gods by living forever.

The traditional view of death limits the death experience to the body, since the soul continues its existence. Vern Hannah rightly states that “such a radical re-definition of death is in fact a denial of death—a definition, no doubt, which the ‘subtle serpent’ of Genesis 3 would find most appealing.”⁷⁴ The Bible takes death much more seriously. Death is the last enemy (1 Cor 15:26) and not the liberator of the immortal soul. As Oscar Cullmann puts it, “death is the destruction of *all* life created by God. Therefore it is death and not the body which must be conquered by the resurrection.”⁷⁵

Helmut Thielicke keenly observes that the idea of the immortality of the soul is a form of escapism which allows the “real” person to evade death. It is an attempt to disarm death. He goes on explaining that “we may hold in idealistic fashion to some ‘inviolable ego region,’ but death is not a ‘passing over’ but a ‘going under,’ and it leaves no room for romanticism or idealism. We may not devalue and obscure the reality of the grave through the idea of immortality. The Christian outlook is resurrection, not the immortality of the soul.”⁷⁶

Our only protection against the popular misconception of death is through a clear understanding of what the Bible teaches on the nature of death. We have found that both the Old and New Testaments clearly teach that death is the *extinction of life* for the whole person. There is no remembrance or consciousness in death (Ps 8:5; 146:4; 30:9; 115:17; Ecc 9:5). There is no independent existence of the spirit or soul apart from the body. Death is the loss of the *total being* and not merely the loss of *well-being*. The whole person rests in the grave in a state of unconsciousness characterized in the Bible as “sleep.” The “awakening” will take place at Christ’s coming when He will call back to life the sleeping saints.

The “sleep” metaphor is frequently used in the Bible to characterize the state of the dead because it fittingly represents the unconscious state of the dead and their awakening on the day of Christ’s coming. It suggests that there is no consciousness of time elapsing between death and resurrection. The “sleep” metaphor is truly a beautiful and tender expression which intimates that death is not the *final* human destiny because there will be an awakening out of the sleep of death on resurrection morning.

A major challenge to our conclusion that death in the Bible is the extinction of life for the whole person comes from unwarranted interpretations given to five New Testament passages (Luke 16:19-31; 23:42-43; Phil 1:23; 2 Cor 5:1-10; Rev 6:9-11) and to the two words, *sheol* and *hades*, which are used in the Bible to describe the dwelling place of the dead. Many Christians find in these texts and words Biblical support for their belief in the

conscious existence of the soul after death. We shall proceed to examine these texts and words in chapter 5 which focuses on the state of the dead during the interim period between death and resurrection, commonly called “the intermediate state.”

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1. Ray S. Anderson, *Theology, Death and Dying* (New York, 1986), p. 104.
2. See Hans Schwarz, “Luther’s Understanding of Heaven and Hell,” *Interpreting Luther’s Legacy*, ed. F. W. Meuser and S. D. Schneider (Minneapolis, 1969), pp. 83-94.
3. The text of this work is found in Calvin’s *Tracts and Treatises of the Reformed Faith*, trans. H. Beveridge (Grand Rapids, 1958), Vol. 3, pp. 413-490.
4. See, for example, Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1940), Vol. 3, pp. 713-30; W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Grand Rapids, n.d.), Vol. 2, pp. 591-640. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids, 1972), pp. 32-64.
5. Westminster Confession, chap. 32, as cited by John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches* (Atlanta, 1977), p. 228.
6. See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Published in 1739). For a brief but informative survey of those who attacked the belief in the afterlife as well as of those who revived such a belief, see Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis, 1984), pp. 173-184.
7. K. Osis and E. Haraldsson, *At the Hour of Death* (Avon, 1977), p. 13.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14. See also W. D. Rees, “The Hallucinations of Widowhood,” *BMJ* 4 (1971), pp. 37-41; G. N. M. Tyrrell, *Apparitions* (Duckworth, 1953), pp. 76-77.
9. Paul Badham and Linda Badham, *Immortality or Extinction?* (Totatwa, New Jersey, 1982), pp. 93-94.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 95-98.

13. These characteristics are taken from the report of American psychiatrist Raymond A. Moody, who wrote two seminal books on this subject, *Life after Life* (1976) and *Reflections on Life after Life* (1977). Moody's report is cited by Hans Schwarz (note 14), pp. 40-41.

14. For a discussion of near-death experiences throughout history, see Hans Schwarz, *Beyond the Gates of Death: A Biblical Examination of Evidence for Life After Death* (Minneapolis, 1981), pp. 37-48.

15. Plato, *Republic*, 10, 614, 621, in Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds., *The Collected Dialogues of Plato Including the Letters* (New York, 1964), pp. 839, 844.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 844.

17. See C. S. King, *Psychic and Religious Phenomena* (New York, 1978). For further literature on the subject, see Stanislav Grof and Christina Grof, *Beyond Death: the Gates of Consciousness* (New York, 1989); Maurice Rawlings, *Beyond Death's Door* (New York, 1981); John J. Heaney, *The Sacred and the Psychic: Parapsychology and the Christian Theology* (New York, 1984); Hans Schwarz, *Beyond the Gates of Death: A Biblical Examination of Evidence for Life After Death* (Minneapolis, 1981).

18. Paul Badham and Linda Badham (note 9), p. 88.

19. On the cover of R. A. Moody, *Life after Life* (New York, 1975).

20. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

21. Editorial, *Lancet* (June 24, 1978).

22. Paul Kurtz, "Is There Life After Death?" a paper submitted to the Eighth International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences, Los Angeles, November 1979.

23. Paul Badham and Linda Badham (note 9), p. 81.

24. Ray S. Anderson (note 1), p. 109.

25. K. Osis and E. Haraldsson (note 7), p. 197.

26. Some of the significant studies on the New Age Movement are: Vishal Mangalwadi, *When the New Age Gets Old: Looking for a Greater Spirituality* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 1992); Ted Peters, *The Cosmic Self. A Penetrating Look at Today's New Age Movements* (New York, 1991); Michael Perry, *Gods Within: A Critical Guide to the New Age* (London, 1992); Robert Basil, ed., *Not Necessarily the New Age* (New York, 1988).

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27. Elliot Miller, *A Crash Course on the New Age Movement* (Grand Rapids, 1989), p. 183.
 28. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
 29. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
 30. Lynn Smith, "The New, Chic Metaphysical Fad of Channeling," *Los Angeles Times* (December 5, 1986), Part V.
 31. Advertisement, *The Whole Person*, July 1987, p. 1.
 32. See Nina Easton, "Shirley MacLaine's Mysticism for the Masses," *Los Angeles Times Magazine* (September 6, 1987), p. 8.
 33. Alan Vaughan, "Channels—Historic Cycle Begins Again," *Mobius Reports* (Spring/Summer 1987), p. 4.
 34. "Jesus" (through Virginia Essene, "Secret Truths—What Is Life?") *Life Times*, 1, p. 3, as cited in Elliot Miller (note 27), p. 172.
 35. Elliot Miller (note 27), p. 178.
 36. Oscar Cullmann, "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?" in *Immortality and Resurrection. Death in the Western World: Two Conflicting Current of Thought*, Krister Stendahl, ed., (New York, 1965), pp. 12-20.
 37. *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.
 38. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
 39. *Ibid.*
 40. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Rome, 1994), p. 265.
 41. Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1970), p. 982.
 42. Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 338.
 43. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, trans. Theodore Engelder (St. Louis, 1950), Vol. 1, p. 536.
 44. Paul Althaus, *Die Letzten Dinge* (Gutersloth: Germany, 1957), p. 157.
 45. *Ibid.*, p. 155

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid., p. 156.

48. Ibid., p. 158.

49. John A. T. Robinson, *The Body, A study in Pauline Theology* (London, 1957), p. 14.

50. Taito Kantonen, *Life after Death* (Philadelphia, 1952), p. 18.

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

52. Herman Bavink, "Death," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Grand Rapids, 1960), Vol. 2, p. 812.

53. E. Jacobs (note 51), p. 803.

54. Howard W. Tepker, "Problems in Eschatology: The Nature of Death and the Intermediate State," *The Springfielder* (Summer 1965), p. 26.

55. Basil F. C. Atkinson, *Life and Immortality* (Taunton, England, n.d.), p. 38.

56. Emphasis supplied.

57. Emphasis supplied.

58. W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., *Expositor's Bible* (New York, 1908), p. 362.

59. Emphasis supplied.

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61. Leon Morris, *The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 86.

62. Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament. Luke and John* (Grand Rapids, 1978), p. 297.

63. Bruce R. Reichenbach, *Is Man the Phoenix* (Grand Rapids, 1978), p. 185.

64. Martin Luther, *Werke* (Weimar, 1910), XVII, II, p. 235.

65. Ibid., XXXVII, p. 151.

66. Ewald Plass, *What Luther Says* (St. Louis, 1959), Vol. 1, par. 1132.

67. Howard W. Tepker (note 54), p. 26.

68. Ibid.

69. John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting* (Grand Rapids, 1989), p. 151. The same view is expressed by Karel Hanhart, *The Intermediate State of the Dead* (Franeker, 1966), pp. 106-114; Murray Harris, *Raised Immortal* (London, 1986), pp. 134-137.

70. "Egeiro," in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, ed. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago, 1979), p. 214.

71. Vern A. Hannah, "Death, Immortality and Resurrection: A Response to John Yates, 'The Origin of the Soul,'" *The Evangelical Quarterly* 62:3 (1990), p. 245.

72. S. Mikolaski, ed., *The Creative Theology of P. T. Forsyth* (Grand Rapids, 1969), p. 249.

73. Vern A. Hannah (note 71), p. 245.

74. Ibid., p. 244.

75. Oscar Cullmann (note 36), p. 19.

76. Helmut Thielicke, *Tod un Leben*, pp. 30,43, as cited by G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids, 1972), p. 253.

Chapter V

THE STATE OF THE DEAD

Belief in life after death seems to have come back from the grave. News weekly covers it. Talk-show hosts discuss it. Popular books such as Moody and Kübler-Ross' *Life After Life* and Maurice Rawlings' *Beyond Death's Door* examine case histories of out-of-body experiences. Even a few pastors have begun preaching it again.

Once regarded by the secular community as a relic of a superstitious past and by believers as something too difficult to comprehend, belief in life after death is regaining popularity. In spite of a significant decline in religious beliefs, according to a recent Gallup Poll, 71 percent of Americans believe in some form of life after death.¹ "Even many who claim no religious belief expect life to go on after death: 46 percent believe in heaven, 34 percent in hell."²

The elaborate funeral arrangements which are intended to preserve the corporeal remains of the deceased reflect the conscious or subconscious belief in life after death. In the ancient world, the dead were provided for the next life with food, liquids, eating utensils, and clothes. Sometimes even servants and animals were buried with the corpse to provide the necessary conveniences in the next life.

Today, the mortuary rituals are different, but they still reveal a conscious or subconscious belief in life after death. The corpse is embalmed and hermetically sealed in a galvanized metal casket to retard decay. It is dressed in the finest clothes and placed on plush satin lining and soft pillows. It is sent on its way accompanied with items cherished in life, such as rings and family pictures. It is sacredly and silently interred in a cemetery, which is expertly manicured, surrounded by flowers, gates, and guards. The dead are surrendered to the "perpetual care" of the Lord in a professionally maintained and landscaped cemetery where no children play and no visitors disturb them.

The concern of people to send their deceased loved ones to the world of the dead with dignity and elegance reveals a desire to ensure their comfort in the afterlife. But, is there life after death? Are the dead conscious or unconscious? If conscious, are they able to communicate with the living? Are they enjoying the bliss of paradise or the torments of hell?

In chapter 4, we noted that belief in the afterlife is promoted today through the polished image of mediums and psychics who claim to place the living in contact with the spirits of their deceased loved ones, the sophisticated “scientific” research into near-death experiences, and the popular New Age channeling with the spirits of the past. In spite of renewed attempts to prove conscious existence in the afterlife, we found that the Bible clearly defines death as the cessation of life for the whole person, body and soul.

Objectives of This Chapter. This chapter continues our investigation of the nature of death by focusing on the condition of the dead during the period between death and the resurrection. This period is commonly known as “the intermediate state.” The fundamental question we pursue in this chapter is: Do the dead sleep in an unconscious state until the resurrection morning? Or, Is the soul of the saved experiencing the bliss of paradise, while that of the unsaved writhing in the torment of hell?

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part examines the Old Testament teaching regarding the state of the dead. The study focuses especially on the meaning and use of the word *sheol*, commonly used in the Old Testament to designate the resting place of the dead. We shall learn that, contrary to prevailing beliefs, none of the references suggest that *sheol* is the place of punishment for the ungodly (hell) or a place of conscious existence for the souls or spirits of the dead. In the Old Testament, *sheol* is the underground depository of the dead. There are no immaterial, immortal souls in *sheol*, simply because the soul does not survive the death of the body.

The second part investigates the New Testament teaching regarding the state of the dead. The study looks first at the eleven references to *hades*, which is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *sheol*. We shall see that *hades* is used like *sheol* in the Old Testament—to denote the grave or the realm of the dead, and not the place of punishment of the ungodly.

Next, we examine the five passages commonly cited in support of the belief in the conscious existence of the soul after death (Luke 16:19-31; 23:42-43; Phil 1:23; 2 Cor 5:1-10; Rev 6:9-11). None of these texts contradict the overall Biblical teaching on the unconscious state of the dead during the intermediate period.

PART I: THE STATE OF THE DEAD

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

A major challenge to the conclusion of chapter 4—that death in the Bible is the cessation of life for the whole person—comes from unwarranted interpretations given to two words used in the Bible to describe the dwelling place of the dead. The two words are *sheol* in the Old Testament and *hades* in the New Testament. They often are interpreted to represent the place where disembodied souls continue to exist after the death and the place of punishment of the ungodly (hell). Thus, it is imperative for us to study the Biblical meaning and usage of these two terms .

Translations and Interpretations of *Sheol*. The Hebrew word *sheol* occurs 65 times in the Old Testament and is translated variously as “grave,” “hell,” “pit,” or “death.” These variant translations make it difficult for the English reader to understand the basic meaning of *sheol*. For example, *The King James Version* (KJV) renders *sheol* “grave” 31 times, “hell” 31 times, and “pit” 3 times. This means that readers of the KJV are often led to believe that the Old Testament teaches the existence of hell where the wicked are tormented for their sins.

For example, in the KJV, Psalm 16:10 reads: “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell.” An uninformed reader will assume that the text means, “For thou wilt not leave my soul to be tormented in hell.” Such a reading is an obvious misinterpretation of the text which simply says, as rendered in the RSV, “For thou does not give me up to Sheol,” that is, the grave. The Psalmist here expresses confidence that God would not abandon him in the grave. In fact, this is the way the text is applied in Acts 2:27 to Christ, who was not left in the grave by the Father. The text has nothing to say about hell.

To avoid such misleading interpretations, the *Revised Standard Version* and *The New American Standard Bible* simply transliterate the Hebrew word into English letters as *sheol*. *The New International Version* usually translates it as “grave” (occasionally as “death”), with a footnote “*sheol*.” This translation accurately reflects the basic meaning of *sheol* as the grave or, even better, the collective realm of the dead.

Different translations often reflect the different theological convictions of the translators. For example, the translators of the KJV believed that at death the righteous go to Heaven and the wicked to hell. Consequently, they translated *sheol* “grave” when referring to the righteous, whose bodies rested in the grave, and “hell” when referring to the wicked whose souls are supposedly tormented in hell. A similar approach has been adopted by Old

Testament scholar Alexander Heidel,³ who has been criticized for arbitrarily handling the Biblical data.⁴

Several evangelical authors concur with the view of the KJV's translators in defining *sheol* as the abode of the soul, in contradistinction to the grave, which is the dwelling place of the body. In his book *Death and the Afterlife*, Robert Morey explicitly states: "The Hebrew word *sheol* is found 66 times in the Old Testament. While the Old Testament consistently refers to the body as going to the grave, it always refer to the soul or spirit of man as going to *sheol*."⁵ To support this contention, Morey cites Princeton scholar B. B. Warfield who wrote: "Israel, from the beginning of its recorded history, cherished the most settled convictions of the persistence of the soul after death. . . . The body is laid in the grave and the soul departs to *sheol*."⁶

Another scholar cited by Morey is George Eldon Ladd who writes in *The New Bible Dictionary*: "In the Old Testament, man does not cease to exist at death, but his soul descends to *sheol*."⁷ The same view is expressed by J. Thomson, who writes with reference to death in the Old Testament: "At death, the body remained on earth; *nephesh* [the soul] passed into *sheol*; but the breath, spirit, or *ruach*, returned to God, not *sheol*. But in *sheol*, a place of darkness, silence, and forgetfulness, life was foreboding and shadowy."⁸

On the basis of testimonies such as these, Morey concludes: "Modern scholarship understands the word *sheol* to refer to the place where the soul or spirit of man goes at death. None of the lexicographical literature defines *sheol* as referring to the grave or to passing into nonexistence."⁹ Some scholars propose a modified view by holding that *sheol* is exclusively the place of punishment of the ungodly and has "the same meaning as the modern hell."¹⁰

These interpretations of *sheol* as the dwelling place of souls (rather than the resting place of the body in the grave) or the place of punishment for the wicked, known as hell, do not stand up under the light of the Biblical usage of *sheol*. This fact is recognized even by John W. Cooper who has produced what is perhaps the most scholarly attempt to salvage the traditional dualistic view of human nature from the massive attacks of modern scholarship against it. Cooper states: "Perhaps most interesting for traditional Christians to note is the fact that it [*sheol*] is the resting place of the dead irrespective of their religion during life. *Sheol* is not the 'hell' to which the wicked are condemned and from which the Lord's faithful are spared in glory. Although the Old Testament has a few hints that even in death the Lord spares and communes with his righteous ones, as we shall see, there is no doubt that believers and unbelievers all were thought to go to *sheol* when they die."¹¹

The liberal *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* states even more emphatically that "Nowhere in the Old Testament is the abode of the dead regarded as a place of punishment or torment. The concept of an infernal 'hell' developed in Israel only during the Hellenistic period."¹²

The attempt of Morey and others to differentiate between *sheol* as the abode of the soul and the grave as the resting place of the body is based on a dualistic view of human nature which is foreign to the Bible. In his classic study on *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, Johannes Pedersen flatly states: "*Sheol* is the entirety into which all graves are merged; . . . Where there is grave, there is *sheol*, and where there is *sheol*, there is grave."¹³ Pedersen explains at great length that *sheol* is the collective realm of the dead where all the deceased go, whether buried or unburied.

In his doctoral dissertation on "Sheol in the Old Testament," Ralph Walter Doermann reaches the same conclusion. He writes: "The dead were conceived as being in *sheol* and in the grave at the same time, yet not in two different places. All the deceased, because they were subject to the same conditions, were thought to be in a common realm."¹⁴ This conclusion becomes self-evident when we look at some usages of *sheol*.

Etymology and Location of *Sheol*. The etymology of *sheol* is uncertain. The derivations most frequently mentioned are from such root meanings as "to ask," "to inquire," and "to bury one's self."¹⁵ Doermann proposes a derivation from the stem *shilah*, which has the primary meaning "to be quiet," "at ease." He concludes that "if a connection between *sheol* and *shilah* is feasible, it would appear that the name is not connected with the location of the realm of the dead, but rather with the character of its occupants, who are primarily 'at rest.'"¹⁶ The difference between the two words is relative. More important is the fact that *sheol* denotes a place where the dead are at rest.

Sheol is located deep beneath the surface of the earth, because it is often mentioned in connection with heaven to denote the uttermost limits of the universe. *Sheol* is the deepest place in the universe, just as the heaven is the highest. Amos describes the inescapable wrath of God in these terms: "Though they dig into Sheol, from there shall my hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down" (Amos 9:2-3). Similarly, the Psalmist exclaims: "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!" (Ps 139:7-8; cf. Job 11:7-9).

Being situated beneath the earth, the dead reach *sheol* by "going down," a euphemism for being buried in the earth. Thus, when Jacob was

informed of the death of his son Joseph, he said: “I shall go down to Sheol to my son mourning” (Gen 37:35). Perhaps the clearest example of the location of *sheol* beneath the earth is the account of the punishment of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, who had revolted against the authority of Moses. “The ground under them split asunder; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their household and all the men that belonged to Korah and all their goods. So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them” (Num 16:31-33). This episode clearly shows that the whole person, and not just the soul, goes down to *sheol*, to the realm of the dead.

Characteristics of *Sheol*. The characteristics of *sheol* are essentially those of the realm of the dead, or the grave. In numerous passages, *sheol* is found in parallelism with the Hebrew word *bor*, which denotes “a pit” or any kind of subterranean hole, such as a grave. For example, the Psalmist writes: “For my soul is full of troubles and my life draws near to Sheol. I am reckoned among those who go down to the Pit [*bor*]” (Ps 88:3-4).¹⁷ Here the parallelism identifies *sheol* with the pit, that is, the burial place of the dead.

Several times *Sheol* appears together with *abaddon*, which means “destruction,” or “ruin.”¹⁸ *Abaddon* appears in parallelism with the grave: “Is thy covenant loyalty declared in the grave, or thy faithfulness in Abaddon” (Ps 88:12); and with *sheol*: “Sheol is naked before the Lord and Abaddon has no covering” (Job 26:6; cf. Prov 15:11); “Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the Lord” (Prov 15:11; cf. 27:20). The fact that *sheol* is associated with *abaddon*, the place of destruction, shows that the realm of the dead was seen as the place of destruction, and not as the place of eternal suffering for the wicked.

Sheol is also characterized as “the land of darkness and deep darkness” (Job 10:21), where the dead never see light again (Ps 49:20; 88:13). It is also “the land of silence” (Ps 94:17; cf. 115:17) and the land of no-return: “As the cloud fades and vanishes, so he who goes down to Sheol does not come up; he returns no more to his house, nor does his place know him any more” (Job 7:10).

***Sheol* and the Realm of the Dead.** All the above characteristics of *sheol* describe accurately the realm of the dead. The pit, the place of destruction, the land of darkness, the land of silence, the land of no-return are all descriptive of the realm of the dead. Furthermore we have some instances where *sheol* occurs in parallelism with death and the grave: “Let death come upon them; let them go down to Sheol alive; let them go away in terror to their grave” (Ps 55:16). By virtue of the parallelism, here *sheol* is identified with death and the grave.

Another example where *sheol* is associated with the grave is found in Psalms 141:7: “As a rock which one cleaves and shatters on the land, so shall their bones be strewn at the mouth of Sheol.” Here the mouth of *sheol* is the opening of the grave where the bones are placed.

The various figures used to describe *sheol* all serve to show that it is not the locality of departed spirits, but *the realm of the dead*. Anthony Hoekema, a Calvinistic scholar, reaches essentially the same conclusion in his book *The Bible and the Future*. He writes: “The various figures which are applied to *sheol* can all be understood as referring to the realm of the dead: *Sheol* is said to have bars (Job 17:16), to be a dark and gloomy place (Job 17:13), to be a monster with insatiable appetite (Prov 27:20; 30:15-16; Is 5:14; Hab 2:5). When we think of *sheol* in this way, we must remember that both the godly and the ungodly go down into *sheol* at death, since both enter the realm of the dead.”¹⁹

In his classic study, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, Hans Walter Wolff notes that, contrary to the ancient Near East religions where the dead were glorified or even deified, “in the Old Testament anything similar is unthinkable. Usually, talk about the descent into *sheol* as the world of the dead means no more than an indication of burial as the end of life (Gen 42:38; 44:29, 31; Is 38:10, 17; Ps 9:15, 17; 16:10; 49:9, 15; 88:3-6, 11; Prov 1:12).”²⁰ Any attempt to turn *sheol* into the place of torment of the wicked or into the abode of spirits/souls clearly contradicts the Biblical characterization of *sheol* as the underground depository of the dead.

The Condition of the Dead in *Sheol*. Since death is the cessation of life and vitality, the state of the dead in *sheol* is described in terms antithetical to the concept of life on earth. Life means vitality and activity; death means weakness and inactivity. This is true for all, the righteous and the wicked. “One fate comes to all, to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean” (Eccl 9:2). They all go to the same place, *sheol*, the realm of the dead.

The wise man offers a graphic description of the condition of the dead in *sheol*: “There is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going” (Eccl 9:10). It is evident that *sheol*, the realm of the dead, is the place of unconscious non-existence. “For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward; but the memory of them is lost. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and they have no more for ever any share in all that is done under the sun” (Eccl 9:5-6). The main argument here is that death puts an abrupt end to all activity “under the sun,” and what follows death is *sheol*, the

realm of the dead where there is a state of inactivity, without knowledge or consciousness. Such a state is best described as “sleep.”

The phrase “and he slept with his father” (cf. 1 Kings 1:21; 2:10; 11:43) reflects the idea that the dead join their predecessors in *sheol* in a somnolent, unconscious state. The idea of rest or sleep in *sheol* is prominent in Job, who cries in the midst of his sufferings: “Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire? . . . For then I should have lain down and been quiet; I should have slept; then I should have been at rest. . . . There the wicked cease from troubling and there the weary are at rest” (Job 3:11,13, 17).

Rest in *sheol* is not the rest of souls enjoying the bliss of paradise or the torments of hell, but the rest of dead bodies sleeping in their dusty, worm-covered graves. “If I wait for the grave [*sheol*] as my house, if I make my bed in the darkness, if I say to corruption, ‘You are my father,’ and to the worm, ‘you are my mother and my sister,’ where then is my hope? . . . Will they go down to the gates of Sheol? Shall we rest together in the dust?” (Job 17:13-16, NKJV).

The dead sleep in *sheol* until the End. “A man lies down and rises not again; till the heavens are no more he will not awake, or be roused out of his sleep” (Job 14:12). “Till the heavens are no more” is possibly an allusion to the coming of the Lord at the end of time to resurrect the saints. In all his trials, Job never gave up his hope of seeing the Lord even after the decay of his body. “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:25-27; NKJV).

In summation, the condition of the dead in *sheol*, the realm of the dead, is one of unconsciousness, inactivity, a rest or sleep that will continue until the day of the resurrection. None of the texts we have examined suggests that *sheol* is the place of punishment for the ungodly (hell) or a place of conscious existence for the souls or spirits of the dead. No souls are in *sheol* simply because in the Old Testament the soul does not survive the death of the body. As N. H. Snaith flatly states it: “A dead body, whether of man, or bird, or beast is without *nepshesh* [soul]. In *sheol*, the abode of the dead, there is no *nepshesh* [soul].”²¹

The Taunting Ode on the King of Babylon. The conclusion we have reached regarding *sheol* as the unconscious realm of the dead is challenged by those who appeal to two major passages that allegedly support the notion of conscious existence in *sheol*. The first passage is Isaiah 14:4-11, which is

a taunting ode against the king of Babylon. The second is Ezekiel 31 and 32, which contain a parabolic dirge over the Pharaoh of Egypt. On the basis of these passages, Robert Morey concludes: “Those in Sheol are pictured as conversing with each other and even making moral judgments on the life-style of new arrivals (Is 14:9-20; 44:23; Ez 32:21). They are thus conscious entities while in Sheol.”²² In view of the probative value attributed to these passages for conscious existence in *sheol*, we need to briefly examine each of them.

The oracle in Isaiah 14 is a taunt song against the king of Babylon, in which the “shades” of the dead, mostly kings subdued by the conquering arms of Nebuchadnezzar, are personified in order to utter God’s doom upon the tyrannical king. When the king joins them in *sheol*, these departed monarchs are portrayed as “shades—*rephaim*” (a term to be examined shortly) rising up from the shadowy thrones to mock the fallen tyrant, saying: “You too have become as weak as we! You have become like us! Your pomp is brought down to Sheol, the sound of your harps; maggots are the bed beneath you, and worms are your covering” (Is 14:10-11).

Here we have a graphic description of the corpse of the king in the grave being eaten up by maggots and worms; not of the soul enjoying the bliss of heaven or the torments of hell. The language of the passage fits, not the image of “departed spirits,” but the portrayal of buried dead. It is evident that if the kings were “departed spirits,” in *sheol*, they would not be sitting on thrones.

In this impressive parable, even the fir trees and the cedar of Lebanon are personified (Is 14:8) and utter a derisive taunt against the fallen tyrant. It is evident that all the characters of this parable, both personified trees and fallen monarchs, are fictitious. They serve not to reveal the conscious existence of souls in *sheol*, but to forecast in striking pictorial language God’s judgment upon Israel’s oppressor, and his final ignominious destiny in a dusty grave, to be eaten by worms. To interpret this parable as a literal description of the afterlife means to ignore the highly figurative, parabolic nature of the passage, which is simply designed to depict the doom of a self-exalting tyrant. Time and again in the course of this research, I have been surprised by the fact that even reputable scholars often ignore a fundamental hermeneutical principle that symbolic, parabolic language cannot and should not be interpreted literally.

Parabolic Dirge over Pharaoh of Egypt. In Ezekiel 31 and 32, we find a parabolic dirge over the Pharaoh of Egypt, very similar to the one in Isaiah over the King of Babylon. The same personification of nature is used

to describe the overthrow of Pharaoh by the king of Babylon. “When it goes down to Sheol I will make the deep mourn for it, and restrain its river, and many waters shall be stopped; I will clothe Lebanon in gloom for it and all the trees of the field shall faint because of it” (Ez 31:15).

The portrayal is highly figurative. The various rulers that in this life caused great terror, now lie in *sheol*, with “their graves round about them” (Ez 32:26). “They do not lie with the fallen mighty men of old who went down to Sheol with their weapons of war, whose swords were laid under their heads, and whose shields are upon their bones” (Ez 32:27). In this figurative language, the mighty are portrayed as buried in *sheol* with their swords as a pillow under their heads and their shields as a blanket over their bones. This is hardly a description of souls enjoying the bliss of paradise or the torment of hell. It is rather a figurative representation of the humiliation of the grave that awaits those who abuse their power in this life.

In his book *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment*, Robert A. Peterson, a Presbyterian scholar, acknowledges that “Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 31 and 32, chapters traditionally understood as referring to hell, make better sense if we take them as speaking of the tomb. The pictures of the king of Babylon with maggots and worms covering him (Is 14:11) and of Pharaoh lying among the fallen warriors with their swords placed under their heads (Ez 32:27) speak not of hell but of the humiliation of the grave.”²³

We conclude that *sheol* is not the place of punishment for the ungodly or the abode of spirits, but the realm of the dead—the silent, dusty, and dark place to which God told Adam he and his descendants must go: “dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen 3:19; KJV).

The Inhabitants of *Sheol*. Eight texts in the Old Testament refer to the inhabitants of *sheol* as *rephaim*,²⁴ a word that is usually translated as “shades.” This translation is misleading, because it gives the impression that the inhabitants of *sheol*, the realm of the dead, are ghosts or disembodied spirits. In fact, dualists capitalize on this misleading translation to argue for the existence of disembodied spirits or souls in *sheol*. For example, Robert Morey boldly affirms: “At death man becomes a *rephaim*, i.e. a ‘ghost,’ ‘shade,’ or ‘disembodied spirit’ according to Job 26:5; Ps 88:10; Prov 2:18; 9:18; 21:16; Is 14:9; 26:14, 19. Instead of describing man as passing into nonexistence, the Old Testament states that man becomes a disembodied spirit. The usage of the word *rephaim* irrefutably establishes this truth.”²⁵ Such a bold conclusion is based on gratuitous assumptions that hardly can be supported by the usage of *rephaim* in the texts cited.

The etymology of *rephaim* is uncertain. It is generally derived from the stem meaning “to sink,” “to relax,” thus meaning “weak,” “flaccid.” In a scholarly article on the derivation and meaning of *rephaim* published in the *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature*, Paul Haupt writes: “The Hebrew *rephaim* denotes those who have ‘sunk’ to their unseen abode, descending into Hades as the sun goes down to a fiery death in the west; the *rephaim* are those who ‘sank,’ vanished, disappeared, passed away, departed. The best translation would be ‘the departed.’”²⁶

The translation of *rephaim* proposed by Haupt as “the departed” or “the dead” fits well with the usage of the term in the eight texts where the word occurs. Let us take a brief look at each of them. In Isaiah 14:9, we read that the descent to *sheol* by the king of Babylon caused a stir: “Sheol beneath is stirred up to meet you when you come, it rouses the shades [*rephaim*] to greet you.” Here *rephaim* could well be translated as “the departed” or “the dead,” since we are told that they are “roused” to meet the king. The implication is that they were asleep, a common euphemism for death in the Bible. Disembodied spirits do not need to be “roused” from sleep. The taunt “You have become as weak as we!” (Is 14:10) does not necessarily mean “You have become a disembodied spirit as we.” Most likely, “You are dead like us.”

This verse is commonly used to define the meaning of *rephaim* as weak “shades” because they are supposed to be only disembodied spirits. But their weakness derives from the fact that they are dead, not disembodied. In the Old Testament, the dead are weak because their soul or vitality is gone. As Johannes Pedersen concisely states, “The dead is a soul bereft of strength. Therefore the dead are called ‘the weak’—*rephaim* (Is 14:10).”²⁷

Rephaim and the Dead. The connection between the dead and the *rephaim* is explicit in Isaiah 26:14, where the prophet contrasts the eternal God with earthly rulers, saying of the latter: “They are dead, they will not live; they are shades [*rephaim*], they will not arise.” The parallelism suggests that the *rephaim* and the dead are the same. Furthermore, it says that the *rephaim* “will not arise.” The implication is that these *rephaim*, namely, wicked dead rulers, will not be resurrected to life.

The *rephaim* are mentioned again in verse 19, where the prophet speaks of the resurrection of God’s people: “Thy dead shall live, their bodies shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For thy dew is a dew of light, and on the land of the shades [*rephaim*] thou wilt let it fall” (Is 26:19). John Cooper uses this text to argue that the *rephaim* are the spirits of the dead who will be reunited with their bodies at the resurrection.²⁸ Cooper writes: “Highly significant for our inquiry is the fact that the term for the deceased

both in v. 14b and v. 19d is *rephaim*, the word used in Isaiah 14 and throughout the Old Testament to designate the dwellers in Sheol. So here we have an unequivocal link between the future bodily resurrection and the inhabitants of the underworld realm of the dead. On the great day of the Lord, the *rephaim* will be reunited with their bodies, reconstituted from the dust, and they will live as the Lord's people again."²⁹

There are three major problems with this categorical interpretation. First, it ignores that the Hebrew text is problematic as indicated by the conflicting translations. Cooper uses the NIV translation which reads: "The earth will give birth to her dead [*rephaim*]." (Incidentally, "giving birth" to the *rephaim* hardly supports the notion that these are living, conscious, disembodied spirits.) Furthermore, other translations render the verse differently. For example, the KJV reads: "The earth shall cast out the dead [*rephaim*]." The casting out of the dead from the earth hardly suggests the reunification of disembodied spirits with their resurrected bodies. The RSV reads: "On the land of the shades [*rephaim*] thou wilt let it fall." The falling of the dew on the *rephaim* can hardly be construed to represent the spirits being reunited with their bodies.

Second, even if the verse refers to the resurrection of the *rephaim* by virtue of the parallelism with the dead who "shall arise," there are no indications in the whole passage that the *rephaim* are disembodied spirits who will be reunited to their bodies at the resurrection. Nowhere, does the Bible speak of the resurrection as the reunification of the body with the spirit or the soul. This scenario derives from Platonic dualism, not from Biblical wholism. In the Bible, the resurrection, as brought out in chapter 7, is the restoration to life of the whole person, body and soul.

Third, the structural parallelism of the verse where the "dead," the "dwellers of the dust," and the *rephaim* are used as synonyms, suggests that the three are essentially the same, namely, the dead. Thus, the *rephaim* are the dead who dwell in the dust, not disembodied spirits who float in the underworld.

The same parallelism between death and *rephaim* occurs in Psalm 88:10: "Does thou work wonders for the dead? Do the shades [*rephaim*] rise up to praise thee?" Here the *rephaim* are paralleled with the dead and declared to be unable to praise God. Why? Simply because "the dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any that go down into silence" (Ps 115:17). The parallelism between death and *rephaim* occurs again in Proverbs 2:18 and 9:18. Speaking of the harlot, the wise man says: "Her house sinks down to death, and her paths to the shades [*rephaim*]" (Prov 2:18). It is evident that the house of the harlot does not lead to the world of the spirits, but to death, as indicated by the parallelism.

Lastly, Job 26:5 personifies the *rephaim*, saying that before God “The shades [*rephaim*] below tremble, the water and their inhabitants.” Here we are dealing with highly figurative language where both the living and the dead tremble before God. This is also evident from the following verse which says: “Sheol is naked before God and Abbadon [destruction] has no covering.” The purpose of all these images is simply to convey the thought that no living or dead creature can escape the omnipresence and omnipotence of God.

In the light of the foregoing analysis we can conclude with Basil Atkinson that “there is nothing in any of the occurrences that obliges us to put the meaning ‘shades’ upon the word [*rephaim*], and it seems unreasonable to force it upon it in the face of the combined and consistent testimony of the rest of Scripture.”³⁰

The Medium of Endor. The preceding discussion of *sheol* provides a fitting background for discussing the only full description to be found in the Bible of communicating with a spirit in *sheol*. In brief, this is the story. When Saul failed to receive guidance for the future from God through the channels of dreams, Urim, and the prophets (1 Sam 28:6), he sought out in desperation a woman medium at Endor, to call up for him the spirit of the deceased Samuel (1 Sam 28:7).

Disguising himself to avoid recognition, Saul came to the woman by night and asked her to bring up the deceased prophet and to elicit information for him (1 Sam 28:8). When she demurred on the ground of the royal ban against necromancy (1 Sam 28:3), Saul swore that no harm would come to her and insisted that she bring up Samuel (1 Sam 28:9-10). She obeyed and said to Saul: “I see a god [*elohim*] coming up out of the earth” (1 Sam 28:13). She described to Saul what she saw, namely, an old man “wrapped in a robe” (1 Sam 28:14).

From the medium’s description, Saul concluded that it was Samuel and proceeded to ask him what he should do in the face of impending defeat by the Philistines. The spirit, impersonating Samuel, first chided Saul for disquieting him when the Lord had departed from the king. Then he prophesied against Saul as from the Lord. Grimly, the spirit foretold Saul’s doom: “Tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me” (1 Sam 28:19; 1 Chron 10:13-14). Then the spirit returned to where he had come from.

Importance of the Story. Dualists find in this story one of the clearest Biblical proofs of the survival of the soul at death. John Cooper, for examples derives from this story four major conclusions about the Old Testament view of the state of the dead. He writes: “First, it is clear that there is continuity of personal identity between the living and the dead. In other

words, dead Samuel is still Samuel, not someone or something else. . . . Second, although this is a highly unusual occurrence, Samuel is nonetheless a typical resident of Sheol. For he expects Saul and his sons to be joining him. . . . Third, although he implies that he was resting, it was still possible for him to ‘wake up’ and engage in a number of acts of conscious communication. . . . Fourth, Samuel is a ‘ghost’ or ‘shade,’ not a Platonic soul or Cartesian mind. . . . His corpse was buried at Ramah (1 Sam 28:3), yet he was in Sheol and appeared at Endor in bodily form.”³¹ Along the same lines, Robert Morey maintains that this story shows that “Israel did believe in a conscious afterlife. While they were forbidden to be engaged in séances, they did not believe that man was extinguished at death.”³²

These attempts to utilize the “ghostly” appearance of “Samuel” at the beck and call of a medium to prove the conscious existence of disembodied souls after death ignore five important considerations. First, it ignores the definite teaching of Scripture on the nature of man and the nature of death which we have already examined thoroughly. The Biblical wholistic view of human nature envisages the cessation of life for the whole person at death and, thus precludes the conscious existence of disembodied souls.

Second, it ignores the solemn warning against consulting “familiar spirits” (Lev 19:31; Is 8:19), a transgression that was punished by death (Lev 20:6, 27). In fact, Saul himself died because “he was unfaithful to the Lord . . . and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance, and did not seek guidance from the Lord” (1 Chron 10:13-14). The reason the death penalty was inflicted for consulting “familiar spirits” is that these were “evil spirits,” or fallen angels impersonating the dead. Such a practice would eventually lead the people to worship the devil rather than God.

God hardly could have prescribed the death penalty for communicating with the spirits of deceased loved ones if such spirits existed and if such a communication were possible. There is no moral reason for God to outlaw on the pain of death, the human desire to communicate with deceased loved ones. The problem is that such communication is impossible, because the dead are unconscious and do not communicate with the living. Any communication that occurs is not with the spirit of the dead, but with evil spirits. This is suggested also by the medium’s statement, “I see a god [*elohim*] coming up out of the earth” (1 Sam 28:13). The plural word *elohim* is used in the Bible not only for the true God but also for false gods (Gen 35:2; Ex 12:12; 20:3). What the medium saw was a false god or evil spirit impersonating Samuel.

Third, such an interpretation assumes that the Lord would speak to Saul by a medium, a practice He had outlawed on the pain of death, after He

had refused to communicate with Saul by legitimate means (1 Sam 28:6). A communication from Samuel, speaking as a prophet, indirectly would be a communication from God. Yet the Bible expressly states that the Lord refused to communicate with Saul (1 Sam 28:6).

Fourth, it ignores the fantastic difficulty of supposing that a spirit from the dead could appear as “an old man . . . wrapped in a robe” (1 Sam 28:14). If the spirits of the dead were disembodied souls, they obviously would not need to be wrapped around with clothes.

Fifth, it ignores the implications of the grim prediction “Tomorrow you and your son shall be with me” (1 Sam 28:19). Where was this rendezvous to take place between the king and the simulator of Samuel? Was it in *sheol*, as Cooper suggests? If that were true, it would mean that God’s prophets and apostate kings share the same living quarters after death. This runs contrary to the popular belief that at death the saved go up to heaven and the unsaved down to *sheol*—hell. Furthermore, if Samuel had been in Heaven, the spirit-impersonator of Samuel would have said: “Why have you brought me down?” But he said: “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” (1 Sam 28:15). Had the location of the saved changed in the course of time from *sheol* beneath the earth to Heaven above the earth?

Reflections such as these give us reason to believe that the séance which occurred at Endor does not support in any way the notion of conscious existence for disembodied souls after death. It is evident that it was not the spirit of Samuel that communicated with Saul. Most likely, a demon impersonated the dead Samuel, as happens in many séances today.

The Scriptures reveal that Satan and his angels have the ability to change their appearance and to communicate with human beings (see Matt 4:1-11; 2 Cor 11:13,14). The story of the “ghostly” appearance of Samuel at Endor tells us very little about conscious existence after death, but it does reveal a great deal about the clever deceptions of Satan. It shows us that Satan has been very successful in promoting the lie, “You will not die,” by using sophisticated means such as the impersonification of the dead by his evil spirits.

Conclusion. Our study of the Hebrew word for “the realm of the dead—*sheol*” shows that none of the texts we have examined suggests that *sheol* is the place of punishment for the ungodly (hell) or a place of conscious existence for the souls or spirits of the dead. The realm of the dead is one of unconsciousness, inactivity, and sleep that continues until the day of the resurrection.

Similarly, the word *rephaim*, which is generally translated “weak” or “shades,” denotes not disembodied spirits who float in the underworld, but the dead who dwell in the dust. We have found that the dead are called “the weak-*rephaim*” (Is 14:10) because they are bereft of strength. The story of the “ghostly” appearance of Samuel at Endor tells us very little about conscious existence after death, because what the medium saw was a false god (*elohim*—a god-1 Sam 28:13) or evil spirit impersonating Samuel, and not the soul of the prophet.

PART II: THE STATE OF THE DEAD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament says very little about the state of the dead during the intermediate period between their falling asleep and their awakening on the day of the resurrection. We must agree with G. C. Berkouwer that what the New Testament tells us about the intermediate state is nothing more than a whisper.³³ The primary concern of the New Testament is with the events that mark the transition from this age to the Age to Come: the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead.

Our major source of information for the New Testament view of the state of the dead are the 11 references to *hades* (which is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *sheol*) and 5 passages commonly cited in support of the belief in the conscious existence of the soul after death. The 5 passages are: (1) Luke 16:19-31, where we find the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus; (2) Luke 23:42-43, which reports the conversation between Jesus and the thief on the cross; (3) Philippians 1:23, where Paul speaks of his “desire to depart and be with Christ”; (4) 2 Corinthians 5:1-10, where Paul uses the imagery of the earthly/heavenly houses and of the unclothed/clothed conditions to express his desire to “be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8); and (5) Revelation 6:9-11 which mentions the souls of the martyrs under the altar crying to God to avenge their blood. We proceed to examine each of the above in the order given.

The Meaning and Nature of *Hades*. The Greek word *hades* came into Biblical use when the translators of the Septuagint chose it to render the Hebrew *sheol*. The problem is that *hades* was used in the Greek world in a vastly different way than *sheol*. While *sheol* in the Old Testament is the realm of the dead, where, as we have seen, the deceased are in an unconscious state, *hades* in Greek mythology is the underworld, where the conscious souls of the dead are divided in two major regions, one a place of torment and the other of blessedness.

Edward Fudge offers this concise description of the Greek conception of *hades*: “In Greek mythology Hades was the god of the underworld, and then the name of the nether world itself. Charon ferried the souls of the dead across the rivers Styx or Acheron into his abode, where the watchdog Cerberus guarded the gate so that none might escape. The pagan myth contained all the elements of the medieval eschatology: there was the pleasant Elysium, the gloomy and miserable Tartarus, and even the Plains of Asphodel, where ghosts could wander who were suited for neither of the above. Ruling beside the god was his queen Proserpine (or Persephone), whom he had raped from the world above.”³⁴

This Greek conception of *hades* influenced Hellenistic Jews, during the intertestamental period, to adopt the belief in the immortality of the soul and the idea of a spatial separation in the underworld between the righteous and the godless. The souls of the righteous proceeded immediately after death to heavenly felicity, there to await the resurrection, while the souls of the godless went to a place of torment in *hades*.³⁵ The popular acceptance of this scenario is reflected in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus to be examined shortly.

This view of *hades* as a place of torment for the wicked eventually entered into the Christian Church and influenced even Bible translators. It is noteworthy that the word *hades*, which occurs 11 times in the New Testament, is translated in the KJV 10 times as “hell”³⁶ and 1 time as “grave.”³⁷ The RSV transliterates the word as “Hades.” The translation of *hades* as “hell” is inaccurate and misleading, because, with the exception of Luke 16:23, the term refers to the grave or the realm of the dead, not to a place of punishment. The latter is designated as *gehenna*, a term which also occurs 11 times in the New Testament³⁸ and is rightly translated “hell,” since it refers to the lake of fire, the place of doom for the lost. *Hades*, on the other hand, is used in the New Testament as the standing equivalent of *sheol*, the realm of the dead or the grave.

Jesus and *Hades*. In the Gospels, Jesus refers to *hades* three times. The first use of *hades* is found in Matthew 11:23, where Jesus upbraids Capernaum, saying: “And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades” (cf. Luke 10:15). Here *hades*, like *sheol* in the Old Testament (Amos 9:2-3; Job 11:7-9), denotes the deepest place in the universe, just as the heaven is the highest. This means that Capernaum will be humiliated by being brought down to the realm of the dead, the deepest place in the universe.

The second use of *hades* in the teaching of Jesus occurs in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:23). We shall return to this shortly. The

third use is found in Matthew 16:18, where Jesus expresses His confidence that “the gates of Hades shall not prevail” against His church. The meaning of the phrase “the gates of Hades” is illuminated by the use of the same expression in the Old Testament and Jewish literature (3 Macc 5:51; Wis. of Sol 16:13) as a synonym for death. For example, Job asks rhetorically: “Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?” (Job 38:17; cf. Is 38:18). The underworld was pictured as enclosed with cliffs, where the dead were locked in. Thus, what Jesus meant by “the gates of Hades” is that death shall not prevail against His church, obviously because He had gained the victory over death.

Like all the dead, Jesus went to *hades*, that is, to the grave, but unlike the rest He was victorious over death. “For thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor let thy Holy One see corruption” (Acts 2:27; cf. 2:31). Here *hades* is the grave where Christ’s body rested for only three days and, consequently, did not “see corruption,” the decay process resulting from a prolonged interment. Because of His victory over death, *hades*—the grave is a defeated enemy. Thus, Paul exclaims: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave [*hades*] where is thy victory?” (1 Cor 15:55, KJV). Here *hades* is correctly translated “grave” in the KJV since it is in parallel with death.

Christ now holds the keys to “death and Hades” (Rev 1:18), He has power over death and the grave. This enables Him to unlock the graves and call forth the saints to everlasting life at His coming. In all these passages, *hades* is consistently associated with death, because it is the resting place of the dead, the grave. The same is true in Revelation 6:8, where the pale horse has a rider whose name “was Death, and Hades followed him.” The reason “Hades” follows “Death” is obviously because *hades*, as the grave, receives the dead.

At the end of the millennium, “Death and Hades” will give up their dead (Rev 20:13) and “then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire” (Rev 20:14). These two verses are significant. First, because they tell us that eventually *hades* will give up the dead, which indicates again that *hades* is the realm of the dead. Second, they inform us that at the End, *hades* itself will be thrown into the lake of fire. By means of this colorful imagery, the Bible reassures us that at the End, both death and the grave will be eliminated. This will be the death of death, or as Revelation puts it, “the second death.”

This brief survey of the use of *hades* in the New Testament clearly shows that its meaning and usage is consistent with that of *sheol* in the Old Testament. Both terms denote the grave or the realm of the dead and not the place of punishment of the ungodly.³⁹

The Rich Man and Lazarus. The word *hades* also occurs in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, but with a different meaning. While in the 10 references we have just examined *hades* refers to the grave or the realm of the dead, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus it denotes the place of punishment for the ungodly (Luke 16:23). The reason for this exceptional use will be explained shortly. Obviously, dualists make great use of this parable to support the notion of the conscious existence of disembodied souls during the intermediate state (Luke 16:19-31). Because of the importance attached to this parable, we need to examine it closely.

First, let us look at the main points of the story. Lazarus and the rich man both die. Their situations in life are now reversed after their death. For when Lazarus died, he “was carried by angels to Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 16:22), whereas the rich man was taken to *hades* where he was tormented by scorching flames (Luke 16:23). Although a great gulf separated them, the rich man could see Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom. So he pleaded with Abraham to send Lazarus on two errands: first, to “send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool his tongue” (Luke 16:24) and second, to send Lazarus to warn his family members to repent lest they experience the same punishment. Abraham denied both requests for two reasons. The first, because there was a great chasm that made it impossible for Lazarus to cross over to help him (Luke 16:26); the second, because if his family members did “not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead” (Luke 16:31).

Before looking at the parable, we need to remember that contrary to an allegory like *Pilgrim’s Progress*, where every details counts, the details of a parable do not necessarily have any significance in themselves, except as “props” for the story. A parable is designed to teach a fundamental truth, and the details do not have a literal meaning, unless the context indicates otherwise. Out of this principle another grows, namely, only the fundamental teaching of a parable, confirmed by the general tenor of Scripture, may be legitimately used for defining doctrine.

Unfortunately, these two fundamental principles are ignored by those who wish to use the details of a parable to support their views. For example, Robert Peterson draws a lesson from each of the major characters of the parable. “First, like Lazarus, those whom God helps will be borne after their death into God’s presence. . . . Second, like the rich man, the unrepentant will experience irreversible judgment. The wicked survive death too, only to endure ‘torment’ and ‘agony.’ . . . Third, through Scripture, God reveals himself and his will so that none who neglect it can legitimately protest their subsequent fate.”⁴⁰

Peterson's attempt to draw three lessons from the parable ignores the fact that the main lesson of the parable is given in the final punch line: "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead" (Luke 16:31). This is the main lesson of the parable, namely, nothing or no one can supersede the convicting power of the revelation that God has given us in His Word. To interpret Lazarus and the rich man as representative of what will happen to the saved and the unsaved immediately after death means to milk the parable for lessons foreign to its original intent.

The Problems of a Literal Interpretation. Those who interpret the parable as a literal representation of the state of the saved and unsaved after death are faced with insurmountable problems. If the narrative is an actual description of the intermediate state, then it must be true in fact and consistent in detail. But if the parable is figurative, then only the moral truth to be conveyed need concern us. A literal interpretation of the narrative breaks down under the weight of its own absurdities and contradictions, as becomes apparent under scrutiny.

Contenders for literalism suppose that the rich man and Lazarus were disembodied spirits, destitute of bodies. Yet the rich man is described as having "eyes" that see and a "tongue" that speaks, as well as seeking relief from the "finger" of Lazarus—all real body parts. They are portrayed as existing physically, despite the fact that the rich man's body was duly buried in the grave. Was his body carried away into *hades* together with his soul by mistake?

A gulf separates Lazarus in Heaven (Abraham's bosom) from the rich man in *hades*. The gulf is too wide for anyone to cross and yet narrow enough to permit them to converse. Taken literally, this means that Heaven and Hell are within geographical speaking and seeing distance from each other so that saints and sinners eternally can see and communicate with one another. Ponder for a moment the case of parents in Heaven seeing their children agonizing in *hades* for all eternity. Would not such a sight destroy the very joy and peace of Heaven? It is unthinkable that the saved will see and converse with their unsaved loved ones for all eternity across a dividing gulf.

Conflict With Biblical Truths. A literal interpretation of the parable contradicts some fundamental Biblical truths. If the narrative is literal, then Lazarus received his reward and the rich man his punishment, immediately after death and before the judgment day. But the Bible clearly teaches that the rewards and punishments, as well as the separation between the saved and the unsaved will take place on the day of Christ's coming: "When the Son of man

comes in his glory, . . . and before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another” (Matt 25:31-32). “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay everyone for what he has done” (Rev 22:12). Paul expected to receive “the crown of righteousness” on the day of Christ’s appearing (2 Tim 4:8).

A literal interpretation of the parable also contradicts the uniform testimony of the Old and New Testaments that the dead, both righteous and ungodly, lie silent and unconscious in death until the resurrection day (Eccl 9:5-6; Job 14:12-15, 20, 21; Ps 6:5; 115:17). A literal interpretation also contradicts the consistent use of *hades* in the New Testament to denote the grave or the realm of the dead, not a place of punishment. We have found that in 10 of its 11 occurrences, *hades* is explicitly connected with death and the grave. The exceptional use of *hades* in this parable as a fiery place of torment (Luke 16:24) derives, as we shall shortly see, not from Scripture, but from current Jewish beliefs influenced by Greek mythology.

Current Jewish Concepts. Fortunately for our investigation, we have Jewish writings that illuminate the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Especially revealing is the “Discourse to the Greeks Concerning Hades,” written by Josephus, the famous Jewish historian who lived during New Testament times (died about A. D. 100). His discourse parallels very closely the narrative of the rich man and Lazarus. In it Josephus explains that “Hades is a subterraneous region where the light of this world does not shine. . . . This region is allowed as a place of custody for souls, in which angels are appointed as guardians to them, who distribute to them *temporary punishments*, agreeable to every one’s behavior and manners.”⁴¹

Josephus points out, however, that *hades* is divided into two regions. One is “the region of light” where the souls of the righteous dead are brought by angels to the “place we call *The Bosom of Abraham*.”⁴² The second region is in “perpetual darkness,” and the souls of the ungodly are dragged by force “by the angels allotted for punishment.”⁴³ These angels drag the ungodly “into the neighborhood of hell itself,” so that they can see and feel the heat of the flames.⁴⁴ But they are not thrown into hell itself until after the final judgment. “A *chaos* deep and large is fixed between them; insomuch that a just man that hath compassion upon them, cannot be admitted, nor can one that is unjust, if he were bold enough to attempt it, pass over it.”⁴⁵

The striking similarities between Josephus’ description of *hades* and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus are self-evident. In both accounts we have the two regions that separate the righteous from the ungodly, the bosom of Abraham as the abode of the righteous, a great gulf that cannot be crossed, and the inhabitants of one region who can see those of the other region.

Josephus' description of *hades* is not unique. Similar descriptions can be found in other Jewish literature.⁴⁶ What this means is that Jesus capitalized on the popular understanding of the condition of the dead in *hades*, not to endorse such views, but to drive home the importance of heeding in this present life the teachings of Moses and the prophets because this determines bliss or misery in the world to come.

Jesus' Use of Current Beliefs. At this juncture, it may be proper to ask, "Why did Jesus tell a parable based on current beliefs that do not accurately represent truth as set forth elsewhere in the Scripture and in His own teachings?" The answer is that Jesus met people on their own ground, capitalizing on what was familiar to them to teach them vital truths. Many of His hearers had come to believe in a conscious state of existence between death and the resurrection, though such a belief is foreign to Scripture. This erroneous belief was adopted during the intertestamental period as part of the process of Hellenization of Judaism and had become a part of Judaism by the time of Jesus.

In this parable, Jesus made use of a popular belief, not to endorse it, but to impress upon the minds of His hearers an important spiritual lesson. It should be noted that even in the preceding parable of the Dishonest Steward (Luke 16:1-12), Jesus uses a story that does not accurately represent Biblical truth. Nowhere, does the Bible endorse the practice of a dishonest administrator who reduces to half the outstanding debts of creditors in order to get some personal benefits from such creditors. The lesson of the parable is to "make friends for yourselves" (Luke 16:9), not to teach dishonest business practices.

John Cooper acknowledges that the parable of the rich man and Lazarus "does not necessarily tell us what Jesus or Luke believed about the afterlife, nor does it provide a firm basis for a doctrine of the intermediate state. For it is possible that Jesus simply uses popular images in order to make his ethical point. He may not have been endorsing those images. He may not have believed them himself because he knew them to be false."⁴⁷

Cooper then asks the question: "What does this passage tell us about the intermediate state?" He flatly and honestly replies: "The answer may be, 'Nothing.' The dualist case cannot lean on this text as a main support."⁴⁸ The reason he gives is that it is most difficult to draw conclusions from the imagery of the parable. For example, Cooper asks: "Will we be bodily beings [in the intermediate state]? Will the blessed and the damned be able to see each other?"⁴⁹

Jesus and the Thief on the Cross. The brief conversation between Jesus and the penitent thief on the cross next to Him (Luke 23:42-43) is used by dualists as a major proof for the conscious existence of the faithful dead in paradise before the resurrection. Thus, it is important to take a close look to the words spoken by Jesus to the penitent thief.

Unlike the other criminal and most of the crowd, the penitent thief did believe that Jesus was the Messiah. He said: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). Jesus answered him, “Truly I say to you today you shall be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). A major problem in the interpretation of this text is caused by the location of the comma, which in most translation, is placed before “today.” Thus, most readers and commentators assume that Jesus said: “Today you shall be with me in paradise” Such reading is interpreted to mean that “on that very day”⁵⁰ the thief went to paradise with Christ.

The original Greek text, however, has no punctuation and, translated literally, reads: “Truly to you I say today with me you will be in paradise.” The adverb “today—*semeron*” stands between the verb “I say—*lego*” and “you will be—*ese*.” This means that grammatically the adverb “today” can apply to either of the two verbs. If it qualifies the first verb, then Jesus said: “Truly I say to you today, you shall be with me in paradise.”

Translators have placed the comma before the adverb “today,” not for grammatical reasons, but for the theological conviction that the dead receive their reward at death. One would wish that translators would limit themselves to translating the text and leave the task of interpretation to the reader.

The question we are facing is: Did Jesus mean to say, “Truly, I say to you today. . .” or “Today you shall be with me in paradise”? Those who maintain that Jesus meant the latter appeal to the fact that the adverb “today” does not occur elsewhere with the frequently used phrase “Truly, I say to you.” This is a valid observation, but the reason for this exceptional attachment of the adverb “today” to the phrase “Truly, I say to you” could very well be the immediate context. The thief asked Jesus to remember him in the *future* when He would establish His messianic kingdom. But Jesus responded by remembering the penitent thief *immediately*, “today,” and by reassuring him that he would be with Him in paradise. This interpretation is supported by three major considerations: (1) the New Testament meaning of paradise; (2) the time when the saved will enter upon their reward in paradise, and (3) the time when Jesus Himself returned to Paradise.

What Is Paradise? The word “paradise—*paradeisos*” occurs only three times in the New Testament—twice in addition to this use in Luke 23:43. In 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, Paul relates an ecstatic experience of being “caught up into paradise,” which he locates in “the third heaven” (2 Cor 12:2). It is evident that for Paul, paradise is in heaven. In Revelation 2:7, the Lord gives this promise: “To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.” Here paradise is associated with the tree of life, which, according to Revelation 22:2, will be found in the New Jerusalem: “On either side of the river [there is] the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month.” All of this suggests that paradise is the eternal habitation of the redeemed in the restored “Garden of Eden.”

Therefore, when Jesus assured the penitent thief of a place with Him in “paradise,” He was referring to the “many mansions” in His “Father’s house” and to the time when He would “come to receive unto Himself His own (John 14:1-3). Throughout His ministry, Jesus taught that the redeemed would enter into His Father’s Kingdom at His coming: “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt 25:34; 16:27). Paul taught the same truth. At Christ’s second coming, the sleeping saints will be resurrected and the living saints translated, and all “shall be caught up together . . . in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:17). It is at that time, following the resurrection of the righteous, that the thief will be with Jesus in Paradise.

When Did Jesus Return to Paradise? Those who interpret Christ’s statement to the thief as meaning that on that very day the thief went to paradise to be with Christ, assume that both Jesus and the thief ascended to heaven immediately after their death. But such a conclusion can hardly be supported by Scripture.

The Scriptures expressly teach that on the day of His crucifixion, Christ went into the grave—*hades*. At Pentecost, Peter proclaimed that in accordance to David’s prophecy (Ps 16:10), Christ “was not abandoned in Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption,” but was raised up by God (Acts 2:31-32). *Hades*, as we have seen, is associated consistently in the New Testament with the grave or the realm of the dead. The only exception is Luke 16:23, where *hades* denotes a place of torment, not paradise. Such meaning derives from popular Jewish conceptions influenced by Greek mythology, not from Scripture. What this means is that Christ could hardly have told the thief that on that very day he would be with Him in paradise, when He knew that on that day He would be resting in the grave.

Those who would argue that only Christ's body went into the grave while His soul ascended to heaven ignore what Jesus said to Mary on the day of His resurrection: "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father" (John 20:17). It is evident that Jesus was not in Heaven during the three days of his burial. He was resting in the grave, waiting for His Father to call Him back to life. Thus, the thief could hardly have gone to be with Jesus in Paradise immediately after his death when Jesus Himself did not ascend to the Father until some time after His resurrection. To appreciate more fully the meaning of being "with Christ in paradise," let us look at Paul's use of the phrase "being with Christ."

"To Depart and Be With Christ." In writing to the Philippians, Paul says: "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account" (Phil 1:22-23). Dualists consider this text one of the strongest proofs that at death the soul of the saved immediately goes into the presence of Christ. For example, Robert Morey states: "This is the clearest passage in the New Testament which speaks of the believer going to be with Christ in heaven after death. This context deals with Paul's desire to depart this earthly life for a heavenly life with Christ. There is no mention or allusion to the resurrection in this passage."⁵¹

The fundamental problem with this interpretation is the failure to recognize that Paul's statement, "My desire is to depart and be with Christ" is a relational and not an anthropological statement. By this I mean, it is a statement of the relation that exists and continues between the believer and Christ through death, not a statement of the "state" of the body and soul between death and the resurrection.

Helmut Thielicke correctly points out that the New Testament is not concerned about a 'state' which exists between death and resurrection, but for a relation that exists between the believer and Christ through death. This relationship of being with Christ is not interrupted by death because the believer who sleeps in Christ has no awareness of the passing of time. As Thielicke puts it, "The removal of a sense of time means for those who are awakened that the long night of death is reduced to a mathematical point, and they are thus summoned out of completed life."⁵²

The attempts to extract from Paul's statement support for the belief in the transit of the soul to heaven at death are unwarranted because, as Ray Anderson rightly observes, "Paul did not think the question of the status of the person *between* death and resurrection was a question that needed to be considered."⁵³ The reason is that for Paul those who "die in Christ" are "sleeping in Christ" (1 Cor 15:18; 1 Thess 4:14). Their relation with Christ

is one of immediacy, because they have no awareness of the passing of time between their death and resurrection. They experience what may be called “eternal time.” But for those who go on living on earth-bound temporal time there is an interval between death and resurrection. The problem is that we cannot synchronize the clock of eternal time with that of our temporal time. It is the attempt to do this that has led to unfortunate speculations and controversies over the so-called intermediate state.

By expressing his desire “to depart and be with Christ,” Paul was not giving a doctrinal exposition of what happens at death. He is simply expressing his longing to see an end to his troubled existence and to be with Christ. Throughout the centuries, earnest Christians have expressed the same longing, without necessarily expecting to be ushered into Christ’s presence at the moment of their death. Paul’s statement must be interpreted on the basis of his clear teachings regarding the time when believers will be united with Christ.

With Christ at His Coming. Paul addresses this question in his letter to the Thessalonians where he explains that both the sleeping and living believers will be united with Christ, not at death, but at His coming. “The dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and *so* we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:17).⁵⁴ The “so” (*houtos*) refers to the manner or way in which believers will be with Christ, namely, *not by dying*, but by being resurrected or translated at His coming. Basil Atkinson notes that the word “so” in Greek *houtos* “means ‘in this way.’ Its place here at the beginning of the sentence makes it emphatic, so that the meaning of the sentence becomes: ‘And this is the way that we shall be for ever with the Lord,’ implying that there is no other way and leading us to conclude that we shall not be with the Lord till the day of the resurrection.”⁵⁵

It should be noted that in describing the union with Christ which believers will experience at His coming, Paul never speaks of disembodied souls being reunited with resurrected bodies. Rather, he speaks of “the dead in Christ” being risen (1 Thess 4:16). Obviously, what is risen at Christ’s coming is not just dead bodies but dead people. It is the whole person who will be resurrected and reunited with Christ. Note that the living saints will meet Christ at the same time “together with” the resurrected saints (1 Thess 4:17). Sleeping and living saints meet Christ “together” at His coming, not at death.

The total absence of any Pauline allusion to an alleged reunion of the body with the soul at the time of the resurrection constitutes, in my view, the most formidable challenge to the notion of the conscious survival of the soul. If Paul knew anything about this, he would surely have alluded to it, especially

in his detailed discussion of what will happen to sleeping and living believers at Christ's coming (1 Thess 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:42-58). The fact that Paul never alluded to the conscious survival of the soul and its reattachment to the body at the resurrection clearly shows that such a notion was totally foreign to him and to Scripture as a whole.

G. C. Berkouwer correctly observes that "New Testament believers are not oriented towards their 'private bliss' so that they forget the coming Kingdom, but they do indeed await being 'with Christ,' for in Him they acquired a new future."⁵⁶ The eschatological hope of being with Christ is not an individualistic hope realized at death by disembodied souls, but a corporate hope realized at Christ's coming through the resurrection, or translation, of the whole person and of all the believers.

Paul's desire "to depart and be with Christ" does not reflect a wish for an intimate 'entre nous [*between us* experience]' in heaven, because the phrase is integrally related to cosmic redemption at the end of time."⁵⁷ The cosmic, corporate dimension of the "with Christ" experience is clearly evident in the same epistle to the Philippians, where Paul speaks repeatedly of the consummation of the Christian hope on the day of Christ's coming. He reassures the Philippians that "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ's coming" (Phil 1:6). The completion and consummation of redemption takes place not by going to be with Christ at death, but by meeting with Christ on the glorious day of His coming.

It is Paul's prayer that the Philippians "may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ" (Phil 1:10). On that day, Christ "will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself" (Phil 3:21). It is this change from mortality to immortality that makes it possible for believers to be with Christ. This is why in the same epistle Paul tells that he was "straining forward" toward that day because he knew that he would receive "the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:13-14), not at death, but at the glorious day of Christ's coming.

"At Home With the Lord." In 2 Corinthians 5:1-10, Paul expresses again the hope of being with Christ by using several striking metaphors. This passage is rightly regarded as the "crux interpretum," primarily because the figurative language is cryptic and open to different interpretations. Unfortunately, many interpreters are eager to derive from this passage, as from Philippians 1:22-23, precise anthropological, chronological, or cosmological definitions of life after death. Such concerns, however, are far removed from Paul, who is using the poetic language of faith to express his hopes and fears regarding the present and future life, rather than the logical language of

science to explain the afterlife. All of this should put the interpreter on guard against reading into the passage what Paul never intended to express.

The passage opens with the preposition “for–*gar*,” thus indicating that Paul picks up from chapter 4:16-18, where he contrasts the temporal, mortal nature of the present life which is “wasting away” (2 Cor 4:16) with the eternal, glorious nature of the future life, whose “eternal weight of glory [is] beyond all comparison” (2 Cor 4:17). Paul continues in chapter 5 developing the contrast between temporality and eternity by using the imagery of two dwelling places representative of these characteristics.

“For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling, so that by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we sigh with anxiety; not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared for us this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee” (2 Cor 5:1-5).

In this first section of the passage, Paul uses two sets of contrasting metaphors. First, he contrasts “the earthly tent,” which is subject to destruction, with the “building from God, a house not made with hands,” which is “eternal in the heavens.” Then Paul highlights this contrast by differentiating between the state of being clothed with the heavenly dwelling and that of being found naked.

The second section, verses 6 to 10, is more straightforward and contrasts being in the body and therefore away from the Lord, with being away from the body and at home with the Lord. The key statement occurs in verse 8 where Paul says: “We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”

The enormous variety of interpretations of this passage can be grouped into three main views, each the direct result of some presuppositions. The history of interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 clearly shows how much exegesis and interpretation are influenced by presuppositions. We briefly state and evaluate each of the three main views which may be called: (1) the intermediate state, (2) the resurrection of the body after death, and (3) the resurrection of the body at Christ’s coming.

The Intermediate State. Most past and present scholars maintain that in this passage Paul describes the existence of the believer in heaven with Christ during the intermediate state between death and resurrection.⁵⁸ Briefly

stated, this interpretation runs as follows: The tent and the present clothing are the earthly existence. Being unclothed represents dying and the resulting state of nakedness signifies the disembodied existence of the soul during the intermediate state. The building we have in heaven represents, for some, the body that will be reattached to the soul at the resurrection, while for others, it is the soul itself that dwells in heaven.

Robert Morey defends the latter view, saying: “Where in Scripture are we told that our resurrection body is already created and waiting in heaven for us? The only rational answer is that Paul is speaking of the soul’s dwelling in heaven.”⁵⁹ On the basis of these verses, Morey argues that “The place of dwelling [of the soul] while [the person is] alive is on earth, while the place of dwelling after death is in heaven.”⁶⁰

Three major problems exist with the intermediate-state interpretation of this passage. First of all, it ignores that the contrast between the heavenly building and the earthly tent is *spatial* and *not temporal*. By this we mean that Paul is contrasting the heavenly mode of existence with the earthly mode of existence. He is not discussing the disembodied state of the soul between death and resurrection. Now, if the apostle had expected to be with Christ at death in his disembodied soul, would he not have alluded to it in this context? Would he not have said, “For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed . . .” we shall be with our souls in the presence of God in heaven. But, in all of his writings, Paul never alludes to the survival and existence of the soul in the presence of Christ. Why? Simply because such a notion was foreign to Paul and to Scripture.

Second, if the state of nakedness is the disembodied existence of the soul in the presence of Christ during the intermediate state, why does Paul shrink back at the thought of being “found naked” (2 Cor 5:3)? After all, this would have fulfilled his earnest desire to be “at home with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8). The fact is the notion of nakedness as the state of the soul stripped from the body is found in the writings of Plato and Philo,⁶¹ but not in Paul’s writings.

Third, if the heavenly building is “the soul’s dwelling in heaven,” then believers must have two souls, one on earth and the other in heaven because Paul says that “we *have* a building from God.” The present tense indicates a present possession. How can the believer’s soul be in heaven with Christ and on earth with the body at the same time?

A Resurrection Body After Death. A number of scholars argue that the heavenly building is the resurrected body, which believers receive immediately at death.⁶² Allegedly, Paul teaches that life in the earthly body, which is represented by the “earthly tent” (2 Cor 5:1, 4), is followed

immediately by the acquisition of the resurrection body, represented by “the building from God, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor 5:1). Thus, Paul is supposed to reject altogether an intermediate disembodied condition of “being naked” or “unclothed” (2 Cor 5:3-4). This view rests on the premise that during the interval between the writing of 1 and 2 Corinthians, Paul had some close brushes with death that caused him to give up his earlier hope of surviving the Parousia and came to believe, instead, that believers receive their resurrection bodies at the moment of their death.⁶³

A fundamental problem with this interpretation is the assumption that Paul in later years abandoned the hope of the resurrection at the Parousia in favor of an immediate resurrection at death. If that were true, Christians would face the dilemma of not knowing which Paul to believe: the earlier or the later Paul? Fortunately, such a dilemma does not exist because Paul never changed his view on the time of the resurrection. This is indicated by the immediate context of the passage under consideration, which specifically mentions the resurrection at the Parousia: “Knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us into his presence” (2 Cor 4:16). Paul could hardly have stated it more clearly that Christ will raise us and bring us into His presence at His coming and not at death.

If Paul had modified his views of the resurrection time since he wrote 1 Corinthians 15, it is doubtful whether he would have said, “we know” (2 Cor 5:1), which implies a known teaching. Furthermore, even in his later writings, Paul explicitly links the resurrection with the glorious return of Christ (Rom 8:22-25; Phil 3:20-21). It is hard to believe that Paul would have altered his eschatology twice.

Resurrection Body at the Parousia. In recent years, a number of scholars have defended the view that the heavenly building is the “spiritual body” given to believers at the time of Christ’s coming.⁶⁴ There are, indeed, elements in this passage which support this view. For example, the idea of putting on the heavenly dwelling (2 Cor 5:2) and the statement that when we are further clothed, the mortal will be swallowed up with life (2 Cor 5:4). These statements are strikingly similar to the imagery found in 1 Corinthians 15:53, where Paul discusses the change that believers will experience at Christ’s coming: “For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality.”

The proponents of this view rightly protest against an eschatology of heaven which focuses on the individual bliss experienced immediately after death. Their strongest argument is that “if Paul expected to receive the spiritual body at once [at death] then a resurrection at the Last Day would no longer be necessary.”⁶⁵

To state it simply, the proponents of this view interpret Paul's metaphors as follows: While living on this earth we are clothed with the "earthly tent" of our mortal body. At death we are "unclothed" when our bodies are "destroyed" in the grave. At Christ's coming, we will "put on the heavenly dwelling" by exchanging our mortal bodies for the glorious immortal bodies.

Overall, we lean toward this interpretation. Yet there is a major weakness in all three interpretations, namely, they interpret the passage by focusing primarily on the body, whether it be the "spiritual body" given to individual believers at death, or to all the believers together at Christ's coming. But Paul here is not trying to define the state of the body before death, at death, or at Christ's coming, but two different modes of existence.

Heavenly and Earthly Modes of Existence. After rereading the passage countless times, I sense that Paul's primary concern is not to define the state of the body before and after death, but rather to contrast two modes of existence. One is the heavenly mode of existence which is represented by the "building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor 5:1). The other is the earthly mode of existence which is typified by "the earthly tent" which is "destroyed" at death.

The meaning of the imagery of "putting on" or "being clothed" with "our heavenly dwelling" may have more to do with accepting Christ's provision of salvation than with "the spiritual body" given to believers at the Parousia. We find support for this conclusion in the figurative use of "heavenly dwelling" with reference to God and of "being clothed" with reference to the believer's acceptance of Christ.

Paul's assurance that "we have a building from God" (2 Cor 5:1) reminds us of such verses as "God is our refuge and strength" (Ps 46:1), or "Lord, Thou hast been our *dwelling place*" (Ps 90:1).⁶⁶ Christ referred to Himself as a temple in a way that is strikingly similar to Paul's imagery of the heavenly dwelling "not made with hands." He is reported to have said: "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands" (Mark 14:58). If Paul was thinking along these lines, then *the heavenly dwelling place is Christ Himself and the gift of eternal life He provides to believers.*

How, then, does a believer put on "the heavenly dwelling"? A look at Paul's use of the metaphor of clothing may provide an answer. "As many as were baptized into Christ were clothed with Christ" (Gal 3:27). In this text, the clothing is associated with the acceptance of Christ at baptism. Paul also says: "This perishable being must be clothed with the imperishable, and what is mortal must be clothed with immortality" (1 Cor 15:53, NEB). Here the

clothing represents the reception of immortality at Christ's coming. These two references suggest that the "clothing" can refer to the new life in Christ, which is accepted at baptism, renewed every day, and consummated at the Parousia, when the final clothing will take place by means of the change from mortality to immortality.

In the light of the above interpretation, to "be found naked" or "unclothed" (2 Cor 5:3-4) may stand in contrast with being clothed with Christ and His Spirit. Most likely "naked" for Paul stands not for the soul stripped from the body, but for guilt and sin which results in death. When Adam sinned, he discovered that he was "naked" (Gen 3:10). Ezekiel allegorically describes how God clothed Israel with rich garments but then exposed her nakedness because of her disobedience (Ez 16:8-14). One may also think of the man without "the wedding garment" at the marriage feast (Matt 22:11). It is possible, then, that being "naked" for Paul meant to be in a mortal, sinful condition, bereft of Christ's righteousness.

Paul clarifies what he meant by being "unclothed" or "naked" versus being "clothed" when he says: "So that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life" (2 Cor 5:4). This statement is interpreted in the light of 1 Corinthians 15:53 to mean that our mortal bodies will be changed into spiritual bodies. But is Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:53 primarily concerned with the body as such? A careful reading of 1 Corinthians 15 suggests that Paul addresses the question of the body parenthetically, merely to answer the question, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body?" (1 Cor 15:35). After showing the continuity between the present and the future body, Paul moves to the larger question of the transformation that human nature as a whole will experience at Christ's coming: "For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality" (1 Cor 15:53).

The same holds true of 2 Corinthians 5. Paul is not concerned with the state of the body or the soul as such before or after death. Incidentally, he never speaks of the soul nor of the "spiritual body" in 1 Corinthians 5. Instead, Paul's concern is to show the contrast between the earthly mode of existence, represented by "earthly tent," and the heavenly mode of existence, represented by the "heavenly dwelling. The former is "mortal" and the latter is immortal ("swallowed up by life;" 2 Cor 5:4). The former is experienced "at home in the body" and "away from the Lord" (2 Cor 5:6). The latter is experienced "away from the body" and "at home with the Lord" (2 Cor 5:8).

The failure to recognize that Paul is speaking about two different modes of existence and not about the state of the body or soul after death, has led to unnecessary, misguided speculations about the afterlife. A good

example is Robert Peterson's statement: "Paul confirms Jesus' teaching when he contrasts being 'at home in the body' and 'away from the Lord' with being 'away from the body and at home with the Lord' (2 Cor 5:6, 8). He presupposes that human nature is composed of material and immaterial aspects."⁶⁷

This interpretation is gratuitous, because neither Jesus or Paul are concerned with defining human nature ontologically, that is, in terms of its material or immaterial components. Instead, their concern is to define human nature ethically and relationally, in terms of disobedience and obedience, sin and righteousness, mortality and immortality. This is Paul's concern in 2 Corinthians 5:1-9, where he speaks of the earthly and heavenly modes of existence in relationship to God, and not of the material or immaterial composition of human nature before and after death.

The Souls Under the Altar. The last passage we examine is Revelation 6:9-11, which reads: "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and the witness they had borne; they cried out with a loud voice, 'O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?' Then they each were given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been."

This passage is often cited to support the notion that the "souls" of the saints exist after death in heaven as disembodied, conscious spirits. For example, Robert Morey emphatically states: "The souls are the disembodied spirits of the martyrs who cry out to God for vengeance on their enemies. . . . This passage has always proven a great difficulty to those who deny that believers ascend to heaven at death. But John's language is clear that these souls were conscious and active in heaven."⁶⁸

This interpretation ignores that apocalyptic pictures are not meant to be photographs of actual realities, but symbolic representations of almost unimaginable spiritual realities. John was not given a view of what heaven is actually like. It is evident that there are no white, red, black, and pale horses in heaven with warlike riders. Christ does not appear in heaven in the form of a lamb with a bleeding knife wound (Rev 5:6). Likewise, there are no "souls" of martyrs in heaven squeezed at the base of an altar. The whole scene is simply a symbolic representation designed to reassure those facing martyrdom and death that ultimately they would be vindicated by God. Such a reassurance would be particularly heartening for those who, like John, were facing terrible persecution for refusing to participate in the emperor's cult.

The use of the word “souls—*psychas*” in this passage is unique for the New Testament, because it is never used to refer to humans in the intermediate state. The reason for its use here is suggested by the unnatural death of the martyrs whose blood was shed for the cause of Christ. In the Old Testament sacrificial system, the blood of animals was poured out at the base of the altar of burnt offerings (Lev 4:7, 18, 25, 30). The blood contained the soul (Lev 17:11) of the innocent victim that was offered as an atoning sacrifice to God on behalf of penitent sinners. Thus, the souls of the martyrs are seen under the altar to signify that symbolically they had been sacrificed upon the altar and their blood has been poured at the base. In chapter 2 we noted that in the Old Testament the soul is in the blood. In this instance, the souls of the martyrs are under the altar because their blood had been symbolically poured at the base of the altar.

The language of sacrificial death is used elsewhere in the New Testament to denote martyrdom. Facing death, Paul wrote: “For I am already on the point of being sacrificed” (2 Tim 4:6). The apostle also says that he was glad “to be poured out as a libation” for Christ (Phil 2:17). Thus, Christian martyrs were viewed as sacrifices offered to God. Their blood shed on earth was poured symbolically at the heavenly altar. Thus their souls are seen under the altar because that is where symbolically the blood of the martyrs flowed.

No Representation of Intermediate State. The symbolic representation of the martyrs as sacrifices offered at the heavenly altar can hardly be used to argue for their conscious disembodied existence in heaven. George Eldon Ladd, a respected evangelical scholar, rightly states: “The fact that John saw the souls of the martyrs *under the altar* has nothing to do with the state of the dead or their situation in the intermediate state; it is merely a vivid way of picturing the fact that they had been martyred in the name of God.”⁶⁹

Some interpret the “white robe” given to the martyrs as representing the intermediate body given to them at death.⁷⁰ But in Revelation, the “white robe” represents not the intermediate body, but the purity and victory of the redeemed through Christ’s sacrifice. The redeemed who come out of the great tribulation “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14). “The church at Laodicea is counseled to buy gold, white robes, and eyesalve (Rev 3:18), a strange suggestion if white robes are glorified bodies.”⁷¹ The “souls” being clothed with white robes most likely represent God’s recognition of their purity and victory through “the blood of the Lamb” in spite of their ignominious deaths.

The souls of the martyrs are seen as *resting* beneath the altar, not because they are in a disembodied state, but because they are awaiting the

completion of redemption (“until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete” Rev 6:11) and their resurrection at Christ’s coming. John describes this event later on, saying: “I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. . . . This is the first resurrection” (Rev 20:4).

This description of the martyrs as “beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God” is very much like that of Revelation 6:9. The only difference is that in chapter 6 the deceased martyrs are told to rest, while in chapter 20 they are brought to life. It is evident that if the martyrs are brought to life at the beginning of the millennium in conjunction with Christ’s coming, they can hardly be living in heaven in a disembodied state while resting in the grave.

To sum up, the function of the vision of the martyrs under the heavenly altar is not to inform us on the intermediate state of the dead, but to reassure believers, especially the martyrs who in John’s time and later centuries gave their lives for the cause of Christ, that God ultimately would vindicate them.

Conclusion. Our study of the state of the dead during the interim period between death and resurrection has shown that both the Old and New Testaments consistently teach that death represents the cessation of life for the whole person. Thus, the state of the dead is one of unconsciousness, inactivity, and sleep that will continue until the day of the resurrection.

Our analysis of the usage of the word *sheol* in the Old Testament and of *hades* in the New Testament has shown that both terms denote the grave or the realm of the dead and not the place of punishment for the ungodly. There is no bliss or punishment immediately after death, but an unconscious rest until resurrection morning.

The notion of *hades* as the place of torment for the wicked derives from Greek mythology, not Scripture. In mythology *hades* was the underworld where the conscious souls of the dead are divided in two major regions, one a place of torment and the other of blessedness. This Greek conception of *hades* influenced some Jews during the intertestamental period to adopt the belief that immediately after death the souls of the righteous proceed to heavenly felicity, while the souls of the godless go to a place of torment in *hades*. This popular scenario is reflected in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

The popular view of *hades* as a place of torment for the wicked crept into the Christian Church and eventually even influenced Bible translators.

In the KJV, for example, *hades* is translated “hell” instead of “grave” in 10 of the 11 occurrences of the term. This inaccurate translation has misled many uninformed Christians into believing that at death the souls of the wicked are thrown into hellfire, where they await the resurrection of their bodies which will only serve to intensify their agony in hell.

Our study of all the relevant Biblical passages has shown that the notion of the intermediate state in which the souls of the saved enjoy the bliss of Paradise, while those of the unsaved suffer the torments of hell derives not from Scripture, but from Greek dualism. It is most unfortunate that during much of its history, Christianity by and large has been influenced by the Greek dualistic view of human nature, according to which the body is mortal and the soul immortal. The acceptance of this deadly heresy has conditioned the interpretation of Scripture and given rise to a host of other heresies such as Purgatory, eternal torment in hell, prayer for the dead, intercession of the saints, indulgences, and etherial view of paradise.

It is encouraging to know that today many scholars of all religious persuasions are launching a massive attack against the traditional dualistic view of human nature and some of its related heresies. We can only hope that these endeavors will contribute to recovering the Biblical wholistic view of human nature and destiny, and thus dispel the spiritual darkness perpetrated by centuries of superstitious beliefs.

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

1. See Table 2.1 Religious Belief, Europe and the USA, in Tony Walter, *The Eclipse of Eternity* (London, 1996), p. 32.

2. “Heaven and Hell: Who Will Go Where and Why?” *Christianity Today* (May 27, 1991), p. 29.

3. Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and the Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago, 1949), pp. 170-207.

4. See Desmond Alexander, “The Old Testament View of Life After Death,” *Themelios* 11, 2 (1986), p. 44.

5. Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis, 1984), p. 72.

6. *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, ed. J. Meeter (Trenton, New Jersey, 1970), p. 339, 345.

7. George Eldon Ladd, "Death," *The New Bible Dictionary*, eds. F. F. Bruce and others, (Grand Rapids, 1962), p. 380.

8. J. G. S. S. Thomson, "Death and the State of the Soul after Death," in *Basic Christian Doctrines*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (New York, 1962), p. 271.

9. Robert A. Morey (note 5), p. 73.

10. William G. T. Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment* (New York 1886), p. 23. See also, Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1953), p. 685; Jon E. Braun, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* (Nashville, 1979), pp. 130-142.

11. John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, 1989), p. 61.

12. Theodore H. Gaster, "Abode of the Dead," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, 1962), p. 788.

13. Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its life and Culture* (Atlanta, 1991), Vol. 1, p. 462.

14. Ralph Walter Doermann, "Sheol in the Old Testament," (Ph. D., dissertation, Duke University, 1961), p. 191.

15. Theodore H. Gaster (note 12), p. 787.

16. Ralph Walter Doermann (note 14), p. 37.

17. See also Ps 30:3; Prov 1:12; Is 14:15; 38:18; Ez 31:16.

18. In Numbers 16:33 it is used of the rebels who "perished in Sheol."

19. Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 96.

20. Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (London, 1974), p. 103.

21. N. H. Snaith, "Life after Death," *Interpretation* 1 (1947), p. 322.

22. Robert A. Morey (note 5), p. 79.

23. Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Phillipsburgh, New Jersey, 1995), p. 28.

24. Job 26:5; Ps 88:10; Prov 2:18; 9:18; 21:16; Is 14:9; 26:14, 19.

25. Robert A. Morey (note 5), p. 78.

26. Paul Haupt, "Assyrian *Rabu*, 'To Sink'—Hebrew *rapha*," *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature* 33 (1916-1917), p. 48.

27. Johannes Pedersen (note 13), p. 180.

28. John W. Cooper (note 11), pp. 71-72.

29. *Ibid.*

30. Basil F. C. Atkinson, *Life and Immortality: An Examination of the Nature and Meaning of Life and Death as They Are Revealed in the Scriptures* (Taunton, England, n.d.), pp. 41-42.

31. John W. Cooper (note 11), pp. 65-66.

32. Robert A. Morey (note 5), p. 49.

33. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids, 1972), p. 63. Anthony A. Hoekema points out that the English translation of the sentence found on page 63 of *The Return of Christ* does not accurately reproduce the Dutch word *fluistering* (whispering), by rendering it as "proclamation:" "Who would pretend to be able to add anything to the proclamation of the New Testament?" (Anthony A. Hoekema [note 19], p. 94).

34. Edward William Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes. A Biblical and Historical Study of the Final Punishment* (Houston, 1989), p. 205.

35. For an informative discussion of the adoption of the Greek conception of *hades* during the intertestamental period, see Joachim Jeremias, "Hades," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, 1974), Vol. 1, pp. 147-148.

36. Matt 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; Rev 1:18, 6:8; 20:13; 20:14.

37. 1 Cor 15:55.

38. Matt 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12: 5; Jam 3:6.

39. Karel Hanhart essentially reaches the same conclusion in her doctoral dissertation presented at the University of Amsterdam. She wrote: "We conclude that these passages do not shed any definite light on our problem [of the intermediate state]. In the sense of power of death, deepest realm, place for utter humiliation and judgment, the term Hades does not go beyond the Old Testament meaning of Sheol" (Karel Hanhart, "The Intermediate State in the New Testament," [Doctoral dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 1966], p. 35).

40. Robert A. Peterson (note 23), p. 67.

41. Josephus, *Discourse to the Greeks Concerning Hades*, in *Josephus Complete Works*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids, 1974), p. 637.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

46. For a brief survey of the intertestamental Jewish literature on the condition of the dead in *hades*, see Karel Hanhart (note 39), pp. 18-31.

47. John W. Cooper (note 11), p. 139.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, 1983), p. 611.

51. Robert A. Morey (note 5), pp. 211-212.

52. Helmut Thielicke, *Living with Death*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, 1983), p. 177.

53. Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Human* (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 117.

54. Emphasis supplied.

55. Basil F. C. Atkinson (note 30), p. 67.

56. G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids, 1962), p. 265.

57. Karel Hanhart (note 39), p. 184.

58. See, for example, G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids, 1972), pp. 55-59; John Calvin, *Second Epistle of Paul, the Apostle to the Corinthians*, *ad. loc.*; R. V. G.; R. v. G. Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, *ad. loc.*; for an extensive bibliography see Karel Hanhart (note 39), pp. 150-155.

59. Robert A. Morey (note 5), p. 210.

60. Ibid.

61. See C. H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks* (New York, 1954), pp. 191-195; Philo speaks of man's longing for the state of the naked soul in *Legum Allegoriae* 2, 57, 59.

62. For an impressive list of scholars who hold such a view, see Murray J. Harris, *Raised Immortal: Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament* (London, 1986), p. 255 n. 2.

63. See, F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, 1977), p. 310.

64. See for example, James Denney, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York, 1903), *ad loc.*; Floyd V. Filson, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, in *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York, 1952), Vol. 10, *ad loc.*; Philip E. Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, 1976), *ad loc.*; Basil F. C. Atkinson (note 30), pp. 64-65; *The Seventh-day Adventist Commentary* (Washington, D C, 1957), Vol. 6, pp.861-863.

65. Karel Hanhart (note 39), p. 156.

66. Emphasis supplied.

67. Robert A. Peterson (note 23), p. 185.

68. Robert A. Morey (note 5), p. 214.

69. George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 103.

70. For example, Anthony A. Hoekema writes: "The white robes and the resting suggest that they are enjoying a provisional kind of blessedness which looks forward to the final resurrection" (note 19, p. 235). See also Murray J. Harris, (note 62), p. 138; G. B. A. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York, 1966), p. 86; R. H. Preston and A. T. Hanson, *The Revelation of Saint John the Divine* (London, 1949), p. 81.

71. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, 1977), p. 160.

Chapter VI

HELL: ETERNAL TORMENT OR ANNIHILATION?

Few teachings have troubled the human conscience over the centuries more than the traditional view of hell as the place where the lost suffer conscious punishment in body and soul for all eternity. The prospect that one day a vast number of people will be consigned to the everlasting torment of hell is most disturbing and distressing to sensitive Christians. After all, almost everyone has friends or family members who have died without making a commitment to Christ. The prospect of one day seeing them agonizing in hell for all eternity can easily lead thinking Christians to say to God: “No thank you God. I am not interested in Your kind of paradise!”

It is not surprising that the traditional view of hell as a place of eternal torment has been a stumbling block for believers and an effective weapon used by skeptics to challenge the credibility of the Christian message. For example, Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), a British philosopher and social reformer, faulted Christ for allegedly teaching the doctrine of hellfire and for the untold cruelty such a doctrine has caused in Christian history.

Russell wrote: “There is one serious defect to my mind in Christ’s moral character, and that is that He believed in hell. I do not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment. Christ certainly as depicted in the Gospels did believe in everlasting punishment, and one does find repeatedly a vindictive fury against those people who would not listen to His preaching—an attitude which is common with preachers, but which does somewhat detract from superlative excellence. . . . I really do not think that a person with a proper degree of kindness in his nature would have put fears and terrors of that sort into the world. . . . I must say that I think all this doctrine, that hellfire is a punishment for sin, is a doctrine of cruelty. It is a doctrine that put cruelty into the world and gave the world generations of cruel torture; and the Christ of the Gospels, if you take Him as His chroniclers represent Him, would certainly have to be considered partly responsible for that.”¹

Russell's charge that Christ is "partly responsible" for the doctrine of everlasting punishment which "gave the world generations of cruel torture" cannot be dismissed lightly as the fruit of an agnostic mind. If Christ really taught that the saved will enjoy eternal bliss while the unsaved will suffer eternal torment in hellfire, then we would have reason to question the moral integrity of His character. It is hard to imagine that the God whom Jesus Christ revealed as the merciful "*Abba-Father*" would wreak vengeance on His disobedient children by torturing them for all eternity!

It is not surprising that today we seldom hear sermons on hellfire even from fundamentalist preachers, who theoretically are still committed to such a belief. John Walvoord, himself a fundamentalist, suggests that the reluctance to preach on hellfire is due primarily to the fear of proclaiming an unpopular doctrine.² In my view, the problem is not merely the reluctance of preachers today to tell the truth about hell, but primarily the awareness that the traditional view of hellfire is morally intolerable and Biblically questionable.

Clark Pinnock keenly observes: "Their reticence [to preach on hellfire] is not so much due to a lack of integrity in proclaiming the truth as to not having the stomach for preaching a doctrine that amounts to sadism raised to new levels of finesse. Something inside tells them, perhaps on an instinctual level, that the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not the kind of deity who tortures people (even the worst of sinners) in this way. I take the silence of the fundamentalist preachers to be testimony to their longing for a revised doctrine of the nature of hell."³ It is such a longing, I believe, that is encouraging theologians today to revise the traditional view of hell and to propose alternative interpretations of the scriptural data.

Objectives of This Chapter. The issue addressed in this chapter is not the *fact* of hell as the final punishment of the lost, but the *nature* of hell. The fundamental question is: Do impenitent sinners suffer conscious punishment in body and soul for all eternity, or are they annihilated by God in the second death after suffering a temporary punishment? To put it differently: Does hellfire torment the lost eternally or consume them permanently?

This fundamental question is examined first by analyzing the *traditional* view and then by presenting the *annihilation* view, to which I subscribe. The first part of the chapter analyzes the major Biblical texts and arguments used to support the literal view of hell as the place of a literal everlasting punishment of the wicked.

The second part of this chapter considers briefly two alternative interpretations of hell. The first is the *metaphorical* view, which regards hell as a place where the suffering is more mental than physical. The fire is not

literal but metaphorical, and the pain is caused more by the sense of separation from God than by physical torments.⁴ The second is the *universalist* view of hell, which turns hell into a purging, refining fire that ultimately makes it possible for every person to make it into heaven.

The third part of this chapter presents the *annihilation* view of hell as a place of the ultimate dissolution and annihilation of the unsaved. Some call this view *conditional* immortality, because our study of the Biblical wholistic view of human nature shows that immortality is not an innate human possession; it is a divine gift granted to believers on condition of their faith response. God will not resurrect the wicked to immortal life in order to inflict upon them a punishment of eternal pain. Rather, the wicked will be resurrected mortal in order to receive their punishment which will result in their ultimate annihilation.

Some may question our use of “annihilation” for the destiny of the wicked, because the first law of thermodynamics says that nothing is destroyed but changed into something else. When corpses are burned, their smoke and ashes remain. This is true, but what remains is no longer human life. From a Biblical perspective, the fire that consumes the wicked annihilates them as human beings.

PART I: THE TRADITIONAL VIEW OF HELL

With few exceptions, the traditional view of hell has dominated Christian thinking from the time of Augustine to the nineteenth century. Simply stated, the traditional view affirms that immediately after death the disembodied souls of impenitent sinners descend into hell, where they suffer the punishment of a literal eternal fire. At the resurrection, the body is reunited with the soul, thus intensifying the pain of hell for the lost and the pleasure of heaven for the saved.

Graphic Views of Hell. Not satisfied with the image of fire and smoke of the New Testament, some of the more creative medieval minds have pictured hell as a bizarre horror chamber where punishment is based on a measure-for-measure principle. This means that whatever member of the body sinned, that member would be punished in hell more than any other member.

“In Christian literature,” writes William Crockett, “we find blasphemers hanging by their tongues. Adulterous women who plaited their hair to entice men dangle over boiling mire by their neck or hair. Slanderers chew their tongues, hot irons burn their eyes. Other evildoers suffer in equally picturesque ways. Murderers are cast into pits filled with venomous reptiles,

and worms fill their bodies. Women who had abortions sit neck deep in the excretions of the damned. Those who chatted idly during church stand in a pool of burning sulphur and pitch. Idolaters are driven up cliffs by demons where they plunge to the rocks below, only to be driven up again. Those who turned their back on God are turned and baked slowly in the fires of hell.”⁵

These early images of hell were refined and immortalized by the famous fourteenth-century Italian poet, Dante Alighieri. In his *Divina Commedia* (*Divine Comedy*), Dante portrays hell as a place of absolute terror, where the damned writhe and scream while the saints bask in the glory of paradise. In Dante’s hell, some sinners wail loudly in boiling blood, while others endure burning smoke that chars their nostrils, still others run naked from hordes of biting snakes.

The more cautious approach of Luther and Calvin did not deter later prominent preachers and theologians from portraying hell as a sea of fire, in which the wicked burn throughout eternity. Renowned eighteenth-century American theologian Jonathan Edwards pictured hell as a raging furnace of liquid fire that fills both the body and the soul of the wicked: “The body will be full of torment as full as it can hold, and every part of it shall be full of torment. They shall be in extreme pain, every joint of them, every nerve shall be full of inexpressible torment. They shall be tormented even to their fingers’ ends. The whole body shall be full of the wrath of God. Their hearts and bowels and their heads, their eyes and their tongues, their hands and their feet will be filled with the fierceness of God’s wrath. This is taught us in many Scriptures. . . .”⁶

A similar description of the fate of the wicked was given by the famous nineteenth-century British preacher Charles Spurgeon: “In fire exactly like that which we have on earth thy body will lie, asbestos-like, forever unconsumed, all thy veins roads for the feet of Pain to travel on, every nerve a string on which the Devil shall for ever play his diabolical tune of hell’s unutterable lament.”⁷ It is hard to comprehend how the Devil can torment evildoers in the place of his own punishment.

Today, those who believe in a literal eternal hellfire are more circumspect in their description of the suffering experienced by the wicked. For example, Robert A. Peterson concludes his book *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment*, saying: “The Judge and Ruler over hell is God himself. He is present in hell, not in blessing, but in wrath. Hell entails eternal punishment, utter loss, rejection by God, terrible suffering, and unspeakable sorrow and pain. The duration of hell is endless. Although there are degrees of punishment, hell is terrible for all the damned. Its occupants are the Devil, evil angels, and unsaved human beings.”⁸

In making his case for hell as a place of eternal punishment, Peterson marshals the following witnesses: the Old Testament, Christ, the Apostles, and Church History (early church, Reformation, and the modern period). He devotes chapters to each of these witnesses. A similar approach is used by other scholars who support the traditional view of hellfire.⁹ A comprehensive response to all the alleged witnesses of eternal punishment of the wicked would take us beyond the scope of this study. Interested readers can find such a comprehensive response in *The Fire that Consumes* (1982) by Edward Fudge. The book, with a foreword by F. F. Bruce, is praised by many scholars for its balanced and fair treatment of the Biblical and historical data. Our response is limited to a few basic observations, some of which will be expanded in the second part of this chapter.

1. The Witness of the Old Testament

The witness of the Old Testament for eternal punishment rests largely on the use of *sheol* and two main passages, Isaiah 66:22-24 and Daniel 12:1-2. Regarding *sheol*, John F. Walvoord says: “*Sheol* was a place of punishment and retribution. In Isaiah [14:9-10] the Babylonians killed in divine judgment are pictured as being greeted in *sheol* by those who had died earlier.”¹⁰

Regarding *sheol*, our study of the word in chapter 5 shows that none of the texts supports the view of *sheol* as the place of punishment for the ungodly. The word denotes the realm of the dead where there is unconsciousness, inactivity, and sleep. Similarly, Isaiah’s taunting ode against the King of Babylon is a parable, in which the characters, personified trees, and fallen monarchs are fictitious. They serve not to reveal the punishment of the wicked in *sheol*, but to forecast in graphic pictorial language God’s judgment upon Israel’s oppressor and his final ignominious destiny in a dusty grave, where he is eaten by worms. To interpret this parable as a literal description of hell means to ignore the highly figurative, parabolic nature of the passage, which is simply designed to depict the doom of a self-exalted tyrant.

Isaiah 66:24: The Fate of the Wicked. The description of the fate of the wicked found in Isaiah 66:24 is regarded by some traditionalists as the clearest witness to eternal punishment in the Old Testament. The setting of the text is the contrast between God’s judgment upon the wicked and His blessings upon the righteous. The latter will enjoy prosperity and peace, and will worship God regularly from Sabbath to Sabbath (Is 66:12-14, 23). But the wicked will be punished by “fire” (Is 66:15) and meet their “end together” (Is 66:17). This is the setting of the crucial verse 24, which says: “And they shall go forth and look on the dead bodies of the men that have rebelled against me; for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall

be an abhorrence to all flesh.”

R. N. Whybray sees in this text “an early description of eternal punishment: though dead, the rebels will continue for ever.”¹⁰ In a similar vein, Peterson interprets the phrase “their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched” as meaning that “the punishment and shame of the wicked have no end; their fate is eternal. It is no wonder that they will be loathsome to all mankind.”¹¹

Isaiah’s description of the fate of the wicked was possibly inspired by the Lord’s slaying of 185,000 men of the Assyrian army during the reign of Hezekiah. We are told that “when men arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies” (Is 37:36). This historical event may have served to foreshadow the fate of the wicked. Note that the righteous look upon “dead bodies” (Hebrew: *pegerim*), not living people. What they see is destruction and not eternal torment.

The “worms” are mentioned in connection with the dead bodies, because they hasten the decomposition and represent the ignominy of corpses deprived of burial (Jer 25:33; Is 14:11; Job 7:5; 17:14; Acts 12:23). The figure of the fire that is not quenched is used frequently in Scripture to signify a fire that consumes (Ezek 20:47-48) and reduces to nothing (Am 5:5-6; Matt 3:12). Edward Fudge rightly explains that “both worms and fire speak of a total and final destruction. Both terms also make this a ‘loathsome’ scene.”¹²

To understand the meaning of the phrase “the fire shall not be quenched,” it is important to remember that keeping a fire live, to burn corpses required considerable effort in Palestine. Corpses do not readily burn and the firewood needed to consume them was scarce. In my travels in the Middle East and Africa, I often have seen carcasses partially burned because the fire died out before consuming the remains of a beast.

The image of an unquenchable fire is simply designed to convey the thought of being completely burned up or consumed. It has nothing to do with the everlasting punishment of immortal souls. The passage speaks clearly of “dead bodies” which are consumed and not of immortal souls which are tormented eternally. It is unfortunate that traditionalists interpret this passage, and similar statements of Jesus in the light of their conception of the final punishment rather than on the basis of what the figure of speech really means.

Daniel 12:2: “Everlasting Contempt.” The second major Old Testament text used by traditionalists to support everlasting punishment is Daniel 12:2, which speaks of the resurrection of both good and evil: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” Peterson

concludes his analysis of this text, by saying: “Daniel teaches that whereas the godly will be raised to never-ending life, the wicked will be raised to never-ending disgrace (Dan 12:2).”¹³

The Hebrew term *deraon* translated “contempt” also appears in Isaiah 66:24 in which it is translated “loathsome” and describes the unburied corpses. In his commentary on *The Book of Daniel*, André Lacocque notes that the meaning of *deraon* both “here [Dan 12:2] and in Isaiah 66:24 is the decomposition of the wicked.”¹⁴ This means that the “contempt” is caused by the disgust over the decomposition of their bodies, and not by the never-ending suffering of the wicked. As Emmanuel Petavel puts it: “The sentiment of the survivors is disgust, not pity.”¹⁵

To sum up, the alleged Old Testament witness for the everlasting punishment of the wicked is negligible, if not non-existent. On the contrary, the evidence for utter destruction of the wicked at the eschatological Day of the Lord is resoundingly clear. The wicked will “perish” like the chaff (Ps 1:4, 6), will be dashed to pieces like pottery (Ps 2:9, 12), will be slain by the Lord’s breath (Is 11:4), will be burnt in the fire “like thorns cut down” (Is 33:12), and “will die like gnats” (Is 51:6).

Perhaps the clearest description of the total destruction of the wicked is found on the last page of the Old Testament in the English (not Hebrew) Bible: “For behold, the day comes burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch” (Mal 4:1). Here the imagery of the all-consuming fire which leaves “neither root nor branch” suggests utter consumption and destruction, not perpetual torment. The same truth is expressed by God’s next prophet, John the Baptist, who cried in the wilderness summoning people to repentance in view of the approaching fire of God’s judgment (Matt 3:7-12).

2. The Witness of Intertestamental Literature

The literature produced during the 400 years between Malachi and Matthew is far from being unanimous on the fate of the wicked. Some texts describe the unending conscious torments of the lost, while others reflect the Old Testament view that the wicked cease to exist. What accounts for these contrasting views most likely is the Hellenistic cultural pressure the Jews experienced at that time as they were widely dispersed throughout the ancient Near East.

Unfortunately, most people are not aware of the different views because traditionalists generally argue for a uniform Jewish view of the final

punishment as eternal torment. Since Jesus and the apostles did not denounce such a view, it is assumed that they endorsed it. This assumption is based on fantasy rather than facts.

Eternal Torment. The Second Book of Esdras, an apocryphal book accepted as canonical by the Roman Catholic Church, asks if the soul of the lost will be tortured immediately at death or after the renewal of creation (2 Esd 7:15). God answers: “As the spirit leaves the body . . . if it is one of those who have shown scorn and have not kept the way of the Most High . . . such spirit shall . . . wander about in torment, ever grieving and sad . . . they will consider the torment laid up for themselves in the last days” (2 Esd 7:78-82).¹⁶

The same view is expressed in Judith (150-125 B. C.), also an apocryphal book included in the Roman Catholic Bible. In closing her song of victory, the heroine Judith warns: “Woe to the nations that rise up against my race; the Lord Almighty will take vengeance of them in the day of judgment, to put fire and worms in their flesh; And they shall weep and feel pain for ever” (Judith 16:17). The reference to the fire and worms probably comes from Isaiah 66:24, but while Isaiah saw the dead bodies consumed by fire and worms, Judith speaks of “fire and worms” as causing internal, unending agonies inside the flesh. Here we have an unmistakable description of the traditional view of hell.

A similar description of the fate of the wicked is found in *4 Maccabees*, written by a Jew with Stoic leanings. The author describes the righteous ascending to conscious bliss at death (10:15; 13:17; 17:18; 18:23) and the wicked descending to conscious torment (9:8, 32; 10:11, 15; 12:19; 13:15; 18:5, 22). In chapter 9, he tells the story of the faithful mother and her seven sons who were all martyred under the tyranny of Antiochus Epiphanes (see 2 Macc 7:1-42). The seven sons repeatedly warn their wicked torturer of the eternal torment that awaits him: “Divine vengeance is reserved for you, eternal fire and torments, which shall cling to you for all time” (4 Macc 12:12; cf. 9:9; 10:12, 15). “The danger of eternal torment is laid up for those who transgress the commandments of God” (4 Macc 13:15).

Total Annihilation. In other apocryphal books, however, sinners are consumed as in the Old Testament. Tobit (about 200 B.C.), for example, describes the end time, saying: “All the children of Israel that are delivered in those days, remembering God in truth, shall be gathered together and come to Jerusalem and they shall dwell in the land of Abraham with security . . . and they that do sin and unrighteousness shall cease from all earth” (Tob 14:6-8). The same view is expressed in Sirach, called also Ecclesiasticus (about 195-171 B.C.) which speaks of “the glowing fire” in which the wicked will “be

devoured” and “find destruction” (Eccl 36:7-10).

The Sibylline Oracles, a composite work, the core of which comes from a Jewish author of perhaps the second century B. C., describes how God will carry out the total destruction of the wicked: “And He shall burn the whole earth, and consume the whole race of men . . . and there shall be sooty dust” (Sib. Or. 4:76). *The Psalms of Solomon*, most likely composed by Hasidic Jews in the middle of the first century B. C., anticipates a time when the wicked will vanish from the earth, never to be remembered: “The destruction of the sinner is forever, and he shall not be remembered, when the righteous is visited. This is the portion of sinners for ever” (Ps. Sol. 3:11-12).

Josephus and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Traditionalists often cite Josephus’ description of the Essene belief about the immortality of the soul and the eternal punishment of the wicked to support their contention that such a belief was widely accepted in New Testament times. Let us look at the text closely before making any comment. Josephus tells us that the Essenes adopted from the Greeks not only the notion that “the souls are immortal, and continue for ever,” but also the belief that “the good souls have their habitations beyond the ocean,” in a region where the weather is perfect, while “bad souls [are cast in] a dark and tempestuous den, full of never-ceasing punishments.”¹⁷ Josephus continues explaining that such a belief derives from Greek “fables” and is built “on the supposition that the souls are immortal” and that “bad men . . . suffer immortal punishment after death.”¹⁸ He calls such beliefs “an unavoidable bait for such as have once had a taste for their [Greek] philosophy.”¹⁹

It is significant that Josephus attributes the belief in the immortality of the soul and in unending punishment not to the teachings of the Old Testament, but to Greek “fables,” which sectarian Jews, like the Essenes, found irresistible. Such a comment presupposes that not all the Jews had accepted these beliefs. In fact, indications are that even among the Essenes were those who did not share such beliefs. For example, the Dead Sea Scrolls, which are generally associated with the Essene community, speak clearly of the total annihilation of sinners.

The *Damascus Document*, an important Dead Sea Scroll, describes the end of sinners by comparing their fate to that of the antediluvians who perished in the Flood and of the unfaithful Israelites who fell in the wilderness. God’s punishment of sinners leaves “no remnant remaining of them or survivor (CD 2, 6, 7). They will be “as though they had not been” (CD 2, 20). The same view is expressed in another scroll, the *Manual of Discipline* which speaks of the “extermination” of the men of Belial (Satan) by means of “eternal fire” (1QS 2, 4-8).²⁰

It is noteworthy that the *Manual of Discipline* describes the punishment of those who follow the Spirit of Perversity instead of the Spirit of Truth in an apparent contradictory way, namely, as unending punishment which results in total destruction. The text states: “And as for the Visitation of all who walk in this [Spirit of Perversity], it consists of an abundance of blows administered by all the Angels of destruction in the everlasting Pit by the furious wrath of the God of vengeance, of *unending dread and shame without end*, and of disgrace of destruction by fire of the region of darkness. And all their time from age to age are in most sorrowful chagrin and bitterest misfortune, in calamities of darkness *till they are destroyed with none of them surviving or escaping*” (1QS 4.11-14).²¹

The fact that the “unending dread and shame without end” is not unending but lasts only “till they are destroyed” goes to show that in New Testament times, people used such terms as “unending,” “without end,” or “eternal,” with a different meaning than we do today. For us, “unending” punishment means “without end,” and not until the wicked are destroyed. The recognition of this fact is essential for interpreting later the sayings of Jesus about eternal fire and for resolving the apparent contradiction we find in the New Testament between “everlasting punishment” (Matt 25:46) and “everlasting destruction” (2 Thess 1:9). When it comes to the punishment of the wicked, “unending” simply means “until they are destroyed.”

The above sampling of testimonies from the intertestamental literature indicates that in this period, there was no consistent “Jewish view” of the fate of the wicked. Though most of the documents reflect the Old Testament view of the total extinction of sinners, some clearly speak of the unending torment of the wicked. This means that we cannot read the words of Jesus or the New Testament writers assuming that they reflect a uniform belief in eternal torment held by Jews at that time. We must examine the teachings of the New Testament on the basis of its own internal witness.

3. The Witness of Jesus

Did Jesus Teach Eternal Torment? Traditionalists believe that Jesus provides the strongest proof for their belief in the eternal punishment of the wicked. Kenneth Kantzer, one of the most respected evangelical leaders of our time, states: “Those who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord cannot escape the clear, unambiguous language with which he warns of the awful truth of eternal punishment.”²²

Australian theologian, Leon Morris, concurs with Kantzer and emphatically states: “Why does anyone believe in hell in these enlightened days? Because Jesus plainly taught its existence. He spoke more often about hell

than he did about heaven. We cannot get around this fact. We can understand that there are those who do not like the idea of hell. I do not like it myself. But if we are serious in our understanding of Jesus as the incarnate Son of God, we must reckon with the fact that he said plainly that some people will spend eternity in hell.”²³

Morris clearly affirms that Jesus taught the existence of hell. In fact, Jesus uses the term *gehenna* (translated “hell” in our English Bibles) seven of the eight times the term occurs in the New Testament. The only other reference is found in James 3:6. But the issue is not the *reality* of hell as the place of the final punishment of impenitent sinners. On this point, most Christians agree. Rather, the issue is the *nature* of hell. Did Jesus teach that hell–*gehenna* is the place where sinners will suffer eternal torment or permanent destruction? To find an answer to this question, let us examine what Jesus actually said about hell.

What Is Hell–*Gehenna*? Before looking at Christ’s references to hell–*gehenna*, we may find it helpful to consider the derivation of the word itself. The Greek word *gehenna* is a transliteration of the Hebrew “Valley of (the sons of) Hinnon,” located south of Jerusalem. In ancient times, it was linked with the practice of sacrificing children to the god Molech (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6; 23:10). This earned it the name “Topheth,” a place to be spit on or abhorred.²⁶ This valley apparently became a gigantic pyre for burning the 185,000 corpses of Assyrian soldiers whom God slew in the days of Hezekiah (Is 30:31-33; 37:36).

Jeremiah predicted that the place would be called “the valley of Slaughter” because it would be filled with the corpses of the Israelites when God judged them for their sins. “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when it will no more be called Topheth, or the valley of Hinnom, but the valley of Slaughter: for they will bury in Topheth, because there is no room elsewhere. And the dead bodies of this people will be food for the beasts of the air, and for the beasts of the earth; and none will frighten them away” (Jer 7:32-33).

Josephus informs us that the same valley was heaped with the dead bodies of the Jews following the A. D. 70 siege of Jerusalem.²⁶ We have seen that Isaiah envisions the same scene following the Lord’s slaughter of sinners at the end of the world (Is 66:24). During the intertestamental period, the valley became the place of final punishment, and was called the “accursed valley” (1 Enoch 27:2,3), the “station of vengeance” and “future torment” (2 Bar 59:10, 11), the “furnace of Gehenna” and “pit of torment” (4 Esd 7:36).

Though the imagery of the *gehenna* is common in the Jewish literature of this period, the description of what happens there is contradictory. Edward Fudge concludes his survey of the literature, saying: “We have seen a few passages in the Pseudepigrapha which specifically anticipate everlasting torment of conscious bodies and/or souls, as well as one such verse in the Apocrypha. Many other passages within the intertestamental literature also picture the wicked being consumed by fire, but it is the consuming, unquenchable fire of the Old Testament which utterly destroys for ever, leaving only smoke as its reminder. It is fair to say that, to those who first heard the Lord, *gehenna* would convey a sense of total horror and disgust. Beyond that, however, one must speak with extreme caution.”²⁷

Jesus and Hell’s Fire. With this note of caution, let us look at the seven references to *gehenna*—hell fire that we find in the Gospels. In The Sermon on the Mount, Jesus states that whoever says to his brother “‘you fool!’ shall be liable to the hell [*gehenna*] of fire” (Matt 5:22; KJV). Again, He said that it is better to pluck out the eye or cut off the hand that causes a person to sin than for the “whole body go into hell [*gehenna*]” (Matt 5:29, 30). The same thought is expressed later on: it is better to cut off a foot or a hand or pluck out an eye that causes a person to sin than to “be thrown into eternal fire . . . be thrown into the hell [*gehenna*] of fire” (Matt 18:8, 9). Here the fire of hell is described as “eternal.” The same saying is found in Mark, where Jesus three times says that it is better to cut off the offending organ than “to go to hell [*gehenna*], to the unquenchable fire . . . to be thrown into hell [*gehenna*], where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:44, 46, 47-48). Elsewhere, Jesus chides the Pharisees for traversing sea and land to make a convert and then making him “twice as much a child of hell [*gehenna*]” (Matt 23:15). Finally, he warns the Pharisees that they will not “escape being sentenced to hell [*gehenna*]” (Matt 23:33).

In reviewing Christ’s allusions to hell—*gehenna*, we should first note that none of them indicates that hell—*gehenna* is a place of unending torment. What is eternal or unquenchable is not the punishment, but the fire. We noted earlier that in the Old Testament this fire is eternal or unquenchable in the sense that it totally consumes dead bodies. This conclusion is supported by Christ’s warning that we should not fear human beings who can harm the body, but the One “who can destroy both soul and body in hell [*gehenna*]” (Matt 10:28). The implication is clear. Hell is the place of final punishment, which results in the total destruction of the whole being, soul and body.

Robert Peterson argues that “Jesus is not speaking here of literal annihilation,” because in the parallel passage in Luke 12:5 the verb “destroy”

is not used. Instead, it says: “Fear him who, after killing the body, has power to throw you into hell” (Luke 12:5). From this Peterson concludes: “The destruction mentioned in Matthew 10:28, therefore, is equivalent to being thrown into hell,”²⁸ that is, eternal torment. The fundamental problem with his argument is that he assumes *first* that “being thrown into hell” means everlasting torment. *Then* he uses his subjective assumption to negate the self-evident meaning of the verb “to destroy—*apollumi*.” Peterson ignores a basic principle of Biblical interpretation which requires unclear texts to be explained on the basis of those which are clear and not viceversa. The fact that Jesus clearly speaks of God destroying both the soul and body in hell shows that hell is the place where sinners are ultimately destroyed and not eternally tormented.

“Eternal Fire.” Traditionalists would challenge this conclusion because elsewhere Christ refers to “eternal fire” and “eternal punishment.” For example, in Matthew 18:8-9 Jesus repeats what He had said earlier (Matt 5:29-30) about forfeiting a member of the body in order to escape the “eternal fire” of hell—*gehenna*. An even clearer reference to “eternal fire” is found in the parable of the Sheep and the Goats in which Christ speaks of the separation that takes place at His coming between the saved and the unsaved. He will welcome the faithful into His kingdom, but will reject the wicked, saying: “Depart from me, you cursed, into *eternal fire* prepared for the devil and his angels; . . . And they will go away into *eternal punishment*, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt 25:41, 46).²⁹

Traditionalists attribute fundamental importance to the last passage because it brings together the two concepts of “eternal fire” and “eternal punishment.” The combination of the two is interpreted to mean that the punishment is eternal because the hellfire that causes it is also eternal. Peterson goes so far as to say that “if Matthew 25:41 and 46 were the only two verses to describe the fate of the wicked, the Bible would clearly teach eternal condemnation, and we would be obligated to believe it and to teach it on the authority of the Son of God.”³⁰

Peterson’s interpretation of these two critical texts ignores four major considerations. First, Christ’s concern in this parable is not to define the nature of either eternal life or of eternal death, but simply to affirm that there are two destinies. The nature of each of the destinies is not discussed in this passage.

Second, as John Stott rightly points out, “The fire itself is termed ‘eternal’ and ‘unquenchable,’ but it would be very odd if what is thrown into it proves indestructible. Our expectation would be the opposite: it would be consumed for ever, not tormented for ever. Hence it is the smoke (evidence that the fire has done its work) which ‘rises for ever and ever’ (Rev 14:11; cf. 19:3).”³¹

Third, the fire is “eternal—*aionios*,” not because of its endless duration, but because of its complete consumption and annihilation of the wicked. This is indicated clearly by the fact that the lake of fire, in which the wicked are thrown, is called explicitly “the second death” (Rev 20:14; 21:8), because, it causes the final, radical, and irreversible extinction of life.

Eternal as Permanent Destruction. “Eternal” often refers to the *permanence of the result* rather than the *continuation of a process*. For example, Jude 7 says that Sodom and Gomorrah underwent “a punishment of eternal [*aionios*] fire.” It is evident that the fire that destroyed the two cities is eternal, not because of its *duration* but because of its *permanent results*.

Similar examples can be found in Jewish intertestamental literature. Earlier we noted that in the *Manual of Discipline* of the Dead Sea Scrolls, God hurls “extermination” upon the wicked by means of “eternal fire” (1QS 2. 4-8). The “Angels of destruction” cause “unending dread and shame without end, and of the disgrace of destruction by the fire of the region of darkness . . . till they are destroyed with none of them surviving or escaping” (1 QS 4. 11-14). Here, the shameful and destructive fire is “unending . . . without end,” yet it will last only “till they are destroyed.” To our modern critical minds, such a statement is contradictory, but not to people of Biblical times. To interpret a text correctly, it is vital to establish how it was understood by its original readers.

The examples cited suffice to show that the fire of the final punishment is “eternal” not because it lasts forever, but because, as in the case of Sodom and Gomorra, it causes the complete and permanent destruction of the wicked, a condition which lasts forever. In his commentary on *The Gospel according to St. Matthew*, R. V. G. Tasker expresses the same view: “There is no indication as to how long that punishment will last. The metaphor of ‘eternal fire’ wrongly rendered *everlasting fire* [KJV] in verse 41 is meant, we may reasonably presume, to indicate final destruction.”³²

Fourth, Jesus was offering a choice between *destruction* and *life* when He said: “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to *destruction*, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to *life*, and only few find it” (Matt 7:13-14).³³ Here Jesus contrasts the comfortable way which leads to *destruction* in hell with the narrow way of trials and persecutions which leads to *eternal life* in the kingdom of heaven. The contrast between *destruction* and *life* suggests that the “eternal fire” causes the eternal destruction of the lost, not their eternal torment.

“Eternal Punishment.” Christ’s solemn declaration: “They will go away into *eternal punishment*, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt 25:46)

is generally regarded as the clearest proof of the conscious suffering the lost will endure for all eternity. Is this the only legitimate interpretation of the text? John Stott rightly answers: “No, that is to read into the text what is not necessarily there. What Jesus said is that both the life and the punishment would be eternal, but he did not in that passage define the nature of either. Because he elsewhere spoke of eternal life as a conscious enjoyment of God (John 17:3), it does not follow that eternal punishment must be a conscious experience of pain at the hand of God. On the contrary, although declaring both to be eternal, Jesus is *contrasting* the two destinies: the more unlike they are, the better.”³⁴

Traditionalists read “*eternal punishment*” as “*eternal punishing*,” but this is not the meaning of the phrase. As Basil Atkinson keenly observes, “When the adjective *aionios* meaning ‘everlasting’ is used in Greek with nouns of *action* it has reference to the *result* of the action, not the process. Thus the phrase ‘everlasting punishment’ is comparable to ‘everlasting redemption’ and ‘everlasting salvation,’ both Scriptural phrases. No one supposes that we are being redeemed or being saved forever. We were redeemed and saved once for all by Christ with eternal results. In the same way the lost will not be passing through a process of punishment for ever but will be punished once and for all with eternal results. On the other hand the noun ‘life’ is not a noun of action, but a noun expressing a state. Thus the life itself is eternal.”³⁵

A fitting example to support this conclusion is found in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, where Paul, speaking of those who reject the Gospel, says: “They shall suffer the *punishment of eternal destruction* and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.”³⁶ It is evident that the destruction of the wicked cannot be eternal in its duration, because it is difficult to imagine an eternal, inconclusive process of destruction. Destruction presupposes annihilation. The destruction of the wicked is eternal—*aionios*, not because the *process* of destruction continues forever, but because the *results* are permanent. In the same way, the “eternal punishment” of Matthew 25:46 is eternal because its *results* are permanent. It is a punishment that results in their eternal destruction or annihilation.

The Meaning of “Eternal.” Some reason that “if the word ‘eternal’ means without end when applied to the future blessedness of believers, it must follow, unless clear evidence is given to the contrary, that this word also means without end when used to describe the future punishment of the lost.”³⁷ Harry Buis states this argument even more forcefully: “If *aionion* describes life which is endless, so must *aionios* describe endless punishment. Here the doctrine of heaven and the doctrine of hell stand or fall together.”³⁸

Such reasoning fails to recognize that what determines the meaning of “eternal” is the object being qualified. If the object is the life granted by God to believers (John 3:16), then the word “eternal” obviously means “unending, everlasting,” because the Scripture tells us that the “mortal nature” of believers will be made “immortal” by Christ at His Coming (1 Cor 15:53).

On the other hand, if the object being qualified is the “punishment” or “destruction” of the lost, then “eternal” can only mean “permanent, total, final,” because nowhere does the Scripture teach that the wicked will be resurrected immortal to be able to suffer forever. Eternal punishment requires either the natural possession of an immortal nature or the divine bestowal of an immortal nature at the time the punishment is inflicted. Nowhere does the Scripture teach that either of these conditions exists.

The punishment of the wicked is eternal both in *quality* and *quantity*. It is “eternal” in *quality* because it belongs to the Age to Come. It is “eternal” in *quantity* because its results will never end. Like “eternal judgment” (Heb 6:2), “eternal redemption” (Heb 9:12), and “eternal salvation” (Heb 5:9)—all of which are eternal in the results of actions once completed—so “eternal punishment” is eternal in its results: the complete and irreversible destruction of the wicked.

It is important to note that the Greek word *aionios*, translated “eternal” or “everlasting,” literally means “lasting for an age.” Ancient Greek papyri contain numerous examples of Roman emperors being described as *aionios*. What is meant is that they held their office for life. Unfortunately, the English words “eternal” or “everlasting” do not accurately render the meaning of *aionios*, which literally means “age-lasting.” In other words, while the Greek *aionios* expresses perpetuity *within limits*, the English “eternal” or “everlasting” denotes *unlimited* duration.

The Meaning of “Punishment.” Note should also be taken of the word “punishment” used to translate the Greek word *kolasis*. A glance at Moulton and Milligan’s *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* shows that the word was used at that time with the meaning of “pruning” or “cutting down” of dead wood. If this is its meaning here, it reflects the frequent Old Testament phrase “shall be cut off from his people” (Gen 17:14; Ex 30:33, 38; Lev 7:20, 21, 25, 27; Num 9:13). This would mean that the “eternal punishment” of the wicked consists in their being permanently cut off from mankind.

As a final observation, it is important to remember that the only way the punishment of the wicked could be inflicted eternally is if God resurrected them with immortal life so that they would be indestructible. But according to the Scripture, only God possesses immortality in Himself (1 Tim 1:17;

6:16). He gives immortality as the gift of the Gospel (2 Tim 1:10). In the best known text of the Bible, we are told that those who do not “believe in him” will “perish [*apoletai*],” instead of receiving “eternal life” (John 3:16). The ultimate fate of the lost is destruction by eternal fire and not punishment by eternal torment. The notion of the eternal torment of the wicked can only be defended by accepting the Greek view of the immortality and indestructibility of the soul, a concept which we have found to be foreign to Scripture.

“Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth.” Four times in the Gospel of Matthew we are told that on the day of judgment “there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; KJV). Believers in literal, eternal hell fire generally assume that the “weeping and gnashing of teeth” describes the conscious agony experienced by the lost for all eternity. A look at the context of each text suggests, however, that the “weeping and grinding of teeth” occurs in the context of the separation or expulsion that occurs at the final judgment.

Both phrases derive most likely from the weeping and gnashing of teeth associated with the Day of the Lord in the Old Testament. For example, Zephaniah describes the Day of the Lord in the following words: “The day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord: the mighty man shall *cry there bitterly*” (Zeph 1:14; KJV).³⁹ In a similar fashion, the Psalmist says: “The wicked shall see it, and be grieved; *he shall gnash with his teeth*, and melt away; the desire of the wicked shall perish” (Ps 112:10).⁴⁰ Here the Psalmist clearly indicates that the gnashing of teeth is the outcome of the judgment of the wicked which ultimately results in their extinction.

Edward Fudge perceptively observes that “the expression ‘weeping and grinding of teeth’ seems to indicate two separate activities. The first reflects the terror of the doomed as they begin to truly realize that God has thrown them out as worthless and as they anticipate the execution of His sentence. The second seems to express the bitter rage and acrimony they feel toward God, who sentenced them, and toward the redeemed, who will forever be blessed.”⁴¹

4. The Witness of Paul

The word “hell” (*gehenna*) does not occur in the writings of Paul. Instead, the apostle refers a few times to God’s judgment executed upon the evildoers at the time of Christ’s coming. Traditionalists appeal to some of these passages to support their belief in the eternal punishment of the lost. Earlier we examined the important passage of 2 Thessalonians 1:9, where Paul speaks of the “punishment of eternal destruction” that the wicked will

suffer at Christ's coming. We noted that the destruction of the wicked is eternal—*aiônios*, not because the *process* of destruction continues forever, but because the *results* are permanent.

The Day of Wrath. Another significant Pauline passage often cited in support of literal unending hellfire is his warning about “the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed. For he will render to every man according to his works: . . . to those who do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek” (Rom 2:5-9). The “wrath, fury, tribulation, distress” are seen by traditionalists as descriptive of the conscious torment of hell.⁴²

The picture that Paul presents of “the day of wrath,” when the evildoers will experience wrath, fury, tribulation and distress is most likely derived from Zephaniah, where the prophet speaks of the eschatological Day of the Lord as a “day of wrath . . . a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom” (Zeph 1:15). Then the prophet says: “In the fire of his jealous wrath, all the earth shall be consumed; for a full, yea, sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth” (Zeph 1:18).

We have reason to believe that Paul expresses the same truth that the Day of the Lord will bring a sudden end to evildoers. Paul never makes any allusion to the everlasting torment of the lost. Why? Simply, because for him, immortality is God’s gift given to the saved at Christ’s coming (1 Cor 15:53-54) and not a natural endowment of every person. The Apostle borrows freely from the Old Testament’s prophetic vocabulary, but he illuminates the vision of the Day of the Lord with the bright light of the Gospel, rather than with lurid details of conscious eternal torment.

5. The Witness of Revelation

The theme of the final judgment is central to the book of Revelation, because it represents God’s way of overcoming the opposition of evil to Himself and His people. Thus, it is not surprising that believers in eternal hell fire find support for their view in the dramatic imagery of Revelation’s final judgment. The visions cited to support the view of everlasting punishment in hell are: (1) the vision of God’s Wrath in Revelation 14:9-11, and (2) the vision of the lake of fire and of the second death in Revelation 20:10, 14-15. We briefly examine them now.

The Vision of God’s Wrath. In Revelation 14, John sees three angels announcing God’s final judgment in language progressively stronger. The third angel cries out with a loud voice: “If any one worships the beast and its

image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also shall drink the wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and he shall be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of his holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever; and they have no rest, day or night, these worshippers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name" (Rev 14:9-11).

Traditionalists view this passage together with Matthew 25:46 as the two most important texts which support the traditional doctrine of hell. Peterson concludes his analysis of this passage, by saying: "I conclude, therefore, that despite attempts to prove otherwise, Revelation 14:9-11 unequivocally teaches that hell entails eternal conscious torment for the lost. In fact, if we had only this passage, we would be obligated to teach the traditional doctrine of hell on the authority of the Word of God."⁴³ Robert Morey states categorically the same view: "By every rule of hermeneutics and exegesis, the only legitimate interpretation of Revelation 14:10-11 is the one that clearly sees eternal, conscious torment awaiting the wicked."⁴⁴

These dogmatic interpretations of Revelation 14:9-11 as proof of a literal, eternal torment reveal a lack of sensitivity to the highly metaphorical language of the passage. In his commentary on *Revelation*, J. P. M. Sweet, a respected British New Testament scholar, offers a most timely caution in his comment on this passage: "To ask, 'what does Revelation teach – eternal torment or eternal destruction?' is to use (or misuse) the book as a source of 'doctrine,' or of information about the future. John uses pictures, as Jesus used parables (cf. Matt 18:32-34; 25:41-46), to ram home the unimaginable disaster of rejecting God, and the unimaginable blessedness of union with God, while there is still time to do something about it."⁴⁵ It is unfortunate that this warning is ignored by those who choose to interpret literally highly figurative passages like the one under consideration.

Four Elements of the Judgment. Let us now consider the four major elements in the angel's announcement of God's judgment upon the apostates who worship the beast: (1) The pouring and drinking of the cup of God's wrath, (2) the torment with burning sulphur inflicted upon the ungodly in the sight of the angels and of the Lamb, (3) the smoke of their torment rising forever, and (4) their having no rest day or night.

The pouring of the cup of God's wrath is a well-established Old Testament symbol of divine judgment (Is 51:17, 22; Jer 25:15-38; Ps 60:3; 75:8). God pours the cup "unmixed," that is, undiluted, to ensure its deadly effects. The prophets used similar language: "They shall drink and stagger, and shall be as though they had not been" (Ob 16: cf. Jer 25:18, 27, 33). The

same cup of God's wrath is served to Babylon, the city that corrupts the people. God mixes "a double draught for her," and the result is "pestilence, mourning, famine" and destruction by fire (Rev 18:6, 8). We have reason to believe that the end of Babylon, destroyed by fire, is also the end of the apostates who drink God's unmixed cup.

The fate of the ungodly is described through the imagery of the most terrible judgment that ever fell on this earth—the destruction by fire and sulphur of Sodom and Gomorrah. "He shall be tormented with fire and sulphur, in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb" (Rev 14:10). The imagery of fire and sulphur that destroyed the two cities frequently is used in the Bible to signify complete annihilation (Job 18:15-17; Is 30:33; Ezek 38:22).

Isaiah describes the fate of Edom in language that is strikingly similar to that of Revelation 14:10. He says: "The streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch, and her soil into brimstone; her land shall become burning pitch. Night and day it shall not be quenched, its smoke shall go up for ever" (Is 34:9-10). As Revelation 14:10, we have here the unquenchable fire, the sulphur (brimstone), and the smoke that goes up forever, night and day. Does this mean that Edom was to burn forever? We do not have to go far to find the answer because the verse continues: "From generation to generation *it shall lie waste*; none shall pass through it for ever and ever" (Is 34:10).⁴⁶ It is evident that the unquenchable fire and the ever-ascending smoke are metaphoric symbols of complete destruction, extermination, and annihilation. If this is the meaning of this imagery in the Old Testament, we have reason to believe that the same meaning applies to the text under consideration.

This conclusion is supported by John's use of the imagery of the fire and smoke to describe the fate of Babylon, the city responsible for enticing God's people into apostasy. The city "shall be burned with fire" (Rev 18:8) and "the smoke from her goes up for ever and ever" (Rev 19:3). Does this mean that Babylon will burn for all eternity? Obviously not, because the merchants and kings bewail the "torment" they see, and cry: "Alas, alas, for the great city . . . In one hour she has been laid waste. . . and shall be found no more" (Rev 18:10, 17, 19, 21). It is evident that the smoke of the torment of Babylon that "goes up for ever and ever" represents complete destruction because the city "shall be found no more" (Rev 18:21).

The striking similarity between the fate of the apostates and the fate of Babylon, where both are characterized as tormented by fire whose smoke "goes up for ever and ever" (Rev 14:10-11; cf. 18:8; 19:3), gives us reason to believe that the destiny of Babylon is also the destiny of those who have partaken of her sins, that is, both experience the same destruction and annihilation.

“**No Rest, Day or Night.**” The phrase “they have no rest, day or night” (Rev 14:11) is interpreted by traditionalists as descriptive of the eternal torment of hell. The phrase, however, denotes the *continuity* and not the *eternal duration* of an action. John uses the same phrase “day and night” to describe the living creatures praising God (Rev 4:8), the martyrs serving God (Rev 7:15), Satan accusing the brethren (Rev 12:10), and the unholy trinity being tormented in the lake of fire (Rev 20:10). In each case, the thought is the same: the action continues while it lasts. Harold Guillebaud correctly explains that the phrase “they have no rest, day or night” (Rev 14:11) “certainly says that there will be no break or intermission in the suffering of the followers of the Beast, *while it continues*; but in itself it does not say that it will continue forever.”⁴⁷

Support for this conclusion is provided by the usage of the phrase “day and night” in Isaiah 34:10, where, as we have seen, Edom’s fire is not quenched “night and day” and “its smoke shall go up for ever” (Is 34:10). The imagery is designed to convey that Edom’s fire would continue until it had consumed all that there was, and then it would go out. The outcome would be permanent destruction, not everlasting burning. “From generation to generation it shall lie waste” (Is 34:10).

To sum up, the four figures present in the scene of Revelation 14:9-11 complement one another in describing the final destruction of the apostates. The “unmixed” wine of God’s fury poured out in full strength suggests a judgment resulting in extinction. The burning sulphur denotes some degree of conscious punishment that precedes the extinction. The rising smoke serves as a continuous reminder of God’s just judgment. The suffering will continue day and night until the ungodly are completely destroyed.

The Lake of Fire. The last description in the Bible of the final punishment contains two highly significant metaphorical expressions: (1) the lake of fire, and (2) the second death (Rev 19:20; 20:10, 15; 21:8). Traditionalists attribute fundamental importance to “lake of fire” because for them, as stated by John Walvoord, “the lake of fire is, and it serves as a synonym for the eternal place of torment.”⁴⁸

To determine the meaning of “the lake of fire,” we need to examine its four occurrences in Revelation, the only book in the Bible where the phrase is found. The first reference occurs in Revelation 19:20, where we are told that the beast and the false prophet “were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur.” The second reference is found in Revelation 20:10, where John describes the outcome of Satan’s last great assault against God:

“The devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” God’s throwing of the devil into the lake of fire increases its inhabitants from two to three.

The third and fourth references are found in Revelation 20:15 and 21:8, where all the wicked are also thrown into the lake of fire. It is evident that there is a crescendo as all evil powers, and people eventually experience the final punishment of the lake of fire.

The fundamental question is whether the lake of fire represents an ever-burning hell where the wicked are supposed to be tormented for all eternity or whether it symbolizes the permanent destruction of sin and sinners. Five major considerations lead us to believe that the lake of fire represents the final and complete annihilation of evil and evildoers.

First, the beast and the false prophet, who are cast alive into the lake of fire, are two symbolic personages who represent not actual people but persecuting civil governments and corrupting false religion. Political and religious systems cannot suffer conscious torment forever. Thus, for them, the lake of fire represents complete, irreversible annihilation.

Second, the imagery of the devil and his host who are devoured by fire from heaven and then cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, is largely derived from Ezekiel 38 and 39, where even the code names “Gog” and “Magog” are found, and from 2 King 1:10, which speaks of the fire that came down from heaven to consume the captain and the fifty soldiers sent against Elijah. In both instances, the fire causes the annihilation of evildoers (Ezek 38:22; 39:6, 16). The similarity of imagery suggests that the same meaning and function of fire as utter destruction applies to the fate of the devil in Revelation 20:10.

Third, it is impossible to visualize how the devil and his angels, who are spirits could “be tormented [with fire] day and night for ever and ever” (Rev 20:10). After all, fire belongs to the material, physical world, but the devil and his angels are not physical beings. Eldon Ladd rightly points out: “How a lake of literal fire can bring everlasting torture to non-physical beings is impossible to imagine. It is obvious that this is picturesque language describing a real fact in the spiritual world: the final and everlasting destruction of the forces of evil which have plagued men since the garden of Eden.”⁴⁹

Fourth, the fact that “Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:14) shows that the meaning of the lake of fire is symbolic, because Death and Hades (the grave) are abstract realities that cannot be

thrown into or consumed with fire. By the imagery of Death and Hades being thrown into the lake of fire, John simply affirms the final and complete destruction of death and the grave. By His death and resurrection, Jesus conquered the power of death, but eternal life cannot be experienced until death is symbolically destroyed in the lake of fire and banished from the universe.

“The Second Death.” The fifth and decisive consideration is the fact that the lake of fire is defined as “the second death.” Before we look at the usage of the phrase “second death,” it is important to note that John clearly explains that “the lake of fire is the second death” (Rev 20:14; cf. 21:8).

Some traditionalists interpret “the second death,” not as the ultimate death, but as the ultimate separation of sinners from God. For example, Robert Peterson states: “When John says that Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:14), he indicates that the intermediate state gives way to the final one. He also does this by revealing that the ‘lake of fire is the second death’ (Rev 20:14). As death means the separation of the soul from the body, so the second death denotes the ultimate separation of the ungodly from their Creator’s love. Accordingly, God reunites the souls of the unsaved dead with their bodies to fit the lost for eternal punishment. If eternal life entails forever knowing the Father and the Son (John 17:3), its antithesis, the second death, involves being deprived of God’s fellowship for all eternity.”⁵⁰

It is hard to understand how Peterson can interpret “the second death” as eternal conscious separation from God when, as we noted in chapter 4, the Bible makes it abundantly clear that there is no consciousness in death. The “second death” is the antithesis of “eternal life,” but the antithesis of eternal life is “eternal death” and not eternal conscious separation from God. Furthermore, the notion of the souls of the unsaved being reunited with their bodies after the intermediate state, to make them fit for eternal punishment can only be supported on the basis of a dualistic understanding of human nature. From a Biblical perspective, death is the cessation of life and not the separation of the body from the soul. The meaning of the phrase “second death” must be determined on the basis of the internal witness of the book of Revelation and of contemporary Jewish literature rather than on the basis of Greek dualism, foreign to the Bible.

Throughout the book of Revelation, John explains the meaning of a first term by the use of a second. For example, he explains that the bowls of incense are the prayers of the saints (Rev 5:8). “The fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints” (Rev 19:8). The coming to life of the saints and their reigning with Christ a thousand years “is the first resurrection” (Rev 20:5).

Following the same pattern, John explicitly explains that “the lake of fire is the second death” (Rev 20:14; cf. 21:8).

Some traditionalists wish to define the second death as the lake of fire, in order to be able to argue that the second death is not the final death, but eternal torment in the lake of fire. A quick reading of Revelation 20:14 and 21:8 suffices to show that the opposite is true. John unmistakably states: “The lake of fire is the second death” and not vice versa. The meaning of the second death derives from and is dependent upon the meaning of the first death experienced by every human being at the cessation of life. The second death differs from the first death, not in *nature* but in *results*. The first death is a temporary sleep because it is followed by the resurrection. The second death is permanent and irreversible extinction because there is no awakening.

References to the “Second Death.” Since John clearly defines the lake of fire to be the second death, it is crucial for us to understand the meaning of “the second death.” This phrase occurs four times in Revelation but does not appear elsewhere in the New Testament. The first reference is found in Revelation 2:11: “He who conquers shall not be hurt by the second death.” Here “the second death” is differentiated from the physical death that every human being experiences. The implication is that the saved receive eternal life, and will not experience eternal death.

The second reference to “the second death” occurs in Revelation 20:6, in the context of the first resurrection of the saints at the beginning of the millennium: “Over such the second death has no power.” Again, the implication is that the resurrected saints will not experience the second death, that is, the punishment of eternal death, obviously because they will be raised to immortal life. The third and the fourth references are in Revelation 20:14 and 21:8, where the second death is identified with the lake of fire into which the devil, the beast, the false prophet, Death, Hades, and all evildoers are thrown. In these instances, the lake of fire is the second death in the sense that it accomplishes the eternal death and destruction of sin and sinners.

The meaning of the phrase “second death” is clarified by its usage in the Targum, which is the Aramaic translation and interpretation of the Old Testament. In the Targum, the phrase is used several times to refer to the final and irreversible death of the wicked. According to Strack and Billerbeck, the Targum on Jeremiah 51:39, 57 contains an oracle against Babylon, which says: “They shall die the second death and not live in the world to come.”⁵¹ Here the second death is clearly the death resulting from the final judgment which prevents evildoers from living in the world to come.

In his study *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch*, M. McNamara cites the Targums of Deuteronomy 33:6, Isaiah 22:14 and 65:6, 15 where the phrase “second death” is used to describe the ultimate, irreversible death. The Targum on Deuteronomy 33:6 reads: “Let Reuben live in this world and die not in the second death in which death the wicked die in the world to come.”⁵² In the Targum on Isaiah 22:14, the prophet says: “This sin shall not be forgiven you till you die the second death, says the Lord of Host.”⁵³ In both instances, “the second death” is the ultimate destruction experienced by the wicked at the final judgment.

The Targum on Isaiah 65:6 is very close to Revelation 20:14 and 21:8. It reads: “Their punishment shall be in Gehenna where the fire burns all the day. Behold, it is written before me: ‘I will not give them respite during (their) life but will render them the punishment of their transgressions and will deliver their bodies to the second death.’”⁵⁴ Again, the Targum on Isaiah 65:15 reads: “And you shall leave your name for a curse to my chosen and the Lord God will slay you with the second death but his servants, the righteous, he shall call by a different name.”⁵⁵ Here, the second death is explicitly equated with the slaying of the wicked by the Lord, a clear image of final destruction and not of eternal torment.

In the light of the preceding considerations, we conclude that the phrase the “second death” is used by John to define the nature of the punishment in the lake of fire, namely, a punishment that ultimately results in eternal, irreversible death. As Robert Mounce points out, “The lake of fire indicates not only the stern punishment awaiting the enemies of righteousness but also their full and final defeat. It is the second death, that is, the destiny of those whose temporary resurrection results only in a return to death and its punishment.”⁵⁶ The same view is expressed eloquently by Henry Alford who writes: “As there is a second and higher life, so there is also a second and deeper death. And as after that life there is no more death (Rev 21:4), so after that death there is no more life.”⁵⁷ This is a sensible definition of the “second death,” as the final, irreversible death. To interpret the phrase otherwise, as eternal conscious torment or separation from God means to negate the Biblical meaning of “death” as cessation of life.

Conclusion. In closing this examination of the traditional view of hell as the place of a literal, everlasting punishment of the wicked, three major observations can be made. First, the traditional view of hell largely depends upon a dualistic view of human nature, which *requires* the eternal survival of the soul either in heavenly bliss or in hellish torment. We have found such a belief to be foreign to the wholistic Biblical view of human nature, where death denotes the cessation of life for the whole person.

Second, the traditionalist view rests largely on a literal interpretation of such symbolic images as *gehennah*, the lake of fire, and the second death. Such images do not lend themselves to a literal interpretation because, as we have seen, they are metaphorical descriptions of the permanent destruction of evil and evildoers. Incidentally, lakes are filled with water and not with fire.

Third, the traditional view fails to provide a rational explanation for the justice of God in inflicting endless divine retribution for sins committed during the space of a short life. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment is incompatible with the Biblical revelation of divine love and justice. This point is considered later in conjunction with the moral implications of eternal torment.

In conclusion, the traditional view of hell was more likely to be accepted during the Middle Ages, when most people lived under autocratic regimes of despotic rulers, who could and did torture and destroy human beings with impunity. Under such social conditions, theologians with a good conscience could attribute to God an unappeasable vindictiveness and insatiable cruelty, which today would be regarded as demonic. Today, theological ideas are subject to an ethical and rational criticism that forbids the moral perversity attributed to God in the past. Our sense of justice requires that the penalty inflicted must be commensurate with the evil done. This important truth is ignored by the traditional view that requires eternal punishment for the sins of even a short lifetime.

PART II: ALTERNATIVE VIEWS OF HELL

The serious problems posed by the traditional view of hell has led some scholars to seek for alternative interpretations. Brief consideration is given here to two fresh attempts to understand the Biblical data, and to redefine the nature of hell.

1. The Metaphorical View of Hell

The most modest revision of the traditional view of hell involves interpreting metaphorically the nature of the unending torment of hell. According to this view, hell is still understood as everlasting punishment, but it is less literally hellish, because the physical fire no longer tortures or burns the flesh of the wicked, but represents the pain of being separated from God. Billy Graham expresses a metaphorical view of hellfire when he says: "I have often wondered if hell is a terrible burning within our hearts for God, to fellowship with God, a fire that we can never quench."⁵⁸ Graham's interpretation of hellfire as "a terrible burning within our hearts for God" is most

ingenious. Unfortunately, it ignores that the “burning” takes place not within the heart, but without where the wicked are consumed. If the wicked had a burning within their hearts for God, they would not experience the suffering of the final punishment.

Figurative Imagery. In his compelling presentation of the metaphorical view of hell, William Crockett argues that Christians should not have to face the embarrassment of believing that “a portion of creation find ease in heaven, while the rest burn in hell.”⁵⁹ His solution is to recognize that “hellfire and brimstone are not literal depictions of hell’s furnishing, but figurative expressions warning the wicked of impending doom.”⁶⁰ Crockett cites Calvin, Luther, and a host of contemporary scholars, all of whom “interpret hell’s fire metaphorically, or at least allow for the possibility that hell might be something other than literal fire.”⁶¹

Crockett maintains that “the strongest reason for taking them [the images of hell] as metaphors is the conflicting language used in the New Testament to describe hell. How could hell be literal fire when it is also described as darkness (Matt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; 2 Pet 2:17; Jude 13)?”⁶² He continues, asking a pertinent question: “Did the New Testament writers intend their words to be taken literally? Certainly, Jude did not. He describes hell as ‘eternal fire’ in verse 7, and then further depicts it as the ‘blackest darkness’ in verse 13. . . . Fire and darkness, of course, are not the only images we have of hell in the New Testament. The wicked are said to weep and gnash their teeth (Matt 8:12; 13:42; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28), their worm never dies (Mark 9:48), and they are beaten with many blows (Luke 12:47). No one thinks hell will involve actual beatings or is a place where the maggots of the dead achieve immortality. Equally, no one thinks that gnashing teeth is anything other than an image of hell’s grim reality. In the past, some have wondered about people who enter hell toothless. How will they grind their teeth?”⁶³ The answer that some have given to the last question is that “dentures will be provided in the next world so that the damned might be able to weep and gnash their teeth.”⁶⁴

On the basis of his metaphorical interpretation of hellfire, Crockett concludes: “Hell, then, should not be pictured as an inferno belching fire like Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace. The most we can say is that the rebellious will be cast from the presence of God, without any hope of restoration. Like Adam and Eve they will be driven away, but this time into ‘eternal night,’ where joy and hope are forever lost.”⁶⁵

Evaluation of the Metaphorical View. Credit must be given to the proponents of the metaphorical view of hell for pointing out that the images

used in the Bible to describe hell, such as fire, darkness, voracious maggots, sulphur, and gnashing of teeth are metaphors and not actual descriptions of fact. When interpreting a text, it is important to distinguish between the medium and the message. Metaphors are designed to communicate a particular message, but they are not the message itself. This means that when interpreting the highly symbolic images of hell, we must seek to understand the message being conveyed instead of taking the images as a literal descriptions of the reality.

Proponents of the metaphorical view are correct in pointing out that the fundamental problem with the traditional view of hell is that it is based on a literalism that ignores the highly symbolic nature of the language used. But the problem with the metaphorical view of hell is that it merely wants to replace the physical torment with a more endurable mental torment. But, by the lowering the pain quotient in a non-literal hell, they do not substantially change the nature of hell since it still remains a place of unending torment.

Some may even question the notion that eternal mental torment is more humane than physical torment. Mental anguish can be as painful as physical pain. By making hell more humane, the metaphorical view has not gained much because it is still burdened with the same problems of the traditionalist view. People are still asked to believe that God tortures evildoers endlessly, though presumably less severely. In my view, the solution is to be found not in humanizing or sanitizing hell so that it may ultimately prove to be a more tolerable place for the wicked to spend eternity, but in understanding the nature of the final punishment which, as we shall see, is permanent annihilation and not eternal torment.

2. The Universalist View of Hell

A second and more radical revision of hell has been attempted by *universalists*, who have reduced hell to a temporary condition of graded punishments which ultimately leads to heaven. Universalists believe that ultimately God will succeed in bringing every human being to salvation and eternal life so that no one, in fact, will be condemned in the final judgment to either eternal torment or annihilation. This belief was first suggested by Origen in the third century, and it has gained steady support in modern times, especially through the writing of such men as Friedrich Schleiermacher, C. F. D. Moule, J. A. T. Robinson, Michael Paternoster, Michael Perry, and John Hick. The arguments presented by these and other writers in support of universalism are both theological and philosophical.

Theological and Philosophical Arguments. Theologically, appeal is made to “universalist passages” (1 Tim 2:4; 4:10; Col 1:20; Rom 5:18;

11:32; Eph 1:10; 1 Cor 15:22), which seem to offer hope of universal salvation. On the basis of these texts, universalists argue that if all human beings are not ultimately saved, then God's will for "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4) would be frustrated and defeated. Only through the salvation of all human beings can God demonstrate the triumph of His infinitely patient love.

Philosophically, universalists find it intolerable that a loving God would allow millions of persons to suffer *everlasting* torment for sins committed within a span of a few years. Jacques Ellul articulates this view admirably, asking the following probing questions: "Have we not seen the impossibility of considering that the New Creation, that admirable symphony of love, could exist *beside* the world of wrath? Is God still double-faced: a visage of love turned toward his celestial Jerusalem and a visage of wrath turned toward this 'hell?' Are then the peace and joy of God complete, since he continues as a God of wrath and of fulmination? Could Paradise be what Romain Gary has so marvelously described in *Tulipe*, when he said that the trouble is not the concentration camp but 'the very peaceable, very happy little village *beside* the camp'—the little village alongside, where people were undisturbed while millions died atrociously in the camp."⁶⁶

Purgatorial Process. Universalists argue that it is unthinkable that in the final judgment God would condemn to eternal torment the countless millions of non-Christians who have not responded to Christ because they have never heard the Christian message. The solution proposed by some universalists is that God will save all the unfaithful by enabling them to be gradually transformed through a "purgatorial" process after death.

This view represents a revision of the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory, which limits this remedial process only to the souls of the faithful. The universalists extend this privilege also to the souls of the *unfaithful*. Thus, beyond death, God continues to draw all the unsaved to Himself, until ultimately all will respond to His love and rejoice in His presence for all eternity.

An Appealing but Unbiblical View. No one can deny that the theological and philosophical arguments of universalism appeal to the Christian conscience. Any person who has deeply sensed God's love longs to see Him saving every person and hates to think that He would be so vindictive as to punish millions of persons—especially those who have lived in ignorance—with eternal torments. Yet, our appreciation for the universalists' concern to uphold the triumph of God's love and to justly refute the unbiblical concept of *eternal* suffering must not blind us to the fact that this doctrine is a serious distortion of Biblical teaching.

First of all, the “universalist passages” declare the *scope* of God’s universal saving *purpose*, but not the *fact* of universal salvation for every human being. For example, in Colossians 1:19-23, God’s plan “to reconcile to himself all things” is said to include the Colossian believers, “*provided that you continue in the faith.*”

Similarly, in 1 Timothy 2:4, God’s *desire* for “all men to be saved” is expressed together with the *fact* of a final judgment that will bring “ruin and destruction” to the unfaithful (1 Tim 6:9-10; cf. 5:24; 4:8). God extends to all the provision of salvation, but He respects the freedom of those who reject His offer even though it causes Him utmost anguish.

Second, the argument that God ultimately will save all because the doctrine of *everlasting* torment for the unsaved is impossible to accept, inasmuch as it negates any sense of divine justice as well as the very peace and joy of paradise, is a valid argument. However, such an argument, as we have shown, rests upon an erroneous interpretation of the Biblical teaching about the nature of the final punishment of the wicked. Universal salvation cannot be right just because eternal suffering is wrong.

Third, the notion of a remedial punishment, or of gradual transformation after death, is totally foreign to the Scripture. The destiny of each person is firmly fixed at death. This principle is explicitly expressed by Christ in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-21). In Hebrews 9:27, also, it is clearly stated that “it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment.” For the impenitent sinners, “the prospect of judgment” is a “fearful” one, because they will experience not universal salvation but “a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries” (Heb 10:26-27).

Fourth, regarding the challenge of those who had no opportunity to learn and to respond to the message of Christ, it is *not* necessary either to surrender the belief in salvation solely through Jesus Christ or to consign all the non-Christians to everlasting torment. The less privileged may find salvation on the basis of their trusting response to what they have known of God. Paul mentions that the Gentiles who do not know the law will be judged according to the law which is “written in their hearts” (Rom 2:14-16).

Universalism, though attractive at first sight, is erroneous because it fails to recognize that God’s love for mankind is manifested not by glossing over sins, nor by limiting human freedom, but rather by providing salvation and freedom to accept it. This truth is aptly expressed in the best-known text about God’s love and the danger involved in rejecting it: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Conclusion. Both the metaphorical and universalistic views of hell represent worthy attempts “to take the hell out of hell.” Unfortunately, they fail to do justice to the Biblical data and thus they ultimately misrepresent the Biblical doctrine of the final punishment of the unsaved. The sensible solution to the problems of the traditionalist view is to be found, not by lowering or eliminating the pain quotient of a literal hell but, by accepting hell for what it is, the final punishment and permanent annihilation of the wicked. As the Bible says: “The wicked will be no more” (Ps 37:10) because “their end is destruction” (Phil 3:19).

PART III: THE ANNIHILATION VIEW OF HELL

“Sectarian Belief.” The annihilation view of hell has been associated mostly with “sects” like the Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and smaller Sabbatarian churches (Church of God Seventh-day, Worldwide Church of God, United Church of God, Global Church of God, International Church of God). This fact has led many evangelicals and Catholics to reject annihilationism a priori, simply because it is a “sectarian” belief and not a traditional Protestant or Catholic belief. Such a belief is regarded as an “absurdity”⁶⁷ and the product of secular sentimentality.⁶⁸

To a large extent, all of us are children of tradition. The faith we received was mediated to us by Christian tradition in the form of sermons, books, Christian education at home, school, and church. We read our Bible in the light of what we have already learned from these various sources. Thus, it is hard to realize how profoundly tradition has moulded our interpretation of Scripture. But as Christians, we cannot afford to become enslaved to human tradition, whether it be “Catholic” tradition, “Evangelical” tradition, or even our own “denominational” tradition. We can never assume the absolute rightness of our beliefs simply because they have been hallowed by tradition. We must retain the right and duty of testing our beliefs and reforming them in the light of Scripture when necessary.

Tactics of Harassment. The strategy of rejecting a doctrine a priori because of its association with “sectarian” churches is reflected in the tactics of harassment adopted against those evangelical scholars who in recent times have rejected the traditional view of hell as eternal conscious torment, and adopted instead the annihilation view of hell. The tactics, as already noted in chapter I, consist in defaming such scholars by associating them with liberals or with sectarians, like the Adventists. Respected Canadian theologian Clark Pinnock writes: “It seems that a new criterion for truth has been discovered which says that if Adventists or liberals hold any view, that view must be

wrong. Apparently a truth claim can be decided by its association and does not need to be tested by public criteria in open debate. Such an argument, though useless in intelligent discussion, can be effective with the ignorant who are fooled by such rhetoric.”⁶⁹

Despite the tactics of harassment, the annihilation view of hell is gaining ground among evangelicals. The public endorsement of this view by John R. W. Stott, a highly respected British theologian and popular preacher, is certainly encouraging this trend. “In a delicious piece of irony,” writes Pinnock, “this is creating a measure of accreditation by association, countering the same tactics used against it. It has become all but impossible to claim that only heretics and near-heretics [like Seventh-day Adventists] hold the position, though I am sure some will dismiss Stott’s orthodoxy precisely on this ground.”⁷⁰

John Stott expresses anxiety over the divisive consequences of his new views in the evangelical community, where he is a renowned leader. He writes: “I am hesitant to have written these things, partly because I have great respect for long-standing tradition which claims to be a true interpretation of Scripture, and do not lightly set it aside, and partly because the unity of the worldwide evangelical community has always meant much to me. But the issue is too important to be suppressed, and I am grateful to you [David Edwards] for challenging me to declare my present mind. I do not dogmatize about the position to which I have come. I hold it tentatively. But I do plead for frank dialogue among evangelicals on the basis of Scripture.”⁷¹

Emotional and Biblical reasons have caused John Stott to abandon the traditional view of hell and adopt the annihilation view. Stott writes: “Emotionally, I find the concept [of eternal torment] intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterizing their feelings or cracking under the strain. But our emotions are a fluctuating, unreliable guide to truth and must not be exalted to the place of supreme authority in determining it. As a committed Evangelical, my question must be—and is—not what my heart tells me, but what does God’s word say? And in order to answer this question, we need to survey the Biblical material afresh and to open our minds (not just our hearts) to the possibility that Scripture points in the direction of annihilationism, and that ‘eternal conscious torment’ is a tradition which has to yield to the supreme authority of Scripture.”⁷²

In response to Stott’s plea to take a fresh look at the Biblical teaching on the final punishment, we briefly examine the witness of the Old and the New Testament by considering the following points: (1) death as the punishment of sin, (2) the language of destruction, (3) the moral implications of eternal torment, (4) the judicial implications of eternal torment, and (5) the cosmological implications of eternal torment.

1. Death as the Punishment of Sin

“The Wages of Sin Is Death.” A logical starting point for our investigation is the fundamental principle laid down in both Testaments: “The soul that sins shall die” (Ezek 18:4, 20); “The wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). The punishment of sin, of course, comprises not only the first death which all experience as a result of Adam’s sin, but also what the Bible calls the second death (Rev 20:14; 21:8), which, as we have seen, is the final, irreversible death experienced by impenitent sinners. This basic principle sets the stage for studying the nature of the final punishment because it tells us at the outset that the ultimate wages of sin is not eternal torment, but permanent death.

Death in the Bible, as noted in chapter 4, is the cessation of life not the separation of the soul from the body. Thus, the punishment of sin is the cessation of life. Death, as we know it, would indeed be the cessation of our existence were it not for the fact of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:18). It is the resurrection that turns death into a sleep, from being the final end of life into being a temporary sleep. But there is no resurrection from the second death. It is the final cessation of life.

This fundamental truth was taught in the Old Testament, especially through the sacrificial system. The penalty for the gravest sin was always and only the death of the substitute victim and never a prolonged torture or imprisonment of the victim. James Dunn perceptively observes that “The manner in which the sin offering dealt with sin was by its death. The sacrificial animal, identified with the offerer in his sin, had to be destroyed in order to destroy the sin which it embodied. The sprinkling, smearing and pouring away of the sacrificial blood in the sight of God indicated that the life was wholly destroyed, and with it the sin and the sinner.”⁷³ To put it differently, the consummation of the sin offering typified in a dramatic way the ultimate destruction of sin and sinners.

The final disposition of sin and the destruction of sinners was revealed especially through the ritual of the Day of Atonement, which typified the execution of God’s final judgment upon believers and unbelievers. The genuine believers were those Israelites who, throughout the year, repented of their sins, bringing appropriate sin offerings to the sanctuary, and who on the Day of Atonement rested, fasted, prayed, repented, and humbled their hearts before God. At the completion of the purification rites, these persons were pronounced “clean before the Lord” (Lev 16:30).

The false believers were those Israelites who, during the year, chose to sin defiantly against God (cf. Lev 20:1-6) and did not repent, thus failing

to bring atoning sacrifices to the sanctuary. On the Day of Atonement, they did not desist from their toil nor did they engage in fasting, prayer, and soul searching (cf. Num 19:20). Because of their defiant attitude on the Day of Atonement, these persons were “cut off” from God’s people. “For whoever is not afflicted on this same day *shall be cut off from his people*. And whoever does any work on this same day, that person *I will destroy from among his people*” (Lev 23:29-30).⁷⁴

The *separation* that occurred on the Day of Atonement between genuine and false Israelites typifies the separation that will occur at the Second Advent. Jesus compared this separation to the one that takes place at harvest time between the wheat and the tares. Since the tares were sown among the good wheat, which represents “the sons of the kingdom” (Matt 13:38), it is evident that Jesus had His church in mind. Wheat and tares, genuine and false believers, will coexist in the church until His coming. At that time, the drastic separation typified by the Day of Atonement will occur. Evildoers will be thrown “into the furnace of fire,” and the “righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt 13:42-43).

Jesus’ parables and the ritual of the Day of Atonement teach the same important truth: False and genuine Christians will coexist until His coming. But at the Advent judgment, typified by the Day of Atonement, a permanent separation occurs when sin and sinners will be eradicated forever and a new world will be established. As in the typical service of the Day of Atonement impenitent sinners were “cut off” and “destroyed,” so in the antitypical fulfillment, at the final judgment, sinners “shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction” (2 Thess 1:9).

Jesus’ Death and the Punishment of Sinners. In many ways, the death of Jesus on the Cross reveals how God ultimately will deal with sin and sinners. Christ’s death on the Cross is a supreme visible manifestation of the wrath of God against all human ungodliness and unrighteousness (Rom 1:18; cf. 2 Cor 5:21; Mark 15:34). What Jesus, our sinless Savior, experienced on the Cross was not just the physical death common to humanity, but the death that sinners will experience at the final judgment. This is why He was “greatly distressed, troubled . . . very sorrowful, even to death” (Mark 14:33-34).

Leon Morris reminds us that “It was not death as such that He feared. It was the particular death that He was to die, that death which is ‘the wages of sin’ as Paul puts it (Rom 6:23), the death in which He was at one with sinners, sharing their lot, bearing their sins, dying their death.”⁷⁵ It is no wonder that Jesus felt forsaken by the Father, because He experienced the death that awaits sinners at the final judgment. At the time of His passion, Jesus went through a period of increasingly excruciating agony culminating in death. The suffering lasted several hours.

“There is no reason why we should not take this [Christ’s death] as the model and example of the final punishment of sin. We are not likely to go far wrong if we conclude that His suffering was the most extreme that will be inflicted on the most defiant and responsible sinner (?Judas Iscariot) and comprised therefore in itself, and covered, all lower degrees of desert. When the Lord Jesus at last died, full satisfaction was made for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2), God’s holy law was vindicated and all sins potentially or actually atoned for. If He bore the punishment of our sins, that punishment cannot under any circumstances be eternal conscious suffering or misery, for He never suffered this and it is impossible that He could have. Thus the facts of the suffering and death of Christ Jesus prove conclusively that the punishment of sin is death in its natural sense of the deprivation of life.”⁷⁶

Some argue that Christ’s death cannot be equated with the final punishment of sinners in hell because He was an infinite Person who could absorb infinite punishment in a single moment. By contrast, sinners must suffer eternal torment because they are finite. This artificial distinction between “finite” and “infinite” punishment and victims does not derive from Scripture but from medieval speculations based on feudalistic concepts of honor and justice.⁷⁷ It also consists of adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing infinities, which mathematically speaking is non-sense.

There are no indications in the Bible that God changed the nature of the punishment for sin in the case of our Lord from everlasting torment to literal death. Edward White correctly states: “If it be asserted that it was the presence of the Godhead within which dispensed with the infliction of endless pains, through the substitution of an Infinite Majesty for the infinitely extended misery of a finite being, we reply, that this is an ‘afterthought of theology’ which finds no place in the authoritative record.”⁷⁸

The Cross reveals the nature of hell as the manifestation of God’s wrath that results in death. If Jesus had not been raised, *He*—like those who have fallen asleep in *Him*—would simply have perished (1 Cor 15:18), and not experienced unending torment in hell. His resurrection reassures us that believers need not fear eternal death, because Christ’s death marked the death of Death (2 Tim 1:10; Heb 2:14; Rev 20:14).

2. The Language of Destruction in the Bible

The Language of Destruction in the Old Testament. The most compelling reason for believing in the annihilation of the lost at the final judgment is the rich vocabulary and imagery of “destruction” often used in the Old and New Testaments to describe the fate of the wicked. The writers of the

Old Testament seem to have exhausted the resources of the Hebrew language at their command to affirm the complete destruction of impenitent sinners.

According to Basil Atkinson 28 Hebrew nouns and 23 verbs are generally translated “destruction” or “to destroy” in our English Bible. Approximately half of these words are used to describe the final destruction of the wicked.⁷⁹ A detailed listing of all the occurrences would take us beyond the limited scope of this chapter, beside proving to be repetitious to most readers. Interested readers can find an extensive analysis of such texts in the studies by Basil Atkinson and Edward Fudge. Only a sampling of significant texts are considered here.

Several Psalms describe the final destruction of the wicked with dramatic imagery (Ps 1:3-6; 2:9-12; 11:1-7; 34:8-22; 58:6-10; 69:22-28; 145:17, 20). In Psalm 37, for example, we read that the wicked “will soon *fade like grass*” (v. 2), “they shall be *cut off* . . . and will be *no more*” (vv. 9-10), they will “*perish* . . . like smoke they *vanish away*” (v. 20), “transgressors shall be altogether *destroyed*” (v. 38). Psalm 1, loved and memorized by many, contrasts the way of the righteous with that of the wicked. Of the latter it says that “the wicked shall not stand in the judgment” (v. 5). They will be “like chaff which the wind drives away” (v. 4). “The way of the wicked will *perish*” (v. 6). Again, in Psalm 145, David affirms: “The Lord preserves all who love him; but all the wicked he will *destroy*” (v. 20). This sampling of references, on the final destruction of the wicked is in complete harmony with the teaching of the rest of Scripture.

The Destruction of the Day of the Lord. The prophets frequently announce the ultimate destruction of the wicked in conjunction with the eschatological Day of the Lord. In his opening chapter, Isaiah proclaims that “rebels and sinners shall be *destroyed together*, and those who forsake the Lord shall be *consumed*” (Is 1:28). The picture here is one of total destruction, a picture that is further developed by the imagery of people burning like tinder with no one to quench the fire: “The strong shall become tow, and his work a spark, and both shall burn together, with none to quench them” (Is 1:31).

Zephaniah stacks up imagery upon imagery to portray the destructiveness of the day of the Lord. “The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; . . . A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry . . . In the fire of his jealous wrath, all the earth shall be *consumed*; for a full, yea, sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth” (Zeph 1:14, 15, 18). Here the prophet describes the destruction of the Day of the Lord in the context of the

historical judgment against Jerusalem. By means of the prophetic perspective, the prophets often see the final punishment through the transparency of imminent historical events.

Hosea, like Zephaniah, uses a variety of images to describe the final end of sinners. “They shall be like the morning mist or like the dew that goes early away, like the chaff that swirls from the threshing floor or like smoke from a window” (Hos 13:3). The comparison of the fate of the wicked with the morning mist, the early dew, the chaff, and the smoke hardly suggests that sinners will suffer forever. On the contrary, such imagery suggests that sinners will finally disappear from God’s creation in the same way as the mist, dew, chaff, and smoke dissipate from the face of the earth.

On the last page of the Old Testament English Bible (not the Hebrew Bible), we find a most colorful description of the contrast between the final destiny of believers and unbelievers. For the believers who fear the Lord, “the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings” (Mal 4:2). But for unbelievers the Day of the Lord “comes, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all the evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes *shall burn them up*, says the Lord of host, so that *it will leave them neither root nor branch*” (Mal 4:1). The day of the final punishment of the lost will also be a day of vindication of God’s people, for they “shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of [their] feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts” (Mal 4:3).

We need not interpret this prophecy literally, because we are dealing with representative symbols. But the message conveyed by these symbolic images is clear. While the righteous rejoice in God’s salvation, the wicked are consumed like “stubble,” so that no “root or branch” is left. This is clearly a picture of total consumption by destroying fire, and not one of eternal torment. This is the Old Testament picture of the fate of the wicked, total and permanent destruction and not eternal torment.

Jesus and the Language of Destruction. The New Testament follows closely the Old Testament in describing the fate of the wicked with words and pictures denoting destruction. The most common Greek words are the verb *apollumi* (to destroy) and the noun *apoleia* (destruction). In addition, numerous graphic illustrations from both inanimate and animate life are used to portray the final destruction of the wicked.

Jesus also used several figures from inanimate life to portray the utter destruction of the wicked. He compared it to the following: weeds that are bound in bundles to be *burned* (Matt 13:30, 40), bad fish that is *thrown away* (Matt 13:48), harmful plants that are *rooted up* (Matt 15:13), fruitless trees that are *cut down* (Luke 13:7), and withered branches that are *burned* (John 15:6).

Jesus also used illustrations from *human life* to portray the doom of the wicked. He compared it to: unfaithful tenants who are *destroyed* (Luke 20:16), an evil servant who will be *cut in pieces* (Matt 24:51), the Galileans who *perished* (Luke 13:2-3), the eighteen persons *crushed* by Siloam's tower (Luke 13:4-5), the antediluvians *destroyed* by the flood (Luke 17:27), the people of Sodom and Gomorrah *destroyed by fire* (Luke 17:29), and the rebellious servants who were *slain* at the return of their master (Luke 19:14, 27).

All of these figures denote capital punishment, either individually or collectively. They signify violent death, preceded by greater or lesser suffering. The illustrations employed by the Savior very graphically depict the ultimate *destruction* or *dissolution* of the wicked. Jesus asked: "When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?" (Matt 21:40). And the people responded: "He will miserably *destroy* [apollumi] those wicked men" (Matt 21:41).

Jesus taught the final destruction of the wicked not only through illustrations, but also through explicit pronouncements. For example, He said: "Do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him [God] who can *destroy both soul and body in hell*" (Matt 10:28). John Stott rightly remarks: "If to kill is to deprive the body of life, hell would seem to be the deprivation of both physical and spiritual life, that is, an extinction of being."⁸⁰ In our study of this text in chapter 3 we noted that Christ did not consider hell a the place of eternal torment, but of permanent destruction of the whole being, soul and body.

Often Jesus contrasted eternal life with death or destruction. "I give them eternal life, and they shall never *perish*" (John 10:28). "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to *destruction*, and those who enter it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Matt 7:13-14). Here we have a simple contrast between life and death. There is no ground in Scripture for twisting the word "perish" or "destruction" to mean everlasting torment.

Earlier we noted that seven times Christ used the imagery of *gehenna* to describe the destruction of the wicked in hell. In reviewing Christ's allusions to hell—*gehenna*, we found that none of them indicates that hell is a place of unending torment. What is eternal or unquenchable is not the punishment but the fire which, as the case of Sodom and Gomorra, causes the complete and permanent destruction of the wicked, a condition that lasts forever. The fire is unquenchable because it cannot be quenched until it has consumed all the combustible material.

Paul and the Language of Destruction. The language of destruction is used frequently also by the New Testament writers to describe the doom of the wicked. Speaking of the “enemies of the cross,” Paul says that “their end is *destruction* [*apoleia*]” (Phil 3:19). Concluding his letter to the Galatians, Paul warns that “The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap *destruction* [*phthora*]; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from that Spirit will reap eternal life” (Gal 6:8, NIV). The Day of the Lord will come unexpectedly, “like a thief in the night, . . . then sudden *destruction* [*olethros*] will come upon them [the wicked]” (1 Thess 5:2-3). At Christ’s coming, the wicked “shall suffer the punishment of eternal *destruction* [*olethron*]” (2 Thess 1:9). We noted earlier that the destruction of the wicked cannot be eternal in its duration because it is difficult to imagine an eternal inconclusive process of destruction. Destruction presupposes annihilation.

John Stott perceptively remarks: “It would seem strange, therefore, if people who are said to suffer destruction are in fact not destroyed; and, . . . it is ‘difficult to imagine a perpetually inconclusive process of perishing.’ It cannot, I think, be replied that it is impossible to destroy human beings because they are immortal, for the immortality—and therefore indestructibility—of the soul is a Greek and not a Biblical concept. According to Scripture only God possesses immortality in himself (1 Tim 1:17; 6:16); he reveals and gives it to us through the gospel (2 Tim 1:10).”⁸¹

In Romans 2:6-12, Paul provides one of the clearest descriptions of the final destiny of believers and unbelievers. He begins by stating the principle that God “will render to every man according to his works” (Rom 2:6). Then he explains that “to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be *wrath and fury*. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek” (Rom 2:7-9).

Note that “immortality” is God’s gift to the faithful, awarded at the resurrection, and not an inherent human quality. The wicked do not receive immortality, but “wrath and fury,” two words associated with the final judgment (1 Thess 1:10; Rev 14:10; 16:19; 19:15). Paul largely repeats the words and phrases found in Zephaniah’s classic description of the great day of the Lord, as “a day of wrath . . . distress and anguish” (Zeph 1:15). God will “consume” the whole world with “the fire of his jealous wrath” and He “will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth” (Zeph 1:18).

This is most likely the picture Paul had in mind when he spoke of the manifestation of God’s “wrath and fury” upon the wicked. This is indicated

by the following verse where he says: “All who have sinned without the law will also *perish* [*apolountai*] without the law” (Rom 2:12). Paul draws a contrast between those who “perish” and those who receive “immortality.” In this whole passage, there is no allusion to eternal torment. Immortality is God’s gift to the saved, while corruption, destruction, death, and perishing is the wages of sin and sinners.

In view of the final destiny awaiting believers and unbelievers, Paul often speaks of the former as “those who are being saved—[*hoi sozomenoi*]” and of the latter as “those who are perishing—[*hoi apollumenoi*]” (1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 2:15; 4:3; 2 Thess 2:10). This common characterization is indicative of Paul’s understanding of the destiny of unbelievers as ultimate destruction and not eternal torment.

Peter and the Language of Destruction. Peter, like Paul, uses the language of destruction to portray the fate of the unsaved. He speaks of false teachers who secretly bring in heresies and who bring upon themselves “swift *destruction*” (2 Pet 2:1). Peter compares their destruction to that of the ancient world by the Flood and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah which were burned to ashes (2 Pet 2:5-6). God “condemned them to *extinction* and made them an example to them who were to be ungodly” (2 Pet 2:6). Here Peter states unequivocally that the extinction by fire of Sodom and Gomorrah serves as an example of the fate of the lost.

Peter again uses the example of the destruction of the world by the Flood, in dealing with scoffers who mocked at Christ’s promised coming (2 Pet 3:3-7). He reminds his readers that as the world “was deluged with water and perished” at God’s command, “by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and *destruction* of ungodly men” (2 Pet 3:7).

The picture here is that the fire that will melt the elements will also accomplish the destruction of the ungodly. This reminds us of the tares of Christ’s parable that will be burnt up in the field where they grew. Peter alludes again to the fate of the lost when he says that God is “forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should *perish*, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). Peter’s alternatives between repentance or perishing remind us of Christ’s warning: “unless you repent you will all likewise *perish*” (Luke 13:3). The latter will occur at the coming of the Lord when “the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be *burned up*” (2 Pet 3:10). Such a graphic description of the destruction of the earth and evildoers by fire hardly allows for the unending torment of hell.

Other Allusions to the Final Destruction of the Wicked. Several other allusions in the New Testament imply the final destruction of the lost. We briefly refer to some of them here. The author of Hebrews warns repeatedly against apostasy or unbelief. Anyone who deliberately keeps on sinning “after receiving the knowledge of the truth,” faces “a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire which will *consume* the adversaries” (Heb 10:27). The author explicitly states that those who persist in sinning against God ultimately experience the judgment of a raging fire that will “*consume*” them. Note that the function of the fire is to consume sinners, not to torment them for all eternity. This truth is reiterated consistently throughout the Bible.

Throughout his epistle, James admonishes those who do not practice the faith that they profess. He warns believers not to allow sinful desires to take root in the heart, because “sin when it is full-grown brings forth *death*” (James 1:15). Like Paul, James explains that the ultimate wages of sin is death, cessation of life, and not eternal torment. James speaks also of God “who is able to save and to *destroy*” (James 4:12). The contrast is between salvation and destruction. James closes his letter encouraging believers to watch for the welfare of one another, because “whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from *death* and will cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:20). Again, salvation is from death and not from eternal torment. James consistently refers to the outcome of sin as “death” or “destruction.” Incidentally, James speaks of saving the “soul from death,” implying that the soul can die because it is part of the whole person.

Jude is strikingly similar to 2 Peter in his description of the fate of unbelievers. Like Peter, Jude points to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah “as an example of those who suffer the *punishment of eternal fire*” (Jude 7, NIV). We noted earlier that the fire that destroyed the two cities is eternal, not because of its *duration*, but because of its *permanent results*. Jude closes, by urging his readers to build themselves up in the faith, caring for one another. “Convince some, who doubt; save some, by *snatching them out of the fire*” (Jude 23). The fire to which Jude refers is obviously the same kind of fire that consumed Sodom and Gomorrah. It is the fire that causes the permanent destruction of the wicked, as envisioned by Jesus, Paul, Peter, James, Hebrews, and the entire Old Testament.

The language of destruction is present, especially in the book of Revelation, because it represents God’s way of overcoming the opposition of evil to Himself and His people. We noted earlier how John describes, with vivid imagery, the consignment of the devil, the beast, the false prophet, death, Hades, and all the wicked into the lake of fire, which he defines as “the second death.” We found that the phrase “second death” was commonly used to describe the final, irreversible death.

A text not mentioned earlier is Revelation 11:18, where at the sounding of the seventh trumpet John hears the 24 elders saying: “The time has come for judging the dead . . . and for *destroying* those who destroy the earth.” Here, again, the outcome of the final judgment is not condemnation to eternal torment in hell, but destruction and annihilation. God is severe but just. He does not delight in the death of the wicked, let alone in torturing them for all eternity. Ultimately, He will punish all evildoer, but the punishment will result in eternal extinction, not eternal torment.

This is the fundamental difference between the Biblical view of final punishment as utter extinction and the traditional view of hell as unending torment and torture—a view shared by many cruel pagan systems. The language of destruction and the imagery of fire that we have found throughout the Bible clearly suggests that the final punishment of the wicked is permanent extinction and not unending torment in hell. In the light of this compelling Biblical witness, I join Clark Pinnock in stating: “I sincerely hope that traditionalists will stop saying that there is no Biblical basis for this view [annihilation] when there is such a strong basis for it.”⁸²

The Language of Destruction Is Metaphorical. Traditionalists object to our interpretation of the language of destruction which we have just surveyed, because they maintain that words like “perish,” “destroy,” “consume,” “death,” “burned up,” “lake of fire,” “ascending smoke,” and “second death” are often used with a metaphorical meaning. This is true, but their figurative meanings derive from their literal, primary meanings. It is an accepted principle of Biblical interpretation that words occurring in non-allegorical prose are to be interpreted according to their primary meaning, unless there is some reason to attribute to them a different meaning.

Scripture never indicates that these words should not be interpreted according to their ordinary meaning when applied to the fate of the wicked. Our study of the usage of these words in Scripture and extra-Biblical literature has shown that they describe a literal, permanent destruction of the wicked. For example, John’s vision of the “smoke ascending forever” (Rev 14:11) occurs in the Old Testament to portray the silent testimony of complete destruction (Is 34:10) and not of eternal torment. Similarly, the “lake of fire” is clearly defined as the “second death,” a phrase used by the Jews to denote final, irreversible death. Incidentally, if the “lake of fire” *annihilates* Death and Hades, we have reason to believe that it hardly can preserve the lost in conscious torment for all eternity. We sincerely hope that traditionalists will find the courage to take a long, hard look at the Biblical data which envision hell as the permanent destruction of the lost.

3. The Moral Implications of Eternal Torment

The traditional view of hell is being challenged today not only on the basis of the language of destruction and the imagery of the consuming fire we find the Bible but also for moral, judicial, and cosmological considerations. To these we must now turn our attention. Let us consider, first, the moral implications of the traditional view of hell which depicts God as a cruel torturer who torments the wicked throughout all eternity.

Does God Have Two Faces? How can the view of hell that turns God into a cruel, sadistic torturer for all eternity be legitimately reconciled with the nature of God revealed in and through Jesus Christ? Does God have two faces? He is boundlessly merciful on one side and insatiably cruel on the other? Can God love sinners so much as He sent His beloved Son to save them, and yet hate impenitent sinners so much that He subjects them to unending cruel torment? Can we legitimately praise God for His goodness, if He torments sinners throughout the ages of eternity?

Of course, it is not our business to criticize God, but God has given us a conscience to enable us to formulate moral judgments. Can the moral intuition God has implanted within our consciences justify the insatiable cruelty of a deity who subjects sinners to unending torment? Clark Pinnock answers this question in a most eloquent way: “There is a powerful moral revulsion against the traditional doctrine of the nature of hell. Everlasting torture is intolerable from a moral point of view because it pictures God acting like a bloodthirsty monster who maintains an everlasting Auschwitz for His enemies whom He does not even allow to die. How can one love a God like that? I suppose one might be afraid of Him, but could we love and respect Him? Would we want to strive to be like Him in this mercilessness? Surely the idea of everlasting, conscious torment raises the problem of evil to impossible heights. Antony Flew was right to object that if Christians really believe that God created people with the full intention of torturing some of them in hell forever, they might as well give up the effort to defend Christianity.”⁸³

Pinnock rightly asks: “How can Christians possibly project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness whose ways include inflicting everlasting torture upon His creatures, however sinful they may have been? Surely a God who would do such a thing is more nearly like Satan than like God, at least by any ordinary moral standards, and by the gospel itself.”⁸⁴

John Hick expresses himself in a similar fashion: “The idea of bodies burning for ever and continuously suffering the intense pain of third-degree burns without either being consumed or losing consciousness is as scientifi-

cally fantastic as it is morally revolting. . . . The thought of such a torment being deliberately inflicted by divine decree is totally incompatible with the idea of God as infinite love.”⁸⁵

Hell and the Inquisition. One wonders if the belief in hell as a place where God will eternally burn sinners with fire and sulphur may not have inspired the Inquisition to imprison, torture, and eventually burn at the stake so-called “heretics” who refused to accept the traditional teachings of the church. Church history books generally do not establish a connection between the two, evidently because inquisitors did not justify their action on the basis of their belief in hellfire for the wicked.

But, one wonders, what inspired popes, bishops, church councils, Dominican and Franciscan monks, Christian kings and princes to torture and exterminate dissident Christians like the Albigenses, Waldenses, and Huguenots? What influenced, for example, Calvin and his Geneva City Council to burn Servetus at the stake for persisting in his anti-Trinitarian beliefs?

A reading of the condemnation of Servetus issued on October 26, 1553, by the Geneva City Council suggests to me that those Calvinistic zealots believed, like the Catholic inquisitors, that they had the right to burn heretics in the same way God will burn them later in hell. The sentence reads: “We condemn thee, Michael Servetus, to be bound, and led to the place of Champel, there to be fastened to a stake and burnt alive, together with thy book, . . . even till thy body be reduced to ashes; and thus shalt thou finish thy days to furnish an example to others who might wish to commit the like.”⁸⁶

On the following day, after Servetus refused to confess to be guilty of heresy, “the executioner fastens him by iron chains to the stake amidst fagots, puts a crown of leaves covered with sulphur on his head, and binds his book by his side. The sight of the flaming torch extorts from him a piercing shriek of ‘misericordia’ [mercy] in his native tongue. The spectators fall back with a shudder. The flames soon reach him and consume his mortal frame in the forty-fourth year of his fitful life.”⁸⁷

Philip Schaff, a renowned church historian, concludes this account of the execution of Servetus, by saying: “The conscience and piety of that age approved of the execution, and left little room for the emotions of compassion.”⁸⁸ It is hard to believe that not only Catholics, but even devout Calvinists would approve and watch emotionlessly the burning of a Spanish physician who had made significant contributions to medical science simply because he could not accept the divinity of Christ.

The best explanation I can find for the cauterization of the Christian moral conscience of the time is the gruesome pictures and accounts of hellfire

to which Christians constantly were exposed. Such a vision of hell provided the moral justification to imitate God by burning heretics with temporal fire in view of the eternal fire that awaited them at the hands of God. It is impossible to estimate the far-reaching impact that the doctrine of unending hellfire has had throughout the centuries in justifying religious intolerance, torture, and the burning of “heretics.” The rationale is simple: If God is going to burn heretics in hell for all eternity, why shouldn’t the church burn them to death now? The practical implications and applications of the doctrine of literal eternal hellfire are frightening. Traditionalists must ponder these sobering facts. After all, Jesus said: “By their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt 7:20, KJV). And the fruits of the doctrine of hellfire are far from good.

A colleague who read this manuscript questioned my attempt to establish a causal connection between the belief in eternal torment in hell and the policy of the Inquisition to torture and burn “heretics” who refused to recant their beliefs. His argument is that the final annihilation of the wicked by fire is no less cruel than their punishment by unending hell-fire. The problem with this reasoning is the failure to recognize that a capital punishment that results in death does not harden or cauterize the Christian conscience like a capital punishment that causes unending atrocious suffering. The difference between the two can be compared to watching the instantaneous execution of a criminal on the electric chair versus watching the unending execution of the same criminal on an electric chair that shock his ever conscious body for all eternity. It is evident that witnessing the latter over an indefinite period of time will either drive a person to insanity or cauterize the moral conscience. On a similar fashion the constant exposure of medieval people to artistic and literary portrayal of hell as a place of absolute terror and eternal torment, could only predispose people to accept the torturing of “heretics” by religious authorities who claimed to act as God’s representatives on this earth.

Attempts to Make Hell More Tolerable. It is not surprising that during the course of history there have been various attempts to make hell less hellish. Augustine invented purgatory to reduce the population of hell. More recently, Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield have also attempted to lower the population of hell by developing a postmillennial eschatology and by allowing for the automatic salvation of babies who die in infancy. The reasoning appears to be that if the total number of those who are going to be tormented is relatively small, there is no reason to be unduly concerned. Such reasoning hardly resolves the problem of the morality of God’s character. Whether God inflicted unending torments on one million or on ten billion sinners, the fact would remain that God tormented people everlastingly.

Others have tried to take the hell out of hell by replacing the physical torment of hell with a more enduring mental torment. But, as we noted above, by lowering the pain quotient in a non-literal hell, the metaphorical view of hell does not substantially change its nature, since it still remains a place of unending torment.

Ultimately, any doctrine of hell must pass the moral test of the human conscience, and the doctrine of literal unending torment cannot pass such a test. Annihilationism, on the other hand, can pass the test for two reasons. First, it does not view hell as everlasting torture but permanent extinction of the wicked. Second, it recognizes that God respects the freedom of those who choose not to be saved. God morally is justified in destroying the wicked because He respects their choice. God desires the salvation of all people (2 Pet 3:9), but respects the freedom of those who refuse His gracious provision of salvation. God's final punishment of the wicked is not vindictive, requiring everlasting torment, but rational, resulting in their permanent annihilation.

Our age desperately needs to learn the fear of God, and this is one reason for preaching on the final judgment and punishment. We need to warn people that those who reject Christ's principles of life and the provision of salvation ultimately will experience a fearful judgment and "suffer the punishment of eternal destruction" (2 Thess 1:9). A recovery of the Biblical view of the final punishment will loosen the preachers' tongues, since they can proclaim the great alternative between eternal life and permanent destruction without fear of portraying God as a monster.

4. The Judicial Implications of Eternal Torment

Contrary to the Biblical Vision of Justice. The traditional view of hell is challenged today also on the basis of the Biblical vision of justice. As John Stott concisely and clearly puts it: "Fundamental to it [justice] is the belief that God will judge people 'according to what they [have] done' (e.g., Rev 20:12), which implies that the penalty inflicted will be commensurate with the evil done. This principle had been applied in the Jewish law courts in which penalties were limited to an exact retribution, 'life for life, eye for an eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot' (e. g., Ex 21:23-25). Would there not, then, be a serious disproportion between sins consciously committed in time and torment consciously experienced throughout eternity? I do not minimize the gravity of sin as rebellion against God our Creator, but I question whether 'eternal conscious torment' is compatible with the Biblical revelation of divine justice."⁸⁹

It is difficult for us to imagine what kind of rebellious lifestyle could deserve the ultimate punishment of everlasting, conscious torment in hell. As

John Hick puts it, “Justice could never demand for finite sins the infinite penalty of eternal pain; such unending torment could never serve any positive or reformatory purpose precisely because it never ends; and it renders any coherent Christian theodicy [that is, the defense of God’s goodness in view of the presence of evil] impossible by giving the evils of sin and suffering an eternal lodgment within God’s creation.”⁹⁰

The notion of unlimited retaliation is unknown to the Bible. The Mosaic legislation placed a limit on the punishment that could be inflicted for various kinds of harm received. Jesus placed an even greater limit: “You have heard that it was said . . . But I say to you” (Matt 5:38-39). Under the ethics of the Gospel, it is impossible to justify the traditional view of eternal, conscious torment because such a punishment would create a serious disproportion between the sins committed during a lifetime and the resulting punishment lasting for all eternity.

Part of the problem is that as human beings we cannot conceptualize how long eternity is. It is impossible for us to image what eternal torment really means. We measure the duration of human life in terms of 60, 70, and in few cases 80 years. But eternal torment means that after sinners have agonized in hell for a million years, their punishment has hardly begun. Such a concept is beyond human comprehension.

Some reason that if the wicked were to be punished by annihilation, “it would be a happy relief from punishment and therefore no punishment at all.”⁹¹ Such reasoning is appalling, to say the least. It implies that the only just punishment that God can inflict upon the unrighteous is the one that will torment them eternally. It is hard to believe that divine justice can be satisfied only by inflicting a punishment of eternal torment. The human sense of justice regards the death penalty as the most severe form of punishment that can be imposed for capital offenses. There is no reason to believe that the divine sense of justice should be more exacting by demanding more than the actual annihilation of the unrighteous. This is not a denial of the principle of degrees of accountability which, as we shall see, determines the “gradation” of the suffering of the lost. The punitive suffering, however, will not last forever; it will terminate with the annihilation of the lost.

Contrary to the Human Sense of Justice. Scholastics, like Anselm, tried to justify the notion of infinite punishment by arguing that sins committed against the infinite majesty of God deserve eternal punishing. Such reasoning may have been acceptable in the feudal society of the Middle Ages, where the human value of the serfs who lived at the bottom of the social pyramid faded in comparison with the value of the king, who lived at the top.

But today, as Pinnock points out, “We do not accept inequalities in judgment on the basis of the honor of the victim, as if stealing from a doctor is worse than stealing from a beggar. The fact that we have sinned against an infinite God does not justify an infinite penalty. No judge today would calibrate the degree of punishment on a scale of the honor of the one who has been wronged. The old arguments for hell as everlasting punishing do not work.”⁹¹

Furthermore, eternal torment serves no positive, reformatory purpose, simply because it only torments sinners without reforming them. Such a notion only exhibits a vindictiveness on the part of God, which is clearly contradicted by what Jesus has revealed to us about His Father’s love for the lost. Hans Küng correctly points out that at a time when our penal and educational systems are gradually abandoning the notion of retributive punishments without opportunity of probation and rehabilitation, “the idea not only of a lifelong, but even eternal punishment of body and soul, seems to many people absolutely monstrous.”⁹³

The traditional view of hell is based on the concept of retributive justice, which requires sinners to pay back to God all that they owe and beyond. This view portrays God as the ultimate harsh, exacting, and unappeasable Judge. Annihilation, on the other hand, portrays God as reasonable and fair. People who refuse to obey Him and to accept His provision for their salvation will be visited with the punishment they deserve, namely, utter extinction.

The issue we are addressing is not whether or not the wicked ultimately will be punished by God. Rather, the issue is whether the wicked will be punished with endless suffering or whether they will perish and become extinct after suffering whatever degree of pain God may inflict upon them. In our view, the latter better harmonizes with the overall Biblical teaching and vision of justice.

Gradation of the Punishment. Extinction does not exclude the possibility of degrees of punishment. The principle of degrees of accountability based on the light received is taught by Christ in several places. In Matthew 11:21-22, Christ says: “Woe to you, Chorazin! woe to you, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you” (cf. Luke 12:47-48). The inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon will be treated more leniently in the final judgment than those of Bethsaida, because they had fewer opportunities to understand the will of God for their lives.

Christ alludes to the same principle in the parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Servants: “And that servant who knew his master’s will, but did not make ready or act according to his will, shall receive a severe beating. But he who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, shall receive a light beating. Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more” (Luke 12:47-48). In the final judgment, each person will be measured, not against the same standard, but against his own response to the light received (see Ezek 3:18-21; 18:2-32; Luke 23:34; John 15:22; 1 Tim 1:13; James 4:17).

Millions of persons have lived and are living today without the knowledge of Christ as God’s supreme revelation and means of salvation. These people may find salvation on account of their trusting response to what they know of God. It is for God to determine how much of His will is disclosed to any person through any particular religion.

In Romans 2, Paul explains that “when Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” (vv. 14-16).

It is because God has written certain basic moral principles into every human conscience that every person can be held accountable—“without excuse” (Rom 1:20)—in the final judgment. A pleasant surprise will be to meet among the redeemed “heathen” who never learned about the Good News of salvation through human agents. Ellen White states this point eloquently: “Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God.”⁹⁴

5. The Cosmological Implications of Eternal Torment

A final objection to the traditional view of hell is that eternal torment presupposes an eternal existence of a cosmic dualism. Heaven and hell, happiness and pain, good and evil would continue to exist forever alongside each other. It is impossible to reconcile this view with the prophetic vision of the new world in which there shall be no more “mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:4). How could crying and pain be forgotten if the agony and anguish of the lost were at sight distance, as in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)?

The presence of countless millions forever suffering excruciating torment, even if it were in the camp of the unsaved, could only serve to destroy the peace and happiness of the new world. The new creation would turn out to be flawed from day one, since sinners would remain an eternal reality in God's universe and God would never be "everything to every one" (1 Cor 15:28). John Stott asks, "How can God in any meaningful sense be called 'everything to everybody' while an unspecified number of people still continue in rebellion against Him and under His judgment. It would be easier to hold together the awful reality of hell and the universal reign of God if hell means destruction and the impenitent are no more."⁹⁵

The purpose of the plan of salvation is ultimately to eradicate the presence of sin and sinners from this world. It is only if sinners, Satan, and the devils ultimately are consumed in the lake of fire and experience the extinction of the second death that we truly can say that Christ's redemptive mission has been an unqualified victory. "Victory means that evil is removed, and nothing remains but light and love. The traditional theory of everlasting torment means that the shadow of darkness hangs over the new creation forever."⁹⁶

To sum up, we can say that from a cosmological perspective the traditional view of hell perpetrates a cosmic dualism that contradicts the prophetic vision of the new world where the presence of sin and sinners is forever passed away (Rev 21:4).

Conclusion. In concluding this study of the various views of hell, it is important to remind ourselves that the doctrine of the final punishment is not the Gospel but the outcome of the rejection of the Gospel. It is by no means the most important doctrine of Scripture, but it certainly affects the way we understand what the Bible teaches in other vital areas such as human nature, death, salvation, God's character, human destiny, and the world to come.

The traditional view of hell as eternal torment is either Biblical or unbiblical. We have sought the answer in God's Word and have found no Biblical support for it. What we found is that traditionalists have tried to interpret the rich language and imageries of destruction of the wicked in the light of the Hellenistic view of human nature and of ecclesiastical dogma rather than on the basis of accepted methods of Biblical interpretation.

Today the traditional view of hell is being challenged and abandoned by respected scholars of different religious persuasions, on the basis of Biblical, moral, judicial, and cosmological considerations. Biblically, eternal torment negates the fundamental principle that the ultimate wages of sin is

death, cessation of life, and not eternal torment. Furthermore, the rich imagery and language of destruction used throughout the Bible to portray the fate of the wicked clearly indicate that their final punishment results in annihilation and not eternal, conscious torment.

Morally, the doctrine of eternal conscious torment is incompatible with the Biblical revelation of divine love and justice. The moral intuition God has implanted within our consciences cannot justify the insatiable cruelty of a God who subjects sinners to unending torments. Such a God is like a bloodthirsty monster and not like the loving Father revealed to us by Jesus Christ.

Judicially, the doctrine of eternal torment is inconsistent with the Biblical vision of justice, which requires the penalty inflicted to be commensurate with the evil done. The notion of unlimited retaliation is unknown to the Bible. Justice could never demand a penalty of eternal pain for sins committed during a mere human lifetime, especially since such punishment accomplishes no reformatory purpose.

Cosmologically, the doctrine of eternal torment perpetuates a cosmic dualism that contradicts the prophetic vision of the new world, from which sin and sinners have forever passed away. If agonizing sinners were to remain an eternal reality in God's new universe, then it hardly could be said that there shall be no more "mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away" (Rev 21:4).

The traditional view of hell as conscious torment is in trouble today. The objections to such a view are so strong and the support so weak that more and more people are abandoning it, adopting instead the notion of universal salvation in order to avoid the sadistic horror of hell. To salvage the important Biblical doctrine of the final judgment and punishment of the wicked, it is important for Biblically-minded Christians to reexamine what the Bible really teaches about the fate of the lost.

Our careful investigation of the relevant Biblical data has shown that the wicked will be resurrected for the purpose of divine judgment. This will involve a permanent expulsion from God's presence into a place where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. After a period of conscious suffering as individually required by divine justice, the wicked will be consumed with no hope of restoration or recovery. The ultimate restoration of believers and the extinction of sinners from this world will prove that Christ's redemptive mission has been an unqualified victory. Christ's victory means that "the former things have passed away" (Rev 21:4), and only light, love, peace, and harmony will prevail throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

1. Bertand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian* (London, 1976), pp. 22-23.
2. John F. Walvoord, "The Literal View," in *Four Views on Hell*, ed. William Crockett (Grand Rapids, 1992), p. 12.
3. Clark H. Pinnock, "Response to John F. Walvoord," in *Four Views on Hell*, Ed., William Crockett (Grand Rapids, 1992), p. 39.
4. For a concise but compelling presentation of the metaphorical view of hell, see William V. Crockett, "The Metaphorical View," in *Four Views of Hell*, ed. William Crockett (Grand Rapids, 1992), pp. 43-81.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.
6. Jonathan Edwards, in John Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell* (Grand Rapids, 1980), p. 56.
7. As cited by Fred Carl Kuehner, "Heaven or Hell?" in *Fundamentals of the Faith*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids, 1975), p. 239.
8. Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial! The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1995), pp. 200-201.
9. See, for example, John F. Walvoord (note 2), pp. 11-31; Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis, 1984), pp. 100-172; E. B. Pusey, *What Is the Faith as to Eternal Punishment?* (Oxford, 1880).
10. R. N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, 1975), p. 293.
11. Robert A. Peterson (note 8), p. 32. See also Harry Buis, *The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment* (Philadelphia, 1957), p. 13.
12. Edward W. Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes. A Biblical and Historical Study of the Final Punishment* (Houston, 1982), p. 112.
13. Robert A. Peterson (note 8), p. 36.
14. André Lacoque, *The Book of Daniel* (Atlanta, 1979), p. 241.
15. Emmanuel Petavel, *The Problem of Immortality* (London, 1892), p. 323.
16. The quotations from the Apocrypha are from R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English* (Oxford, 1913), vol. 1.

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17. Josephus, *War of the Jews* 2, 9, 11, cited from *Josephus Complete Works*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids, 1974), p. 478.
 18. Ibid.
 19. Ibid.
 20. The text of the Dead Sea Scrolls is cited from André Dupont-Sommer, ed., *The Essene Writings from Qumran*, trans. G. Vermes (New York, 1962).
 21. Emphasis supplied. References to the final destruction of the wicked are found throughout the Dead Sea Scrolls. For other texts and discussion, see Edward Fudge (note 12), pp. 136-140.
 22. Kenneth Kantzer, "Troublesome Questions," *Christianity Today* (March 20, 1987), p. 45. Similarly, W. T. G. Shedd writes: "The strongest support of the doctrine of Endless Punishment is the teaching of Christ, the Redeemer of man. Though the doctrine is plainly taught in the Pauline Epistles, and other parts of Scripture, yet without the explicit and reiterated statements of God incarnate, it is doubtful whether so awful a truth would have had such a conspicuous place as it always has had in the creeds of Christendom. . . . Christ could not have warned men so frequently and earnestly as He did against 'the fire that never shall be quenched,' and 'the worm that dieth not,' had He known that there is no future peril to fully correspond to them" (*Dogmatic Theology* [New York, 1888], pp. 665-666).
 23. Leon Morris, "The Dreadful Harvest," *Christianity Today* (May 27, 1991), p. 34.
 25. "Hell," *Protestant Dictionary*, ed. Charles Sydney and G. E. Alison Weeks (London, 1933), p. 287.
 26. Josephus, *War of the Jews* 6, 8, 5; 5, 12, 7.
 27. Edward W. Fudge (note 12), p. 161.
 28. Robert A. Peterson (note 8), p. 44.
 29. Emphasis supplied.
 30. Robert A. Peterson (note 8), p. 47.
 31. John Stott and David L. Edwards, *Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (London, 1988), p. 316.
 32. R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According St. Matthew. An Intro-*

duction and Commentary (Grand Rapids, 1963), p. 240.

33. Emphasis supplied.

34. John Stott (note 31), p. 317.

35. Basil F. C. Atkinson, *Life and Immortality. An Examination of the Nature and Meaning of Life and Death as They Are Revealed in the Scriptures* (Taunton, England, n. d.), p. 101.

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37. Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 270.

38. Harry Buis, *The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment* (Philadelphia, 1957), p. 49.

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40. Emphasis supplied.

41. Edward W. Fudge (note 12), p.172.

42. See, for example, Robert A. Peterson (note 8), pp. 78-79.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

44. Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis, 1984), p. 144. The same view is expressed by Harry Buis, who wrote: "These passages from the epistles and Revelation give evidence that the apostles follow their Master in teaching the serious alternatives of life. They teach clearly the fact of judgment, resulting in eternal life or eternal death, which is not cessation of existence, but rather an existence in which the lost experience the terrible results of sins. They teach that this existence is endless" (note 38, p. 48).

45. J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation* (Philadelphia, 1979), p. 228.

46. Emphasis supplied.

47. Harold E. Guillebaud, *The Righteous Judge: A Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment* (Taunton, England, n. d.), p. 24.

48. John F. Walvoord (note 2), p. 23.

49. George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 270.

50. Robert A. Peterson (note 8), p. 90.

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51. As cited by J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation, Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York, 1975), p. 393.
52. M. McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* (New York, 1958), p. 117.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid., p. 123.
55. Ibid.
56. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, 1977), p. 367.
57. Henry Alford, *Apocalypse of John in The Greek Testament* (Chicago, 1958), Vol. 4, pp. 735-736.
58. Billy Graham, "There is a Real Hell," *Decision* 25 (July-August 1984), p. 2. Elsewhere Graham asks: "Could it be that the fire Jesus talked about is an eternal search for God that is never quenched? That, indeed, would be hell. To be away from God forever, separated from His Presence" (in *The Challenge: Sermons from Madison Square Garden* [Garden City, New York, 1969], p. 75).
59. William V. Crockett (note 4), p. 43.
60. Ibid., p. 44.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid., p. 59.
63. Ibid., p. 60.
64. The statement is from Professor Coleman-Norton at Princeton University and quoted by Bruce M. Metzger, in "Literary and Canonical Pseudepigrapha," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972), p. 3.
65. William V. Crockett (note 4), p. 61.
66. Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse, The Book of Revelation* (New York, 1977), p. 212.
67. See, Arthur W. Pink, *Eternal Punishment* (Swengel, Pennsylvania, n.d.), p. 2; William Hendricksen, *The Bible on the Life Hereafter* (Grand Rapids, 1963), p. 188.

68. J. I. Packer, "Evangelicals and the Way of Salvation: New Challenges to the Gospel—Universalism and Justification by Faith," in *Evangelical Affirmations*, ed. K. S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids, 1990), p. 126.

69. Clark H. Pinnock (note 3), p.161.

70. Ibid., p. 162.

71. John Stott (note 31), pp. 319-320.

72. Ibid., pp. 314-315.

73. James D. G. Dunn, "Paul's Understanding of the Death of Jesus," in *Reconciliation and Hope: New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology*, ed. Robert Banks (Grand Rapids, 1974), p. 136.

74. For a study of the typology of the Day of Atonement and its antitypical fulfillment, see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *God's Festivals. Part 2: The Fall Festivals* (Berrien Springs, 1996), pp. 127-205.

75. Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1965), p. 47.

76. Basil F. C. Atkinson (note 35), p. 103.

77. For an analysis of this argument, see Edward W. Fudge (note 12), pp. 232-233.

78. Edward White, *Life of Christ: A Study of the Scripture Doctrine on the Nature of Man, the Object of the Divine Incarnation, and the Condition of Human Immortality* (London, 1878), p. 241.

79. Basil F. C. Atkinson (note 35), pp. 85-86.

80. John Stott (note 31), p. 315.

81. Ibid., p. 316.

82. Clark H. Pinnock (note 3), p. 147.

83. Ibid., pp. 149-150.

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85. John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (New York, 1976), pp. 199, 201.

86. As cited by Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, 1958), Vol. 8, p. 782.

87. Ibid., p. 785.

88. Ibid., p. 786.

89. John Stott (note 31), pp. 318-319.

90. John Hick (note 85), p. 201.

91. Harry Buis, "Everlasting Punishment," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, 1978), Vol. 4, p. 956.

92. Clark H. Pinnock (note 3), pp. 152-153.

93. Hans Küng, *Eternal Life, Life after Death as a Medical, Philosophical, and Theological Problem* (New York, 1984), p. 137.

94. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, California, 1950), p. 638.

95. John Stott (note 31), p. 319.

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Chapter VII

THE CONSUMMATION OF REDEMPTION

The Italian poet Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) is famous for his trilogy on hell, purgatory, and heaven, known as *The Divine Comedy*. In introducing the last book, “Paradise,” he begs Apollo, the Patron of the Muses, to give wings to his poetic spirit and lead his imagination on right paths. Dante felt that he needed special help from the highest regions to write about paradise because it was far more difficult than writing about hell or purgatory. After all, the pain and torments of hell or purgatory are not too foreign to our human experience, but the joy, delight, and bliss of paradise are hard to imagine.

It is with the same sense of inadequacy that I set out to write this final chapter. I am aware of the limited Biblical information available on the glorious future that awaits the people of God. We are reminded of Paul’s words that “no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1Cor 2:9). When Biblical data are limited, it is easy to succumb to the temptation of indulging in unbridled speculations. Let us keep this danger in mind while studying in this chapter some of the events leading to the consummation of redemption.

Objectives of the Chapter. This final chapter focuses on four major events leading to the consummation of redemption: (1) The Second Advent, (2) the Resurrection, (3) the Final Judgment, (4) the ushering in of the World to Come. Our concern is not only to define the Biblical vision of the consummation of redemption but also to examine how this vision has been blurred by the dualistic understanding of human nature.

We stated in chapter 1 that what we believe about the make-up of our human nature largely determines what we believe about our ultimate destiny. In this final chapter, we explore the implications of dualism for the consummation of redemption. Specifically, we consider how dualism has contributed to the formation of popular misconceptions regarding the second Advent, the

resurrection, the final judgment, and the world to come. The purpose of this study is not primarily to expose misconceptions fostered by dualism about the consummation of redemption, but to affirm the Biblical realistic vision of the events leading to the glorious destiny that awaits the people of God.

PART I: THE SECOND ADVENT

Christ's glorious return represents the consummation of the Christian Hope. While in pagan religions, salvation was often conceived of as a *human ascension* toward God, in Biblical faith, salvation is realized through a *divine descent* toward mankind. In other words, the Christian hope rests not on an inherent capacity of disembodied souls to *go up* to God but on God's revelation of His willingness to *come down* to our planet to restore our world to its original perfection. In some ways, the Bible is the *Advent Story*, the story of God who *came down* to create, to redeem, and ultimately to restore the human and sub-human creation.

1. Dualism and the Neglect of the Advent Hope

The belief in immediate transit of individual souls after death to a state of perfect blessedness (*heaven*), or to a state of continuous punishment (*hell*), or to an intermediate state of purification (*purgatory*) has greatly weakened the expectation of Christ's Coming. It is not difficult to see how such a belief can obscure and eclipse the expectation of the Second Advent. If at death the soul of the believer immediately goes up to heaven to meet the Lord and enjoys perfect blessedness and communion with God, there hardly can be any real sense of expectation for the Coming of the Lord to resurrect the sleeping saints. At best, the Parousia may be regarded as an intensification of heavenly bliss for the saved and hellish pain for the unsaved, by granting a material body to disembodied souls already in their final destinies.

Meeting Christ at Death. In his book *Christ Among Us*, a best-seller presentation of the Catholic faith, Anthony Wilhelm devotes no chapter to the Second Advent. Why? Simply because he expounds the Catholic faith according to which the souls of the saved already meet Christ at death. He writes: "It is Christ whom we encounter after death face to face, in the clearest, most intimate way possible. He whom we have been reaching for in our prayers, whom we have dimly encountered in the sacraments, is now before us in the overwhelming fullness of His light and love and power."¹ What this means is that for the believer, the climactic moment is death and not the Second Advent. Wilhelm states this point unequivocally: "Death is the climactic experience of our life. It is more than just a moment of time; it is

an experience. We awaken to full consciousness and full freedom, and encounter God himself. All our life has been lived for just this.”²

This doctrine openly contradicts the teaching of the Bible according to which the Christian hope finds its fulfillment in meeting Christ at His glorious coming and not at death. Death is never presented in the Bible as “the climactic experience of our life.” It is not surprising that for Catholics and many Protestants the Second Advent is no longer really necessary, because they believe in meeting Christ at death as disembodied souls. Oscar Cullmann finds an example of this development in the “decision of the Congregation of the Holy Office [July 29, 1944], according to which faith in the visible return of Christ no longer is regarded as obligatory (it can ‘not be taught as certain’).”³

Besides being foreign to the Scripture, this teaching encourages Christians to strive for individual and immediate blessedness after death and, consequently, pushes into the background the hope for a universal, cosmic, and corporate redemption to be realized at and through the Coming of the Lord. The ultimate result of this belief, as noted by Abraham Kuyper, is that “by far the majority of Christians do not think much beyond their own death.”⁴

The primary concern of those who believe in the survival of their souls after death is to reach paradise immediately, though in a disembodied, psychical form. This concern barely leaves any time or interest for the Coming of the Lord and the resurrection of the body.

Immortality or Resurrection? The individualistic hope for immediate immortality overrides the Biblical corporate hope for an ultimate restoration of this creation and its creatures (Rom 8:19-23; 1 Cor 15:24-28). When the only future that really counts is individual 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 concept of the disembodied survival of the soul after death is rooted in Greek philosophy. We have seen that for the Greeks the resurrection of the body was unthinkable, because the body, being matter, was of lower value than the soul and was not worthy of survival. In Biblical thought, however, the body is not a tomb for the soul, but a temple for God’s Spirit and, thus, is worthy of creation and resurrection.

“From the Greek concept of death,” writes Oscar Cullmann, “one could come only to the doctrine of the ‘immortality of the soul.’ Resurrection faith, on the contrary, is only possible on Biblical grounds, where . . . death and continued life after death do not constitute an organic natural process;

rather, mighty powers stand here in conflict. When in the Bible life comes out of death, a miracle is necessary. . . . The resurrection hope presupposes the faith in creation. Because God is the creator also of the body, therefore, in the Bible ‘resurrection,’ in opposition to Hellenism, must be the resurrection of the body.”⁵

To believe in the immortality of the soul means to believe that at least part of oneself is immortal in the sense of being incapable of passing out of existence. Such a belief encourages confidence in oneself and in the possibility of one’s soul going up to the Lord. As Stephen Travis puts it: “Immortality tends to be thought of as a natural endowment of man, an inevitable part of his make up, rather than as a gift of God’s grace.”⁶

On the other hand, to believe in the resurrection of the body means to believe not in ourselves or in our disembodied souls going to the Lord, but rather in Christ, who will come to raise the dead and transform the living. The Parousia stresses a final consummation realized by a movement of Christ’s *coming down* to mankind rather than individual souls *going up* to Him.

The Christian Hope is not “a pie in the sky when you die” but a real meeting upon this earth between embodied believers and the embodied Christ on the glorious day of His Parousia. Out of that real meeting will come a transformation affecting humanity and nature. The dualistic view of human nature obscures and erases this great expectation by teaching, instead, that the soul meets Christ in the beatitude of paradise immediately after death. The only safeguard against this popular, deceptive teaching is through a clear understanding of the Biblical teaching on human nature and destiny. At this juncture, we examine the Biblical portrayal of the *manner, purpose, and outcome* of Christ’s coming.

2. The Manner of Christ’s Coming

Christ’s Coming Will Be Personal. The New Testament suggests the Christ’s return will be *personal, visible, sudden, glorious, and triumphant*. Christ’s return will be decidedly a *personal* Coming. The disciples, gazing at their ascending Lord, were reassured by two angels: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

This passage makes it abundantly clear that the resurrected Lord who ascended to heaven in person will in like manner return to this earth. His return will be as personal as His departure. This clear teaching is rejected by many liberal theologians who interpret spiritually both the ascension and the Second Advent. In their view, the ascension was merely a visionary represen-

tation of Christ's higher level of existence. Similarly, the references to Christ's return are interpreted as a greater manifestation of His spiritual power in this world. They believe Christ is not returning personally to this earth but will exert an ever-increasing spiritual influence upon mankind.

The spiritualization of the Second Advent does injustice to the many explicit descriptions of His personal Return. Paul says in Philippians 3:20, 21: "We await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body." Again, in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, the Apostle says: "For the Lord *himself* will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God" (cf. Col 3:4; 1 Cor 15:22; Titus 2:13). Passages such as these clearly negate the spiritual interpretation of Christ's return. It is "the Lord *himself*" who "will descend from heaven," not His power.

Christ's Coming Will Be Visible. Intimately connected to the personal and physical aspects of Christ's coming is *its visible* character. The latter is inherent in the two words chiefly used to describe it, namely, *parousia*—coming, and *epiphaneia*—appearing. These terms describe not an inward, invisible spiritual experience but a real meeting with a visible person.

Hebrews explains that as Christ "has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself . . . so Christ . . . will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (Heb 9:26, 28). The comparison suggests that the second appearing will be as visible as the first.

Jesus Himself left no doubt whatsoever as to the visibility of His Return. He warned His disciples against the deception of a secret coming by comparing it to the visibility of the lightning, which "comes from the east and shines as far as the west" (Matt 24:26-27). Christ added: "Then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and *they will see* the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt 24:30).

The same truth is emphatically expressed in majestic language in Revelation 1:7: "Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and *every eye will see him*, every one who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him." The notion of an invisible Coming of Christ, perceived only through the eye of faith, as taught by Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as the idea of a secret Coming of Christ to rapture away the church from the earth, as held by many dispensationalists, is foreign to Biblical thought. John points to the visibility of Christ's return as the assurance of our ultimate transformation: "We know that when he appears we shall be like him for *we shall see him* as he is" (1 John 3:2).

Christ's Coming Will Be Unexpected. Christ's return also will be *unexpected*, taking people by surprise. To illustrate the suddenness of His coming, Christ compared it to the unexpected destruction by the Flood: "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, . . . so will be the coming of the Son of man" (Matt 24:38-39).

Another metaphor used by Christ to illustrate the sudden and unanticipated manner of His Return is the unexpected breaking in of a thief: "If the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into" (Matt 24:43). Because of the sudden and unexpected manner of Christ's Return, believers are urged to constantly be ready: "Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matt 24:44; cf. 1 Thess 5:6)

The suddenness of Christ's Return is not contradicted by the fulfillment of the End-time signs, because, as I have discussed this elsewhere,⁷ their function is to encourage constant preparation and not sensational prognostications. The End-time signs given by Christ, and clarified by New Testament writers are of a generic nature, because they were intended to nourish the faith and strengthen the hope of believers throughout history.

Christ's Coming Will Be Glorious and Triumphant. In dramatic contrast to His First coming, when Christ entered our world as a helpless baby in an obscure village, He will return as the Conqueror, with the power and glory of God. Jesus Himself describes His Second Coming as a visible and universal manifestation of His power and glory. "For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done" (Matt 16:27). Paul partly echoes Christ's word in his description of the Second Advent: "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God" (1 Thess 4:16; cf. Col 3:4; Titus 2:13).

John the Revelator portrays in a most dramatic way the glory of Christ's Return by comparing it to the coming of a Rider on a white horse, dazzling with glory, followed by the armies of heaven "arrayed in fine linen, white and pure," and with the name "King of kings and Lord of lords" inscribed "on his robe and on his thigh" (Rev 19:11-16).

Perhaps the most effective imagery used in the Bible to portray the glory and majesty of Christ's Coming is that of His "coming on the clouds." Jesus Himself used this imagery when He spoke of His Return. To His disciples who asked about the manner of His Coming, Christ replied: "Then

will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man *coming on the clouds of heaven* with power and great glory” (Matt 24:30). During His interrogation by the high priest, Christ declared: “I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and *coming on the clouds of heaven*” (Matt 26:64). The same language is used in the book of Revelation: “Behold, he is *coming with the clouds*, and every eye will see him” (Rev 1:7).

The origin of this description can be traced back to Old Testament prophets, especially to Daniel, who writes: “I saw in the night visions, and behold, *with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man*, . . . and to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom” (Dan 7:13-14; cf. Joel 2:2; Zeph 1:14-18). Why is Christ’s Return associated with clouds? The rich meaning of “the clouds” in Biblical history suggests three possible reasons.

The coming of Christ on the clouds suggests, first of all, that it will be a unique, *visible manifestation of divine power and glory*. Since the clouds are the chariots of God’s glory (Ps 104:3) and are used by God to diffuse His glorious presence (Ex 24:14-15), they fittingly express the majesty and splendor that will accompany Christ’s Return.

The coming of Christ on the clouds also suggests the *fulfillment of God’s covenant to reward the faithful and punish the unfaithful*. The covenant that God established with Noah after the Flood by setting a rainbow “in the cloud” (Gen 9:13), and the guidance that God promised through the cloud to His people journeying through the wilderness will be ultimately fulfilled when the Advent clouds appear and believers reach the end of their pilgrimage as their Savior welcomes them into the Promised Land of enduring rest.

The Advent clouds are also *ominous of punishment* and death for unbelievers. The prophets describe the retribution of the great day of the Lord as “a day of clouds and thick darkness” (Zeph 1:15; Joel 2:2). From the first exodus to the last, the clouds in the Bible contain both a promise of protection for the faithful and a warning of punishment for the unfaithful.

The coming of the Lord on the clouds also points to the *joyful reunion* with Christ and with believers of all ages. Paul explains that both the resurrected and the transformed saints will be caught up together “in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:16-17). Here the clouds are seen as the rendezvous with the Lord and with the believers of all the ages. Just as the Israelites experienced divine presence and power by living “under the cloud” and by being baptized “in the

cloud” (1 Cor 10:1-5), so the redeemed will experience Christ’s presence and power at the grand rendezvous in the clouds of Christ’s glorious Return. Here the Advent clouds represent the place of transfiguration for all believers, the place where the eternal fellowship of the believers begins.

These characterizations of Christ’s coming as *personal, visible, sudden, glorious, and triumphant* must be regarded as feeble attempts to describe the most breathtaking event human beings will ever see.

3. The Purpose of Christ’s Coming

Completion of Redemption. Why is it necessary for Christ to return? The basic answer is to complete the redemptive work begun at His incarnation. God’s conquest of the powers of evil is accomplished through two great events or visitations: the Incarnation and the Second Advent. Oscar Cullmann illustrates this two-step victory by the analogy of the Allies’ victory over Nazi Germany.⁸ The two steps in that victory are known as D-Day and V-Day. D-Day was the successful landing of Allied armies on the beachheads of Normandy, which turned the tide of the war. Though there was still much bitter fighting before the final capitulation of the German army, the decisive blow had been inflicted and the tide of the war had turned. V-Day represented the formal surrender of the German army and the accompanying victory celebrations.

Through His victorious life, death, and resurrection, Christ inflicted a decisive blow to the realm of Satan (D-Day). As Paul puts it, “He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them” (Col 2:15). Since Pentecost, the Gospel of God’s Kingdom has been preached around the world, and ever-increasing numbers of persons have been delivered from Satan’s domain and have become members of Christ’s Kingdom. Though Satan has suffered a decisive defeat, he is by no means destroyed. His evil powers are still very much with us. Hate, violence, crime, persecution, and wars are still a painful daily reality. Thus, it is necessary for Christ to return to “put all his enemies under his feet [V-Day]. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor 15:25-26).

The enemies of God’s Kingdom are spiritual enemies who influence human minds and actions. The final victory against these demonic powers can only be won by direct divine intervention. The purpose of Christ’s Return is to reveal His hidden power by destroying all forms of evil and evildoers and establishing His everlasting Kingdom of peace and righteousness.

Gathering of the Redeemed. On repeated occasions during His ministry, Christ announced that the primary purpose of His Return would be to gather all His redeemed children to Himself (Matt 24:31; 25:32-34), so that,

as Jesus said, “where I am you may be also” (John 14:3). The fact that Christ cares so much for our company as to desire to return should make our hearts leap with joy at the thought of being with Him. Christ’s Return is so intimately connected with the gathering of the redeemed that Paul can speak in one breath of “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him” (2 Thess 2:1, NIV).

It is impossible to imagine what a grand gathering it will be, when the redeemed of all the ages will be assembled together around the Savior. As Christ sent forth His followers to witness “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8), so He will send forth His angels to “gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven” (Mark 13:27). No believer will be left out. At the visit of a Head of State, only a few persons can be part of the welcoming party. At the coming of Christ, every believer who ever lived, whether young or old, educated or uneducated, rich or poor, black or white will participate in the grand Advent celebration.

PART II: THE RESURRECTION

1. The Resurrection of the Believers

The universal gathering of all believers will be made possible at Christ’s Return by two major events: the resurrection of the sleeping saints and the transformation of the living saints. The latter is generally known as “translation.” Such usage is not quite correct, since both the sleeping and the living saints will be translated, that is, transferred from this earth to heaven. Nevertheless, we use the term “translation” according to the accepted theological usage, as designating the transformation of the living saints.

The resurrection and translation of all the believers are clearly placed in the Scripture at the time of Christ’s Return, sometimes called “the last day” (John 6:39-40, 44, 54). Paul explains that “as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ” (1 Cor 15:22-23; cf. Phil 3:20-21; 1 Thess 4:16).

Paul clearly explains that both the resurrection of all the sleeping saints and the translation of all living believers will take place at the same time in conjunction with Christ’s Coming: “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in

the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:16-17).

One Resurrection of Believers. Some dispensationalists interpret the phrase “the dead in Christ will rise *first*” as meaning that *first* there will be a resurrection of New Testament believers who will be raptured away secretly before the final seven-year Tribulation and *then*, after the Tribulation, there will be a resurrection of the Old Testament believers, of the tribulation saints, and of the unbelievers.⁹ This interpretation clearly misinterprets the Pauline passage. Even a cursory reading of this passage reveals that Paul is not contrasting the resurrection of Old Testament believers with that of New Testament believers, but rather the resurrection of the dead in Christ with the rapture of living believers. “First” simply means here that the sleeping saints are raised first, that is, before the living saints are caught up to be with the Lord.¹⁰

The same sequence is suggested by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:52: “For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.” Paul’s concern in both passages is to reassure his readers that believers who are alive at the time of Christ’s Return will have no advantage over those believers who are asleep. The reason is that transformed, living believers “shall be caught up together with them [resurrected saints] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess 4:17). In other words, all believers will be present at the grand Advent gathering, both the resurrected saints of all ages and the transformed living saints.

2. The Resurrection of Unbelievers

What about the unbelievers? Will they also be resurrected, and, if so, when? Paul in his epistles makes no reference to the resurrection of the unbelievers, though he is quoted in Acts 24:15 as saying that “there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.” The reason for Paul’s silence is simply that the resurrection of unbelievers was not an issue he needed to address in his correspondence. However, the Bible is not silent on this point. The most explicit Old Testament reference to the resurrection of both believers and unbelievers is found in Daniel 12:2: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

In the New Testament, the resurrection of both believers and unbelievers is presupposed in some of the Kingdom parables which speak of a final general separation of the evildoers from the righteous (Matt 13:41-43, 49-50; 25:31-46). The most explicit statement is found in the Gospel of John, where Jesus says: “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are

in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:28-29, NIV).

All three cited texts (Acts 24:15; Dan 12:2; John 5:28-29) seem to suggest that the resurrection of the righteous and the unrighteous will take place contemporaneously. However, Revelation 20 suggests that there will be two separate resurrections. The resurrection of the believers occurs first, at the victorious Second Coming of Christ, and results in life: “Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years” (Rev 20:6). The second resurrection, that of the unbelievers, takes place at the end of the millennium and results in condemnation and the second death: “If any one’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. . . . This is the second death” (Rev 20:14-15).¹¹

Fact More Important Than Phases. To a critical modern reader, an open contradiction appears between those passages which speak of one general resurrection of believers and unbelievers and the reference in Revelation to two resurrections, separated by one thousand years. This apparent contradiction did not disturb Bible writers, because for them the *reality* of the resurrection was more important than its *modality*. This is why most of the references to the resurrection mention its *fact* rather than its *phases*.

The same principle applies to the final judgment, where most of the Biblical references emphasize its reality and finality rather than its phases. Yet there are Biblical passages which implicitly suggest a Pre-Advent and a Post-Advent phase of the final judgment.

In light of these facts, the Seventh-day Adventist Church accepts as real the distinction found in Revelation 20 between the resurrection of believers at the beginning of the millennium and that of unbelievers at the end of the millennium. A word of caution is in order here because the distinction between the two resurrections rests solely on this one passage of the Bible. One isolated passage hardly provides a solid Biblical basis for constructing a strong doctrine. Adventists recognize the silence of Scripture regarding the nature of the resurrection of the wicked and their mode of existence before their final destruction. Thus, there is no virtue in speculating regarding what is not revealed in Scripture.

Two Distinct Resurrections. The belief in two distinct resurrections, as held by Seventh-day Adventists, is a rather unique brand of premillennialism. Adventists believe that the resurrection of *all* the righteous

dead and the translation of *all* the righteous living takes place contemporaneously at the beginning of the millennium when Christ returns personally, visibly, and gloriously. The wicked living at that time will be destroyed, while those wicked who are dead will remain in their graves until the second resurrection at the end of the millennium.

During the millennium the redeemed will be in heaven, while Satan will be isolated on this earth which remains depopulated. At the close of the millennium, the wicked dead will be resurrected. This event will enable Satan to make one final attempt to gain control of this world as the redeemed descend to this earth. God, however, will execute His judgment upon the wicked by destroying them forever (second death—Rev 20:13-15). Afterwards, God will re-create this earth, and the redeemed will dwell on it securely forever.

When compared with other views, the Seventh-day Adventist interpretation is less confusing and more consistent with Scripture. There are not three or four resurrections, as held by some dispensationalists, but only two: one for the righteous and one for the unrighteous. This means that all the redeemed are resurrected and rewarded at the same time, and similarly, all the wicked are resurrected and punished at the same time.¹¹ There is no confusion as to who lives on earth and who is in heaven during the millennium. There is no division between a millennial Jewish kingdom on this earth and a Christian kingdom in heaven. There is only one Kingdom of God consisting of believers of all ages.

3. The Resurrection of the Body

What kind of body will believers receive at the resurrection or translation? Will the resurrected body be reattached to the souls of those who have died? Will it be a physical or a spiritual body? Will it be similar to or radically different from the present one? How will our personal identity be preserved? Will my father be 83 years old and my mother 81? Before we attempt to answer these questions about the nature of the resurrection body, we must mention briefly the two main objections that have been raised against the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. These stem, on one hand, from philosophical dualism and, on the other hand, from “scientific” materialism.

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

“We can only surmise,” writes Anthony Hoekema, “that this was done under the influence of Greek thought, which taught the immortality of the soul but denied the resurrection of the body. Paul replies to this error by indicating that if one believes in the resurrection of Christ, one cannot very well deny the resurrection of believers.”¹²

Philosophical dualism has greatly influenced Christian thought. In early Christianity, the Gnostics denied the resurrection of the body because, as J. N. D. Kelly puts it, “Matter being intrinsically evil, the flesh could not participate in salvation, which must therefore be the prerogative of the soul; and so, if the resurrection is a fact, it must be an exclusively spiritual one, consisting in the illumination of the mind by the truth.”¹³

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus is rightly called “the first-born from the dead” (Col 1:18) because, as George Eldon Ladd expresses it, “he stands, at the head of a new order of existence—resurrection life.”¹⁴ The fact of Christ’s resurrection has made the believers’ resurrection a certainty because Christ has proved His victory over death. The eschatological character of Jesus’ resurrection is evident in Paul’s statement that His resurrection was “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:20).

The expression “first fruits” has little meaning for today’s urban dwellers. In Bible times it had a rich meaning because it referred to the first produce of the harvest, which was offered in sacrifice to God to express gratitude for granting a new harvest. Thus, the first fruits which were brought to the Temple were seen not as mere hope of a new harvest but as its actual beginning. Christ’s resurrection, then, is “the first fruits” in the sense that it has made the resurrection of believers not a mere possibility, but a certainty.

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

4. Characteristics of the Resurrection Body

What kind of body will Christ give at His return to the sleeping and living saints? We are rather fortunate to have Paul’s discussion of this very question which had been raised by the Corinthians: “But some one will ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?’ You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what

you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body” (1 Cor 15:35-38).

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

Paul develops further the analogy of sowing and reaping to give the nearest thing to a description of the resurrection body to be found in the Bible: “So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:42-44).

Four Contrasts. In 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, Paul explains the difference between our present body and the resurrection body by means of four contrasts. These contrasts are equally applicable to the bodies of the living saints who will be transformed and translated at Christ’s return without seeing death. First, our present bodies are *perishable* (*phthora*)—subject to sickness and death—but our resurrection bodies will be *imperishable* (*aphtharsia*)—no longer liable to sickness and death. Second, our present bodies experience the *dishonor* of being lowered into a grave, but our resurrection bodies will experience the *glory* of an inner and outward transformation.

Third, our present bodies are *weak*, as they easily become tired and exhausted, but our resurrection bodies will be full of *power*, with boundless energy to accomplish all our goals. Fourth, our present bodies are *physical* (*soma psychikon*), but our resurrection bodies will be *spiritual* (*soma pneumatikon*). This last contrast has led many to believe that our resurrection/translation bodies will be “spiritual” in the sense that they will be devoid of the present physical substance. “Spiritual” is understood as the opposite of physical. Thus the resurrection/translation bodies allegedly consist of a nonphysical, nonmaterial substance, whatever that may be.

A “Spiritual” Resurrected Body. Did Paul believe, and does the Bible teach, that at the Second Advent living and dead believers will receive nonmaterial and nonphysical bodies, totally devoid of physical substance?

This is indeed the view of some scholars. They define “spiritual body—*soma pneumatikon*” as meaning “composed of spirit,” as though “spirit were some ethereal, heavenly substance.”¹⁵ According to this view, “spirit” would be the substance and “body” would be the form of the resurrection body.

In his book *Raised Immortal: Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament*, Murray Harris defines the spiritual body as follows: “The spiritual body is the organ of the resurrected person’s communication with the heavenly world. It is a somatic form fully responsive to the Christian’s perfected spirit and perfectly adapted to its heavenly environment.”¹⁶

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

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

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

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

Spirit Led. More telling is Paul’s use of the same two words (physical-*psychikos*/spiritual-*pneumatikos*) in the same epistle: “The *unspiritual* [physical-*psychikos*] man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit

of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The *spiritual* [*pneumatikos*] man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one" (1 Cor 2:14-15).

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

Anthony Hoekema clearly brings out this point: "*Spiritual* (*pneumatikos*) here does not mean nonphysical. Rather, it means someone who is guided by the Holy Spirit, at least in principle, in distinction from someone who is guided only by his natural impulses. In a similar fashion, the natural body described in 1 Corinthians 15:44 is one which is part of this present, sin-cursed existence; but the spiritual body of the resurrection is one which will be totally, not just partially, dominated and directed by the Holy Spirit."¹⁷

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

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

G. C. Berkouwer insightfully explains that "the 'spiritual body' does not have to do with what we sometimes call 'spiritualizing.' 'Spiritualizing' always presupposes a dualism, which in turns carries with it a devaluation of

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

Physical Body Is Not Evil. If God at the Second Advent were to change our present physical bodies into bodies consisting of nonphysical and nonmaterial substance, then, as Anthony A. Hoekema perceptively points out, "the devil would have won a great victory since God would then have been compelled to change human beings with physical bodies such as he had created into creatures of a different sort, without physical bodies (like the angels). Then it would indeed seem that matter had become intrinsically evil so that it had to be banished. And then, in a sense, the Greek philosophers would have been proved right. But matter is not evil; it is part of God's good creation."²⁰

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

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

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

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

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

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

This conclusion is also supported by the references to *names* “written before the foundation of the world in the book of life” (Rev 13:8; cf. 17:8, 21:27; Dan 12:1; Phil 4:3). Such names suggest an original divine plan for an optimum number of righteous people to inhabit this earth. It also suggests that once this optimum number has been reached, Christ will come to gather the righteous, as well as to cleanse and restore this earth to its original perfection. In the new earth, God will terminate the human reproductive cycle since the

earth will already be filled by an ideal number of people. The termination of the procreative function of marriage does not necessitate the termination of the relational function of marriage.

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

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

The doctrine of first things (etiology) must illuminate the doctrine of last things (eschatology). Surprisingly, many people wrongly assume that there is no correlation between creation and ultimate restoration. Shortly, we shall notice that the Biblical vision of the original perfect creation provides the basis for envisioning the ultimate restoration of this earth. It is unfortunate that dualists have been so conditioned by the notion that this material world, including our physical body, is evil, that they are seeking for an eternal home *up in heaven* and not *down on this planet earth*.

5. The Meaning of the Resurrection of the Body

What does “the resurrection of the body” mean? Biblical writers knew as well as we do that it could not possibly mean the rehabilitation of our present physical bodies. First, because many bodies are sick or deformed, and second, because at death they decompose and return to dust: “When thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust” (Ps 104:29; cf. Eccl 3:20; Gen 3:19). In spite of this Biblical witness, many Christians have

believed through the centuries in the resurrection of the very same particles composing the dead body. This belief is expressed in the earliest forms of the Apostles' Creed which states: "I believe in . . . the resurrection of the flesh," rather than "of the body."²¹

Tertullian (c. 160-c. 225), who is regarded as the Father of Latin Christianity, argues at great length in his treatise *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* that God will resurrect the very "flesh which has been consigned to the ground." He appeals to Jesus' words, "the very hairs of our head are all numbered," to prove that they will all be restored at the resurrection. "If they were to be lost," Tertullian reasons, "where would be the use of having taken such a numeral care of them?"²²

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

When Paul speaks of the resurrection of the body, he is clearly thinking of the whole person. As Michael Perry rightly points out, "In Paul's usage, 'body' is not 'something external' to a man himself, something he *has*. It is what he *is*. Indeed, *soma* (the Greek word for 'body') is the nearest equivalent to our word 'personality'."²³ In view of this fact, to believe in the resurrection/translation of the body means to believe that my human self, the human being that "I" am, will be restored to life again. It means that I will not be someone different from whom I am now. I will be exclusively *myself*. In short, it means that God has committed Himself to preserving my individuality, personality, and character.

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

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

In order to take the resurrection seriously, we must also take death seriously. Karl Barth stated a profound truth when he said: “The man who does not know what death is does not know either what resurrection is.”²⁴ Both death and resurrection affect the total person. Helmut Thielicke states this point in a personal and emphatic way: “I dare not regard my death as something that no longer strikes the real me, since I am immortal, but moves on bypassing my soul. No, all of me goes down into death. Nothing gives me the right to reject the totality of man, which the Scriptures proclaim in connection with the disaster of death, and suddenly split him into body and soul, into a perishable and an imperishable I-segment. But as a Christian I go down into this death with the complete confidence that I cannot remain therein, since I am one whom God has called by name and therefore I shall be called anew on God’s day. I am under the protection of the Resurrected One. I am not immortal, but await my own resurrection.”²⁵

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

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

Dualists claim that a “fatal flaw” of the wholistic view of human nature is that it cannot guarantee the continuity of personal identity. They say that the wholistic view “cannot show that resurrected persons are the very

same persons who lived on earth rather than being mere copies; it cannot preserve the principle of personal identity.”²⁷ This criticism is based on the assumption that since the wholistic view does not allow for any continuity of body or soul between death and resurrection, the resurrected bodies must be “different persons no matter how much they might look or think alike.”²⁸

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

The Bible reassures us of the preservation of our identity through the suggestive imagery of our “names written in the book of life” (Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12). A name in the Bible stands for character or personality, as indicated by the various names used to portray the character of God. This suggests that God preserves an accurate picture of the character of each person who ever lived on this planet. The record of each life is all inclusive, because Jesus said: “On the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt 12:36-37).

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

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

Charles Hartshorne maintains that at death human beings “live on in the complete and infallible memory of God. . . . Death cannot be the destruction, or even the fading of the book of one’s life; it can only mean the fixing of its concluding page. Death writes: ‘The End’ upon the last page, but nothing further happens to the book, by way of either addition or subtraction.”²⁹

Some Practical Implications. The practical implications of the belief in the resurrection/translation of the whole person are not difficult to see. The fact that at His coming Christ will resurrect believers, restoring to each their distinct personality and character, teaches us, as aptly stated by Ellen G. White, that “the characters formed in this life will determine the future destiny.”³⁰ This means also, as the same author emphasizes, that “now is the time for all to cultivate the powers that God has given [us], that [we] may form characters for usefulness here and for a higher life hereafter.”³¹

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

To believe in the resurrection/translation of the body means to believe that we will be able to recognize our loved ones. We shall recognize our resurrected and translated loved ones, though not necessarily because they will look exactly the same as when we last saw them. I was known to my grandmother as the little boy who visited her at her farmhouse. I am known to my wife as the bald man she married 36 years ago with plenty of wavy hair. I am known to my grandchildren as the grandpa who tells stories from the World War II.

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

The same principle applies to the recognition of our resurrected loved ones. We shall recognize them in spite of the noticeable improvements in their physical appearance, because God will resurrect their unique individuality and personality. Summing up, we can say that the belief in the resurrection of the body challenges us to take seriously our total being with its mental, physical, and spiritual components, because we are “a temple of the Holy Spirit . . . which [we] have from God” (1 Cor 6:19) and which God will miraculously resurrect at Christ’s return.

PART III: THE FINAL JUDGMENT

1. The Necessity and Scope of the Final Judgment

The resurrection of believers and unbelievers is closely related to the final judgment, since it is the former which makes the latter possible. The final judgment is clearly presented in Scripture as being concomitant with the Second Advent. In a sense, a major purpose of Christ’s Return is to execute the final judgment which will dispose of evil in a decisively final and permanent way. Jesus Himself stated this truth when He said: “When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (Matt 25:31-32). The outcome of this separation will be that the wicked “will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt 25:46).

Paul reiterates the same basic truth when referring to the final judgment. He says: “For he will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury” (Rom 2:6-8). Statements such as these indicate that a fundamental function of Christ’s return is to execute the final judgment that will usher in a new world.

The Denial of the Final Judgment. Many today have difficulty accepting the idea of a divine final judgment for all mankind. They are troubled by the concept of God as a Judge and by the mechanics of a final judgment. Well-known theologians such as Karl Barth, Oscar Cullmann, Reinhold Niebuhr, C. H. Dodd, and Rudolf Bultmann hardly mention the *final* judgment, emphasizing instead the idea of a *present* judgment. The final judgment is interpreted, not as a dramatic and climactic cosmic event, but as a present decision for or against Christ which results in the divine justification or condemnation of individuals.³²

Dualists also find it difficult to justify the necessity of the final judgment, because they believe each person's destiny is already determined at the time of his or her death. As cogently stated by T. Francis Glasson, "If men know their fate after death, what is the purpose of the final collective judgment, which can produce no trepidation or uncertainty since everything is already fixed?"³³ The implication is clear. Dualism ultimately negates the necessity of the Second Advent and the final judgment by teaching that each person meets Christ and the final judgment at death.

This view rests on a dualistic understanding of human nature which we have found to be foreign to the Scriptures. Nowhere does the Bible teach two phases of reward and punishment, the first at death for the soul and the second, at Christ's coming, for the body and soul. The resurrection to life or the resurrection to condemnation to death (John 5:29) will be experienced by the whole person in conjunction with the final judgment at Christ's coming.

The Necessity of the Final Judgment. Scripture does not argue for the necessity of a final judgment, it simply acknowledges its reality as an axiomatic, self-evident truth. The only way into the world to come is not through a gradual evolution, but through a final judgment executed by Christ at His coming. The reality of the final judgment is as inescapable as death: "It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Heb 9:27).

Paul asks rhetorically: "Do you suppose, O man, that . . . you will escape the judgment of God?" (Rom 2:3). The answer is never in doubt. The final judgment is such a self-evident and fundamental reality that it makes any present judgment of the conduct of fellow believers inappropriate (Rom 14:10) and any judgment of a "human court" passed upon believers of relative value (1 Cor 4:3-4).

The necessity of a final judgment rests on the moral nature of God and on the moral order of His creation. Only by abrogating His moral nature and the moral order of His universe, could God dispense with the final judgment. If God is a moral, just God, He must judge in a final, decisive way the moral conduct of all His rational creatures. God's justice and mercy demand a final outward judgment for their revelation and vindication. It is only the final judgment that will bring the conflict between good and evil to an end by disposing of evil in a decisive and permanent way.

The necessity of a final judgment is also determined by our human freedom and responsibility. Human beings are not programmed by God to act automatically. God fully respects our human freedom. To be free to choose means to be ultimately responsible for one's decision and destiny. Judgment

is the consequence of God's respect for our choices. The eternal consequences of our choices will be revealed at the final judgment.

To retain our hope and optimism for the ultimate triumph of God over evil, we must safeguard the integrity of the doctrine of the final judgment. To do away with it would mean to negate a final human accountability, to deny a future revelation of God's justice and mercy, and to regard evil as a permanent reality in this world.

The Scope of the Final Judgment. The final judgment is universal, including both believers and unbelievers. This truth is clearly taught in the Scriptures. For example, Christ said that "before him will be gathered *all the nations*, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Matt 25:32).

Paul writes in Romans that God will "judge *the world*" (3:6) and that "we shall *all* stand before the judgment seat of God" (14:10; cf. 2 Cor 5:10). In the judgment scene of Revelation 20, all the dead, great and small, powerful and powerless are seen standing before the judgment throne (Rev 20:12-13).

The final judgment extends beyond human beings to include even fallen angels. Peter speaks specifically of the judgment of the fallen angels: "God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell [Greek, *tartaros*] and committed them to pits of nether gloom to be kept until the judgment" (2 Pet 2:4; cf. Jude 6; 1 Cor 6:2-3). Though restricted in their activities, fallen angels are not inactive. Thus, the scope of the final judgment is truly universal and final. It includes both heavenly and human beings and it represents God's final, decisive, and permanent elimination of evil and evildoers.

Everything Will Be Judged. Most people could face the thought of the final judgment calmly if only they could be sure that certain secret sins would remain hidden. But there is no deed, word, or thought now hidden which will not be revealed on the Day of Judgment. This truth is clearly taught in the Scriptures. For example, Jesus said that on the day of judgment people "will render account for every careless word they utter" (Matt 12:36).

The scrutiny of the final judgment extends also to our secret thoughts. Paul wrote: "Do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart" (1 Cor 4:5; cf. Rom 2:16; Luke 12:2; Matt 10:26; 1 Tim 5:24). Everything we have done in this life, whether openly or secretly, whether good or bad, will be revealed.

Summing up, the final judgment is universal in terms both of people and of their behavior. It will include every person who has ever lived and every deed, word, and thought each person has ever done or conceived. All earthly distinctions—social, racial, linguistic, geographic, economic, education, political—will vanish away at the final judgment. Rudyard Kipling expresses this universality eloquently in *The Ballad of East and West* where he says: “Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet, Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God’s great Judgment Seat.”

2. The Standard of the Final Judgment

Revelation Received. The standard by which saints and sinners are judged in the final judgment is the revelation each person has received of the will of God. Factors such as profession, reputation, appearance, and social connections will not influence God’s final judgment. The criterion will be solely the character and conduct of each person in relation to the light received. Paul explains that “all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified” (Rom 2:12-13).

Millions of persons have lived and are living today without the knowledge of Christ as God’s supreme revelation and means of salvation. These persons may find salvation on account of their trusting response to what they know of God. It is for God to determine how much of His will is disclosed to any person through any particular religion.

Paul explains that “when Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” (Rom 2:14-16).

It is because God has written certain basic moral principles into every human conscience that every person can be held accountable and be “without excuse” (Rom 1:20) at the final judgment. A pleasant surprise will be to meet among the redeemed “heathen” who never learned about the Good News of salvation through human agents.

Response to Christ. A decisive factor in the final judgment is a person’s response to Christ. The Savior said: “He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day” (John 12:48). The same words of Christ that give eternal

life to those who accept them (John 3:18) will bring eternal death to those who reject them: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24; cf. 3:36).

The statement “he does not come into judgment” (*krisis*) does not mean that the case of the saved will not be considered in the final judgment, since “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor 5:10; cf. Rom 14:10). “Judgment” is the opposite of eternal “life” in John 5:24. Thus, the meaning of the text must be that believers will not be condemned in the final judgment because of their constant “hearing” and “believing” (present tense in Greek) in Christ.

The Greek noun for judgment used here (*krisis*) is often used with the meaning of condemnation (John 3:19; 5:29; 2 Thess 2:12). Paul expresses the same view with a related word when he says: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). Those who accept Christ stand under no condemnation, either in the present life or in the future judgment, because they have received both forgiveness for their sins and grace to fulfill in their lives “the just requirement of the law” (Rom 8:4).

Judgment According to Works? Both the Old and New Testaments teach that God will judge a person “according to his work” (Ps 62:12; cf. Jer 17:10). Christ expressed this truth, saying: “For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done” (Matt 16:27). Similarly, Paul wrote that God “will render to every man according to his works” (Rom 2:6). Peter reminded his readers that God “judges each one impartially according to his deeds” (1 Pet 1:17). Revelation closes with the promise: “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done” (Rev 22:12; cf. 20:12).

This teaching of the final judgment according to works appears to be in open contradiction to the Biblical teaching of justification by faith, apart from works (Gal 2:16, 21; Rom 3:27). If God gives us the gift of eternal life through faith, how can He judge us according to our deeds? Different attempts have been made to resolve these two apparently contradictory teachings. In our view, the resolution is found in what may be termed the *dynamic view of faith*.

The salvation of the believer depends from beginning (justification) to end (judgment), not on faith or works taken in isolation, but rather on a combination of the two, namely, a *working faith*. The faith that saves is not merely a passive acceptance of the divine provision of salvation, but an active response manifested in works. As John Calvin once put it, “It is faith alone

which justifies, and yet the faith which justifies is not alone.”³⁴ Faith alone saves, but a faith which is alone without works does not save.

Judgment about Faith. The final judgment “according to works” will in a sense be a judgment about faith. It will reveal if the professed faith was indeed genuine. If the faith was genuine, then works will be there as evidence. If the works are not there, then the faith was not real. James expresses this truth very strikingly: “But some one will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith” (James 2:18).

The final judgment is not a judgment of our own merits, but of our faith-response to God’s grace, extended to us freely through Jesus Christ. God will not ask: What works have you done to deserve eternal life? But He will ask: What are your “fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:11)? To put it differently, God will ask for the “proof” of a living, active faith (Rom 5:4; 2 Cor 9:13). The task of the Christian is not to perform daily an adequate amount of works to pass the final judgment, but rather to ensure that his faith is alive, “working through love” (Gal 5:6).

Paul expresses his striving to ensure the reality of his faith in dramatic ways. He says, for example, “I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” (1 Cor 9:27; cf. Phil 3:13-14). He also admonishes believers saying: “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13). Since it is God Himself who is guiding the willing and the working, in the final judgment, the Christian will be asked not about his personal achievements but about his faith-response to the workings of God in his own life.

Confusion between Method and Standard. The apparent tension between justification by faith and final judgment according to works is often caused by a misunderstanding of the relation between the *standard* of the final judgment and the *method* by which that standard is to be reached.

Impressed by Paul’s emphasis on righteousness by faith apart from works as a method of salvation (Rom 3:27-28; Gal 2:16), some have concluded that the standard of the final judgment is not the *Christian’s works* but faith in *Christ’s works*. The problem with this view is that in its legitimate concern to stress the *method* of salvation, namely, righteousness by *faith*, it ignores the *standard* of judgment, namely, *righteousness* which is made possible through faith in Jesus Christ. Pushed to the extreme, this view promotes justification of *sinfulness* rather than justification of *sinners* by faith. Such a view rests on an arbitrary, one-sided reading of Paul. It focuses

on what the apostle teaches about the *method* of salvation while ignoring his equally important teachings on the *standard* of judgment.

In his presentation of the dynamics of salvation in both Romans and Galatians, Paul discusses first the method and then the standard of salvation. In the first eleven chapters of Romans as well as in the first four of Galatians, Paul explains with a variety of illustrations that the method of salvation is God's gift of grace and not human achievement (Rom 3:21-28; 10:9-10; Gal 2:16; 3:10-11; 4:28-30). However, after his exposition of *God's gift (method)* of salvation, Paul devotes the remaining chapters in both epistles to discussing *God's claim (standard)* of conformity to His will through the grace of Christ.

Paul recognized the indissoluble connection between what God gives to us through Jesus and what He claims of us through the power of His Spirit. Salvation is a gift of grace, but the acceptance of this gift requires a response of obedience, which shows the genuineness of our faith. The proof of the transformation of our sinful nature is our actions, or what Paul calls the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22). This explains why in the final judgment God "will render to every man according to his works" (Rom 2:6). "Works" or "fruit" are decisive in the final judgment because they constitute the proof of the acceptance by faith of God's gift of salvation. As Emil Brunner aptly says: "The question is not whether the doing of good is decisive, but whether one arrives at the doing of good in his own strength."³⁵

The conclusion, then, is that *the method* of salvation by faith does not contradict but confirms *the standard* of the final judgment according to works, because the works which God requires are those that spring from a living faith.

The Final Judgment Is Just and Serious. Judgment on the basis of works implies that God's judgment will be perfectly just, because it will be based on facts, not on fiction. Human judgments often rest upon appearances or upon partial knowledge of the facts. People can consider the actions but not the motives that prompted them. On the contrary, "We know that God's judgment . . . is based on truth" (Rom 2:2; NIV), because it rests on the full knowledge of the covert motives, as well as of the overt actions, of each person who ever lived. In the final judgment, the Lord "will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart" (1 Cor 4:5; cf. Rom 2:16).

Judgment according to works also means that the final judgment will be serious, fraught with eternal consequences. The good or evil a person has done determines his or her eternal salvation or condemnation, because it

reflects the acceptance or rejection of the gift of salvation. “A time is coming,” Jesus said, “when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:28, 29, NIV).

The seriousness of the final judgment is sometimes expressed in the Bible in terms of the wrath of God. In fact, the day of judgment is sometimes called “the day of wrath” (Rom 2:5) and “the great day of wrath” (Rev 6:17; cf. 11:18; 14:19). God’s wrath is the inevitable consequence of His holiness, righteousness, and love. Being a holy God, He does not wink at sin but takes every transgression of His known will in absolute seriousness (Ex 34:7). Christ’s death on the cross represents a unique revelation of the full weight of God’s judgment and wrath upon sin (Rom 3:24-25; 1 John 4:10). If Christ bore such a heavy judgment for our sins, “how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” (Heb 2:3; cf. 10:26-27).

3. The Seventh-Day Adventist View of the Final Judgment

The Great Controversy Concept. The Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the final judgment is unique, because it includes both an *evaluative* and an *executive* phase. The basis of the Adventist understanding of the final judgment is the “Great Controversy” concept. This concept embraces the origin, development, and final resolution of the conflict between good and evil. A most dramatic description of the origin of this conflict is found in the well-known imagery of Revelation 12, which speaks of a war that “arose in heaven,” in which Satan and his angels “were defeated” and expelled (vv. 7-9). This conflict which began in heaven was extended to this earth (vv. 13-17) where it will continue until Satan is imprisoned for “a thousand years” (Rev 20:1-3). At the end of this period, Satan ultimately will be destroyed in “the lake of fire and brimstone” (Rev 20:7-10).

The final judgment is seen in Adventist theology as a vital, climactic aspect of the divine resolution of this “Great Controversy,” which extends beyond the human world to include heavenly beings (Eph 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:16; 2:15; Rom 8:38). Through the final judgment, God accomplishes at least two important objectives. On the one hand, He reveals and executes His “righteous judgment” (Rom 2:5-6) which will terminate the human and the heavenly rebellion and usher in His everlasting kingdom. On the other hand, through the final judgment, God provides an opportunity for His moral creatures to understand and accept the justice of His giving eternal life to some and everlasting death to others (Rev 15:3, 4).

Evaluative and Executive Phases. The eternal security of a moral universe is largely determined by the extent to which its rational created beings understand and accept the justice of God's judgments. This trustful acceptance of the rightness of God's judgments hardly could be gained from a final judgment consisting exclusively of a unilateral and inscrutable executive act of Christ, who at His Advent renders to each person, reward or retribution according to his words.

Thus, Seventh-day Adventists believe that God's final judgment encompasses both an *evaluative* and an *executive* phase. The latter is carried out by Christ at His Return, when He will grant the gift of eternal life to living and resurrected believers and the punishment of death to the living wicked (2 Thess 1:7-10; Matt 25:31-32; Rom 2:5-7).

The former (the evaluative phase) takes place before and after the Second Advent; thus they are called "pre-advent" and "post-advent" judgments. An important purpose of this investigative process is to enable heavenly and human beings fully to understand and accept the rightness of God's final judgment. The Adventist understanding of the final judgment as consisting of both an evaluative and an executive phase preserves the singularity, unity, and finality which Scripture attributes to this event.

The two phases of the final judgment are not explicitly differentiated in the Scriptures, because to Bible writers the *fact* of the final judgment was more important than its *phases*. Yet several Biblical passages clearly suggest that the final judgment encompasses both an *evaluative* and an *executive* phase. No attempt can be made within the limited scope of this chapter to provide an adequate analysis of the Biblical texts which support the notion of a pre- and post-advent phase of the final judgment. The few comments below are designed to give merely a glimpse of the subject. Interested readers can find a comprehensive study of the final judgment in chapters 13 and 14 of my book *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*.

A Glimpse at the Pre-Advent Phase of the Final Judgment. The notion of a Pre-Advent evaluative judgment is an underlying assumption in much of Jesus' teaching about the judgment. For example, He often spoke about receiving or missing God's *reward* (Matt 5:46; 6:1, 2, 4, 5, 16, 18; 10:41; Mark 9:41; Luke 6:23, 25), which presupposes an evaluative judgment to decide who receives what. Jesus returns to *execute* the judgment and not to *institute* it.

Jesus also spoke of human accountability, which includes not only acts but also "every careless word" (Matt 12:36). The accountability of each human being is obviously decided before Christ comes to call forth "those

who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28-29). The resurrection to life or to condemnation represents Christ’s executive judgment which presupposes the termination of the evaluative judgment. Christ’s statement indicates that people will be resurrected *not to be judged* but *already judged*. If those who are resurrected to eternal life or death were still to be judged, we would have an incongruous situation in which the results of the judgment would be meted out before the convening of the judgment itself.

Paul describes the final judgment as the time “when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed” (Rom 2:5). This revelation of “God’s righteous judgment” presupposes some prior process of investigation that determines who is to receive the gift of eternal life and who “the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thess 1:8-9). The *revelation* of God’s judgment at the Second Advent presupposes the *termination* of God’s judging before the Advent.

The same inference can be drawn from Paul’s reference to Christ “who is to judge the living and the dead” (2 Tim 4:1; cf. 1 Pet 4:5). If the dead are judged while still dead, such judgment must precede the Advent judgment, when the resurrection to eternal life or eternal death takes place. This reference is part of Paul’s charge to Timothy, which says: “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word, . . .” (2 Tim 4:1-2).

William Barclay notes the significance of the sequential order of the charge: (1) Judgment, (2) Appearance, (3) Kingdom. This sequence, he points out, reflects the logical progression that leads to the consummation of salvation history.³⁶ Christ’s judgment of the living and the dead is followed by His appearance, which will usher in His eternal Kingdom.

The Pauline descriptions of the Second Advent in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 exclude the possibility of a universal investigative judgment being set up and conducted at Christ’s coming. The resurrection and transformation of believers is followed immediately by their meeting with the Lord and not by an investigative judgment (1 Thess 4:16-17). J. A. Seiss perceptively notes in this regard: “The truth is, that the resurrection, and the changes which pass ‘in the twinkling of an eye’ upon the living, are themselves the fruits and embodiments of antecedent judgment. They are consequences of abjudications then already made.”³⁷

In Daniel 7, there is an impressive three-part vision where in each the heavenly judgment in the presence of the Ancient of Days surrounded by thousands of angels, precedes the coming of the Son of Man to receive the

eternal Kingdom. The same is true in Revelation 11, where the announcement of “the time for the dead to be judged” (Rev 11:18) precedes the opening of the most Holy Place of the heavenly temple in which the ark of the covenant is seen (Rev 11:19). This is a clear allusion to the Day of Atonement which finds its antitypical fulfillment in the coming of Christ as indicated by the manifestation of the cosmic signs of the End (Rev 11:19).

The sampling of references cited above suffices to show that the notion of a Pre-Advent evaluative judgment is clearly implied in different ways in the Scriptures. This concept is an underlying assumption of much of the teachings of Jesus and of Paul. More explicit descriptions of the Pre-Advent judgment are found in the apocalyptic judgment visions of Daniel (chs. 7 and 8) and Revelation (chs. 5 and 14). Valuable insights into the Pre-Advent judgment work of Christ are also provided by the typological correspondence which Hebrews establishes between the ministry of the Day of Atonement, performed by the high priest in the earthly sanctuary, and that performed by Christ in the heavenly.

A Glimpse at the Post-Advent Phase of the Final Judgment.

Several Scriptural passages clearly attest that a judgment will be conducted by the redeemed after Christ’s Return. Christ promised to His followers that “in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt 19:28).

In rebuking the Corinthians for taking fellow believers to court, Paul makes this startling statement: “Do you not know that the *saints will judge the world?* And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, matters pertaining to this life!” (1 Cor 6:2-3). “The world” the saints will judge must be the world of the unsaved, otherwise the saints would be judging themselves. The fact that the “saints” are doing the judging implies that they themselves have already been judged in the Pre-Advent judgment which granted them admission into God’s kingdom.

The saints will also judge the “*angels.*” The reference here must be to the fallen angels whom, according to Peter, God has “kept until the judgment” (2 Pet 2:4; cf. Jude 6). In summary, according to Paul, the resurrected saints will participate in a Post-Advent judgment process that will examine the cases of both the unsaved human beings and the fallen angels.

John the Revelator confirms and elaborates the above testimonies in his description of the millennial reign of the saints: “Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed. Also I saw the

souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection!" (Rev 20:4-6).

This passage, informs us, first of all that a work of judgment is committed to redeemed persons. These saints will begin their work of judgment after they come to life at the time of the first resurrection. The latter is differentiated from the resurrection of "the rest of the dead," who come to life a thousand years later to be destroyed in the lake of fire. The time of the first resurrection is the Second Advent of Christ, which is symbolically portrayed in the preceding narrative through the imagery of a dazzling rider on a white horse coming with the armies of heaven (Rev 19:11-16).

The Scope of the Post-Advent Judgment. The Post-Advent judgment will include all the unbelievers and fallen angels who have ever existed. This total inclusiveness is expressed in a variety of ways. We noted that Jesus said that the judgment will include "the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt 19:28). Paul speaks of the saints judging "the world" and "angels" (1 Cor 6:2-3). John expresses this inclusiveness in a most dramatic way: "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened . . . And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done" (Rev 20:12-13).

The judgment is conducted on the basis of evidence supplied both by the record contained in the books of the deeds and by the record found in the book of life. These two kinds of books are mentioned in Revelation. The first of these apparently contains the record of human deeds: "And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done" (Rev 20:12). The parallelism suggests that the content of the books is the record of "what they had done." We have seen that the idea of the judgment based on the records of people's deeds is common in the Scriptures. "The court sat in judgment," says Daniel, "and the books were opened" (Dan 7:10).

The concept of a record kept by God of each person's deeds suggests that each person is writing his or her own destiny. Throughout our daily lives, we are acquiring a record that will bring us either shame or honor in the final judgment. In a sense, it is not so much God judging each person as it is each person writing his or her own final judgment.

The other book is called "the book of life": "Also another book was opened, which is the book of life . . . and if any one's name was not found

written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:12, 15). This is the book which contains the names of all those who have believed in Christ. Both the Old and New Testaments often speak of the book including all the names of the righteous (Ex 32:32-33; Dan 12:1; Luke 10:20; Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 13:8; 21:27).

The relationship between the book of deeds and the book of life is not clear. Austin M. Farrar aptly suggests that those whose names are missing from the book of life are given the chance to understand the reason by checking the books containing the record of their lives.³⁷ It seems plausible that this verification is also part of the judgment process performed by the saints. There will be surprises in God’s Kingdom as some of the respected “saints” will be absent and some of the reputed “sinners” will be present. The book of deeds will explain why some names are present while others are absent from the book of life. Thus an important function of the Post-Advent judgment, like that of the Pre-Advent judgment, is to enable moral beings fully to understand and accept the justice of God’s judgments.

Comparison between Pre- and Post-Advent Judgments. A comparison between the Pre-Advent and the Post-Advent phases of the final judgment suggests several similarities and some differences. Both the Pre-Advent and Post-Advent judgments are a judicial process that precedes God’s executive act of granting final reward or punishment. Both are designed to enable moral intelligences to evaluate and accept the justice of God’s judgment in saving some and condemning others. Both decide eternal destinies of intelligent, moral beings.

There are also some differences. While the Pre-Advent judgment is held in the presence of unfallen heavenly beings, the Post-Advent judgment is conducted before saved human beings. While the former reveals God’s justice in saving believers, the latter reveals His justice in punishing unbelievers. While the former results in Christ’s Coming to grant eternal life to the righteous, the latter terminates with the eternal destruction of the wicked.

Two Outcomes. The difference between the Pre-Advent and Post-Advent evaluative phases of the final judgment is primarily in their outcomes. The Pre-Advent evaluative judgment is held in the presence of unfallen heavenly beings and reveals God’s justice in Christ’s coming to reward the resurrected and living believers with the gift of eternal life. On the other hand, the Post-Advent evaluative judgment is conducted before saved human beings and reveals God’s justice in Christ’s coming down to this earth at the end of the millennium, to punish the resurrected wicked with eternal death.

The ultimate outcome of the final judgment executed by Christ, first at His Second Advent and then at the end of the millennium, is eternal life for the righteous and permanent annihilation for the unrighteous. This Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the final judgment preserves the unity and finality which Scripture attributes to this event. It enhances our appreciation of God's justice and strengthens our expectation of the Second Advent.

PART IV: THE WORLD TO COME

The ultimate outcome of Christ's Return is the restoration of this world to its original perfection. The resurrection and translation of believers, the final judgment, and the resurrection and destruction of unbelievers are all preparatory events leading to the final act of redemptive history: the creation of a "new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1; 2 Pet 3:13).

The purpose of creation and of redemption ultimately will be accomplished when the effects of sin are eradicated from the entire creation and a new, perfect order is established by God. It is only when *paradise lost* becomes *paradise restored* that the purpose of Christ's first and second comings into this world will be fully realized.

1. New Earth Fulfills Old Testament Promises

God promised mankind at creation that this earth would be our human habitation and inheritance (Gen 1:28). As a result of sin, our first parents were banished from the Garden of Eden and sent out into the earth now under a curse (Gen 3:17). The promise of final victory which God made immediately after the Fall (Gen 3:15), contains the implicit assurance of a restored paradise in a new earth.

The same assurance is implicitly present in God's promise to Abraham: "And I will give to you, and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God" (Gen 17:8). Note that God promised the land of Canaan not only to Abraham's descendants but also to Abraham himself. Obviously this promise was never fulfilled to Abraham himself, because the only land he ever possessed in Canaan was a burial cave, which he purchased from the Hittites (Gen 23).

Expanded Fulfillment. The book of Hebrews informs us that Abraham looked forward to a greater fulfillment of God's promised inheritance of the land of Canaan, namely, "the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb 11:10). The "city" to which Abraham looked

forward is the New Jerusalem, which will be on the new earth. Thus God's promise to Abraham ultimately will be fulfilled, not when the Jews repossess all the land of Palestine, as taught by dispensationalists, but when God establishes a new world as the inheritance of all the spiritual children of Abraham.

Paul alludes to the expanded fulfillment of the land of Canaan when he says that God promised to Abraham and his descendants "that they should *inherit the world*" (Rom 4:13). The same expansion of the concept of the land of Canaan can be seen in Christ's beatitude: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the *earth*" (Matt 5:5), which is a paraphrase of Psalm 37:11: "But the meek shall possess the *land*." The promise of entrance into the rest and peace of the land of Canaan is a type of the rest and peace of the new earth which awaits the people of God (Heb 4:9). Thus, the new earth represents the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises to His people.

2. Annihilation or Renewal of Present Earth?

Both the Old and New Testaments speak of the world to come that God will establish for the redeemed as "a new heaven and a new earth" (Is 65:17; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1). What does the expression "a *new* heaven and a *new* earth" mean? Does it mean that our planet earth will be completely annihilated, so that God will create a brand new planet totally different from the present one? Or does it mean that God will purify and renew our planet earth?

G. C. Berkouwer mentions a number of Lutheran theologians who favor the concept of the annihilation of the present earth and a complete discontinuity between the old earth and the new.³⁸ They appeal to such passages as 2 Peter 3:12 which says: "The heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire!"

There is no doubt that the earth will be radically transformed by the cataclysmic events accompanying Christ's execution of the final judgment upon sinners and this sinful world. Yet the Scripture does not support the concept of the total annihilation of this earth but rather of its renewal and restoration. Four main reasons can be given.

New in Quality not in Origin. First, the term used in 2 Peter 3:13 and in Revelation 21:1 to designate the newness of this world ("*new* heaven and *new* earth") in Greek is *kainos* and not *neos*. The difference between the two terms is significant. *Neos*, as J. Behm explains, is what "is new in time or origin," while "*kainos* is what is new in nature, different from the usual, impressive, better than the old, superior in value or attraction."³⁹ Thus the expression "a new heaven and a new earth" means that the new earth is not totally different from the present one, but rather better, because it will be gloriously renewed.

A good example of the meaning of *kainos* is found in 2 Corinthians 5:17 where Paul writes: “If any one is in Christ, he is a new [*kaine*] creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new [*kaina*] has come.” As the individual believer becomes “a new creature or creation” (both readings are possible), by being renewed and transformed by divine grace, so this whole world will become “a new heaven and a new earth,” by being purified and restored by divine power. In both instances, the “new” stands in continuity with the old.

Freedom from Decay. A second reason favoring the renewal rather than annihilation of this world is Paul’s statement that “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom 8:21). The fact that Paul describes the ultimate restoration of this world as liberation “from its bondage to decay” suggests a renewal of the present creation and not some totally different creation, bearing no relation to this world.

A third reason is the continuity suggested by the resurrection of the body. The fact that Scripture speaks of the resurrection of the body, and not of the creation of new human beings, suggests a clear continuity between our present mode of existence and that of the new earth. If this is true for the human creation, we have reason to believe that it is equally true for the subhuman creation.

Satan’s Defeat. A fourth reason for preferring renewal over annihilation is that annihilation would represent a victory for Satan and not for God. This would mean, as Anthony A. Hoekema rightly explains, that “Satan would have succeeded in so devastatingly corrupting the present cosmos and the present earth that God could do nothing with it but to blot it totally out of existence. But Satan did not win such a victory. On the contrary, Satan has been defeated decisively. God will reveal the full dimensions of that defeat when he shall renew this very earth on which Satan deceived mankind and finally banish from it all the results of Satan’s evil machinations.”⁴⁰

The practical implication of the renewal of the present earth is that we cannot write it off as a total loss and rejoice in its deterioration. On the contrary, we must work for the betterment of the world now in view of God’s plan to renew it at the end. Our mission is to develop and promote a distinctively Christian lifestyle which has value not only for this present world, but also for the world to come.

3. The Biblical View of the New Earth

Ethereal Paradise. Most people think of the world to come as a spiritual retreat center somewhere up in heaven, where glorified souls will

spend eternity in everlasting contemplation and meditation. This misconception is reflected in the lines of popular hymns such as the one that says: “In mansions of glory and endless delight, I’ll ever adore Thee in heaven so bright.”

The thought of spending eternity in a spiritual world somewhere off in space, wearing white robes, plucking harps, singing, meditating, and contemplating can hardly appeal to twentieth-century Christians in love with the sights and sounds of the great metropolis. In his essay entitled “Paradise,” the poet Laurie Lee notes how unsatisfying to modern minds are the traditional images of paradise: “Too chaste, too disinfected, too much on its best behavior, it received little more than a dutiful nod from the faithful. Hell, on the other hand, was always a good crowd-raiser, having ninety per cent of the action—high colors, high temperatures, intricate deviltries and always the most interesting company available.”⁴¹

This vision of a vague, ethereal paradise has been inspired by Greek philosophy and not by Biblical teachings. For the Greeks, 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 enjoyed eternal bliss.

During the course of this study, we have seen how the Christian church by and large has adopted the Greek dualistic view of human nature and destiny. The impact of dualism upon Christian thought and practice has been incalculable. It has led not only to the depreciation of the physical aspect of life (*vita activa*) in favor of the spiritual aspect of life (*vita contemplativa*) but also to the devaluation of this material world in favor of a spiritual realm somewhere up in “heaven.”

Most Christians today want to spend eternity “up in heaven,” and not down here on a renewed earth. This truth was brought home to me in an unusual way while researching for this chapter. When I punched in the word “new earth” at our Andrews University Library computer catalogue, only one entry showed up in the monitor. It was a study on a “New Earth Restaurant” in Illinois. But when I entered the word “heaven,” over 200 titles show up on the monitor. It is evident that the world to come has become associated in Christian thought with “heaven” and not with the “new earth.”

Biblical Realism. The vision of an ethereal, spiritual paradise somewhere “up in heaven” has been inspired by Greek dualism rather than by Biblical realism. Both the Old and the New Testaments speak of a “new heaven and a new earth” (Is 65:17; Rev 21:1) as not being a different world somewhere off in space, but the present heaven and earth renewed and transformed to their original perfection.

In another study, I have shown how the vision of the peace, harmony, material prosperity, and delight of the primordial Sabbath—Adam’s *First Day* after his creation—functions in Old Testament times as a paradigm of the *Last Days*, a common designation for the world to come.⁴² The peace and harmony that existed between Adam and the animals will be restored in the new earth when “the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them” (Is 11:6).

Similarly, the prosperity and abundance which prevailed at creation will be restored on the new earth, where “the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it” (Amos 9:13; cf. Is 4:2; 30:23-25; Joel 3:18; Zeph 3:13). These descriptions convey the picture of a real and abundant “earthly” life in the new world.

Urban Life. The New Testament is equally emphatic on the continuity between life in the present world and that in the world to come. Perhaps the most powerful image used to convey the sense of continuity and realism of the new world is the image of the city. Hebrews, for example, says that Abraham “looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb 11:10). The experience of Abraham is a type of the experience of all the believers, because, as the same author explains, “here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come” (Heb 13:14).

The New Testament closes with a most impressive description of the Holy City, Jerusalem, into which are welcomed “only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev 21:27). It is doubtful that all the details of the city are to be taken literally. For example, why should the Holy City have a very high wall which would prevent its citizens from viewing the marvelous panorama beyond the city walls? Obviously, the vision of such a high wall conveyed to John and to his contemporaries the assurance of complete security. In those days, the taller the wall the more peacefully the inhabitants could sleep at night.

Similarly, the references to the names of the twelve tribes inscribed on the twelve gates (Rev 21:12) and to the names of the twelve apostles written on the twelve foundations (v. 14) suggest that the citizens of the Holy City consist of believers from both the Old and New Testament communities. Whatever the meaning of all the details, the vision of the Holy City conveys the image, not of a mystical, monastic life in a heavenly retreat, but of urban life of intense activity on this renewed earth.

Active, Exciting Life. The Biblical vision of the Holy City suggests that life on the new earth will not be one of isolation and loneliness, but of communion, excitement, and action. The new earth will be a complex, cosmopolitan place where all kinds of people of different races, cultures, and languages will live and work together in peace. Life will not be static and boring, but dynamic and creative.

“In the New Jerusalem,” Shirley C. Guthrie writes, “there will be community without uniformity, individuality without irresponsibility. The problem of individual rights versus community welfare will be solved in such a way that community serves individual, and individual serves the community, in a commonwealth of free responsible beings united in love.”⁴³

The image of the redeemed living together in the City of God in interrelatedness and interdependence represents the fulfillment of the divine intent for creation and redemption. At creation, God willed that human beings would find their fulfillment not by living alone, but in working together to subdue and have dominion over the earth. Through redemption, Christ reconciles us to God and to fellow beings, so that we can live in peace even with those whom we once viewed as enemies.

Urban Life Sanctioned by God. The Biblical vision of the Holy City in the new earth should teach us to view the structure of urban life as sanctioned by God. For many it is difficult to accept this view because our present cities are hardly a reflection of the City of God. On the contrary, they are the places where crime, hate, hostility, and indifference toward God and fellow beings prevail.

The present state of urban life should not cause us to reject, in principle, urbanization as a sinful social structure. The fact that urban life will continue on the new earth tells us that it will be possible for people to live together in a complex urban system of interrelatedness and interdependence without giving rise to the social, economic, ecological, political, and racial problems we experience today. Moreover, this vision of living together in the future City of God should challenge us as Christians not to abandon the cities en masse by fleeing to the country, but to work in and for the cities by offering our Christian influence and help to solve the many complex problems.

4. A Preview of Life in the New Earth

The chief Biblical passages which speak of life in the new earth (Is 65:17-25; 66:22-23; Rev 21:1 to 22:5) offer us only a glimpse of what life will really be like there. Thus, any attempt to characterize the life, the conditions, and the pursuits of the world to come must be seen as very limited and

imperfect efforts to describe a reality which “no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived” (2 Cor 2:9).

The Presence of God. A most unique and rewarding aspect of life on the new earth will be an unprecedented experience of the presence of God among His people. “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them” (Rev 21:3). These familiar words are the central promise of God’s covenant of grace (cf. Gen 17:7; Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10) which will be realized fully on the new earth.

In His parables, Jesus often spoke of human destiny in terms of being in God’s presence. He compared the destiny of His followers to a wedding feast where He Himself will be the bridegroom (Matt 25:1-13) or the host (Matt 22:1-10); also to a household, to which the Master, Christ Himself, returns to reward His faithful servants, saying: “enter into the joy of your master” (Matt 25:21; cf. Luke 12:35-38).

God’s presence on the new earth will be so real that “the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb” (Rev 21:23). This passage indicates that on the new earth, heaven, the place where God dwells, and earth, the human habitation, will no longer be separated but will be merged.

Believers will enjoy on the new earth the blessed fellowship that Adam and Eve experienced each Sabbath when God came to visit them. The Fall interrupted this blessed fellowship, but the Sabbath remained to remind believers of its future restoration (Heb 4:9). Our weekly celebration of the Sabbath nourishes our hope of the future fellowship with God on the new earth. That will be, as Augustine puts it, “the greatest of Sabbaths” when “we shall rest and we shall see; we shall see and we shall love; we shall love and we shall praise; this is what will be at the end without end.”⁴⁴

Fellowship with All Believers. The fellowship we will enjoy with the Trinity will bring us into communion with believers of all ages and from all over the world. Today we can only fellowship with those who live in our time and in our immediate surroundings. On the new earth, our fellowship will extend to those who lived in every age and country: patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, missionaries, pioneers, our family ancestors, and descendants, pastors, and laity.

The symbol of this grand fellowship is the great wedding banquet of the Lamb: “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev 19:9). This fellowship will include “a great multitude which no

man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues” (Rev 7:9). It is impossible to imagine the inspiration and information we will gain from becoming personally acquainted with the most gifted people who ever lived.

Absence of Evil. A most notable difference between our present life and that of the new earth will be the absence of all the things which now limit or harm our lives. The Devil, who is the ultimate source of all forms of evil, will be destroyed in the lake of fire (Rev 20:10). Consequently, there will be no more manifestation of evil within us or around us. It is hard to imagine what it will be like to live in the new world where there will be no more hate, jealousy, fear, hostility, discrimination, deception, oppression, killing, cut-throat competition, political rivalries, arms races, economic recessions, racial tensions, starvation, disparity between the rich and the poor, or sickness and death.

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:4). These bold strokes suggest far more than they actually indicate. They suggest that there will be no more incurable diseases, no more tragic accidents, no more crippled children, no more funeral services, no more permanent separations. They also suggest that we will be able to accomplish our God-inspired goals. In our present life, sickness or death often terminates the ambitious projects we are pursuing. On the new earth, everyone will have unlimited time and resources to achieve the highest goals.

Absence of Fear. The absence of evil will be evident especially in the absence of fear, insecurity, and anxiety. Our present life is constantly exposed to dangers, uncertainties, and fears. We fear the loss of our job, the break-in by a robber in our home, the break down of our car, the unfaithfulness of our marital partner, the failure of our children at school or at work, the deterioration of our health, the rejection by our peers. In a word, we fear all the uncertainties of life. Such fears fill our lives with anxiety, thus contradicting God’s purpose for us and diminishing our human potential.

Scripture uses various images to reassure us that on the new earth there will be no fear or insecurity. It speaks of a city with permanent foundations built by God Himself (Heb 11:10), and of “a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Heb 12:28). Perhaps the most suggestive picture of security for a first-century Christian was that of a city with “a great high wall” (Rev 21:12). Once the massive gates were closed in ancient cities, its citizens could live inside in relative security. To emphasize the complete security on the new earth, the

Holy City was shown to John as having walls which are as high as their length (Rev 21:16).

Another significant image designed to convey the sense of perfect security in the new earth is that of the disappearance of the sea (“the sea was no more”—Rev 21:1). For John the sea represented isolation in Patmos and separation from fellow-believers in the mainland. The sea was seen also as a threat to the security of the universe (cf. Rev 13:1; 17:15), especially by the Hebrews, who, not having a maritime force, were constantly exposed to the danger of sudden attacks from the sea. Thus, the absence of the sea from the new earth means the absence of threats to its security and harmony. The same sense of security would be best conveyed to twentieth-century Christians by other types of images such as: no alarm system, no security locks, no homeowner insurance, no security check points, or no strategic defense system. Irrespective of the imagery used, the assurance is that on the new earth we will be set free from the crippling effects of fear and anxiety.

Absence of Pollution. One of the most pleasant aspects of life on the new earth will be its clean environment. “Nothing unclean shall enter it, nor any one who practices abomination or falsehood” (Rev 21:27). Freedom from the moral pollution of sin will be reflected in the freedom from the physical pollution of the environment. Life will no longer be threatened by irresponsible pollution and depletion of natural resources, because the citizens of the new earth will be faithful stewards of God’s new creation. There will not be “smoking sections” on the new earth, because no one will ever wish to smoke his or her health away. What a relief it will be to be able to breathe always fresh, clean air outdoors and indoors; to be able to drink from any fountain clear, sparkling water; to be able to eat wholesome fresh food uncontaminated by pesticides or preservatives!

We are not told how God will purify this earth from its air, water, and soil pollution. Peter alludes to a purification by fire when he writes: “The heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire!” (2 Pet 3:12). Fire was known in the ancient world as the main purifying agent. It is feasible, however, that God will use other means beside fire to reach into the depths of the earth to clean up the toxic wastes dumped underground. Whatever method God may use to eliminate radically the pollution present in the air, water, and soil, the assurance is that the new earth will be both morally and physically clean.

Reassuring also is the fact that the citizens of the new earth will be responsible stewards of God’s new creation who will not spoil it again. They presumably will produce little waste and know how to dispose of it in such a

way that nature will be able to assimilate and process. A perfect ecological equilibrium will be preserved, which will guarantee the well-being of the human and subhuman creation.

Activity and Creativity. Life in the new earth will not be spent in idleness or passive mediation, but in productive activity and creativity. Those who think that the redeemed will live in the new world as glorified guests, fed, housed, and entertained by God, are totally misled. The new earth is not a kind of Disneyland magic world where God provides endless free rides to everyone. There will be no “free-loaders” in the world to come. Isaiah writes: “They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat” (Is 65:21-22).

The Biblical picture of tomorrow’s world is one in which real people engage in productive activity and creativity. There will be no lack of time or of resources to complete our projects. In the field of knowledge today, we only can scratch the surface of any discipline we choose to specialize in. The more we learn, the more we realize there is yet much to be learned. On the new earth, there will be no limit to our growth in knowledge and grace. “Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies. There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body.”⁴⁵

Continuity with Present Culture. Life in the new earth will involve some continuity with what we may loosely term our present culture. This is suggested by the fact, noted earlier, that the Bible speaks of the transformation of this world rather than of its annihilation. Continuity is also indicated by the resurrection of the body, which implies a preservation and continuation of our personalities from death into resurrection.

Another significant indication of continuity is found in Revelation 21:24, 26 which says: “The kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it [the city], . . . they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.” This passage suggests, first of all that the inhabitants of the new earth will include persons who have attained great prominence and power in this world: kings, presidents, scientists, and the like. Second, the unique contribution which each nation has made to the betterment of the present life will enrich the life of the new earth. This gives us reason to believe that the technological breakthroughs of our time in the fields of computers, communication, and travel will not be lost but greatly enhanced, refined, and perfected.

Stephen Travis perceptively notes that “God who affirms the goodness of the world he has made, will not simply write it off with all its wealth of art and beauty and human inventiveness. In God’s economy nothing is wasted. All the creative work of men and women which reflects the abundant creativity of God will be carried over into the transformed world.”⁴⁶ God values our creative accomplishments, often produced at great personal sacrifice. It is comforting to think that their value will extend beyond this present life to the new earth. The preservation on the new earth of the unique accomplishments of mankind suggests also that life there will not be dull and colorless, but exciting and fulfilling.

Regular Worship. Central to the life on the new earth will be the regular worship of God. Isaiah describes the regularity and stability of worship on the new earth in terms familiar to his time: “From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the Lord” (Is 66:23). The context indicates that this regular gathering for worship refers, first of all, to the hoped-for political restoration of Jerusalem and of its religious services (v. 20), and second, to the End-time restoration of this earth, of which the former was a type. The prophets often see the ultimate divine accomplishments through the transparency of imminent historical events.

Isaiah mentions the “new moon” together with the Sabbath because the former played a vital role in determining the beginning of the new year, of each month, and also the date for celebrating key annual festivals such as Passover, Pentecost, and the Day of Atonement. Since the date of the new moon was determined by actual observation, its appearance was crucial to the stability of the civil and religious calendar. This is why Isaiah (66:23) and Ezekiel (46:3) speak of regular assembling on the new moon and on the Sabbath in the restored Jerusalem. To them, this signified worship regularity and stability.

There is no reason to believe that the redeemed will assemble for worship on the day of the new moon because its primary function was to aid the Israelites in calculating their annual feasts and in preparing for them. Isaiah mentions the new moon as a time of regular worship gathering on the new earth because he describes the latter in the context of the historical regathering of the Jews “from all the nations” (Is 66:20). It is necessary therefore to distinguish between those elements which applied to national Israel, such as the new moon, and those elements which will continue in the new earth, such as the Sabbath. Moreover, it is important to note that Isaiah’s concern is to emphasize the stability and regularity of both the social and religious life (“the new earth . . . your descendants and your name . . . shall

remain”—Is 66:22). This assurance applies both to the past promised restoration of Jerusalem and to the future life in the new earth.

Richer Worship. On the new earth, both personal and public worship not only will be regular but also richer in expression and meaning. The hymns in the book of Revelation give us a glimpse of what such worship may be like. It is said that the 144,000 will sing “a new song” which no one could learn except those “who had been redeemed from the earth” (Rev 14:3). Presumably this song is new and unique because it is a song of experience which expresses personal gratitude to God for His marvelous redemption. Those who have conquered the final deception are seen by John as standing on or beside what appeared to be like a “sea of glass mingled with fire” and singing “the song of the Lamb,” which says: “Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, O King of the Ages! . . . All nations shall come and worship thee, for thy judgments have been revealed” (Rev 15:2-4).

The hymns of the book of Revelation suggest that the keynote of worship on the new earth will be the praise of the worthiness of God for His perfect creation (4:11), marvelous redemption (5:9, 12) and final vindication and restoration of His people (15:3-4; 19:1-3). Since the essence of worship is the acknowledgment of the worthiness of God through praise and adoration, worship on the new earth will be richer than here because the redeemed will have a fuller appreciation of the worthiness of God.

In this present life, we worship God though we do not always understand why He allows the wicked to prosper and the innocent to suffer. On the new earth, this mystery will be solved as the redeemed are given the opportunity to understand the fairness of God’s judgments. “All nations shall come and worship thee, for thy judgments have been revealed” (Rev 15:4). This revelation of divine justice and mercy will inspire the redeemed to praise God, saying: “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just” (Rev 19:1-2).

Worship will be richer on the new earth, not only because of the fuller appreciation of God’s mercy and justice, but also because of the opportunity to worship God visibly. “The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in [the city], and his servants shall worship him; they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads” (Rev 22:3-4). This text suggests that the worship of God in the new earth will enrich believers with a fuller knowledge and enjoyment of God. In a sense, this is the ultimate function of the worship of God, namely, to experience His presence, peace, and power in our lives. This experience will be so real in the new earth that the place will truly be heaven.

CONCLUSION

In the opening chapter we affirmed that what we believe about the make-up of our human nature largely determines what we believe about our ultimate destiny. During the course of our study, we have compared and contrasted the *dualistic* view of human nature, which emphasizes the distinction between the material, mortal body and the spiritual, immortal soul, and the *wholistic* view, which emphasizes the unity of body, soul, and spirit, each being part of an indivisible organism.

Our study has shown that the dualistic view of human nature is largely derived from Greek philosophers and has greatly influenced Christian beliefs and practices. For example, the belief that the body is mortal and the soul immortal has led to the strange definition of death as the separation of the immortal soul from the mortal body rather than the cessation of life as clearly attested in Scripture. This unbiblical definition of death has fostered the popular belief in the transition of the soul at the moment of death to paradise, hell, or purgatory. In turn, the latter belief gave rise to the Catholic belief in the intercessory role of the saints and to the belief that the church on earth has the jurisdiction to apply the merits of the saints to souls suffering in purgatory.

Regarding the final punishment of the wicked, we noted how the belief in the immortality of the soul influenced an interpretation of hell where the lost are supposed to be tormented by God for all eternity. Such a view is in deep trouble today because more and more Christians are rejecting it for Biblical and moral reasons. Biblically, the rich imagery and language of destruction used throughout the Bible to portray the fate of the wicked clearly indicate that their final punishment results in annihilation and not eternal conscious torment. Morally, the doctrine of eternal, conscious torment is incompatible with the Biblical revelation of divine love and justice.

In this final chapter, we found that dualism has weakened the expectation of Christ's coming by leading people to believe that they can meet Christ at death as disembodied souls. It has rendered the final judgment practically unnecessary by teaching that each person is judged at death by being sent to heaven or consigned to hell. It has spiritualized away the resurrection of the body and the world to come by depreciating the physical aspect of the resurrected body and the material aspect of the world to come. The outcome of dualism is that most Christians today are hardly inspired by the vision of an ethereal paradise, where they are expected to live for all eternity as glorified souls engaged in everlasting singing, meditation, and contemplation.

It is impossible to estimate the negative impact of dualism on various aspects of Christian life and thought. Many scholars have recognized that the body-soul dualism has fostered other dichotomies which are in conflict with the Biblical view of human nature and detrimental to people. Theologians often have linked the body-soul dualism to the sacred-secular dualism, which differentiates between the sacred and secular aspects of life, thereby cutting loose part of life from the claims of the gospel. Missiologists acknowledge that dualism has led to a truncated witness of the gospel, which focuses on saving souls without ministering to the whole human being.

Educators find the negative influence of dualism in the traditional curricula, where the emphasis is on cultivating the mind at the expense of the total person. Doctors and psychologists recognize that dualism may be responsible for the failure to recognize the psychosomatic dynamics of physical and emotional sickness. Since no attempt was made in this study to examine the various areas that have been impacted by dualism, by way of conclusion I briefly allude to three significant aspects of dualism: (1) Religious Dualism, (2), Moral Dualism, and (3) Social Dualism.

Religious Dualism. Body-soul dualism has fostered an illegitimate division of life into two separate areas: religious life versus secular life, sacred calling versus secular profession, or, to use a medieval distinction, *vita contemplativa* versus *vita activa*. Some scholars see this modern sacred-secular dichotomy as the direct result of body-soul, nature-grace distinction of medieval theology.⁴⁶

As in human nature there is a spiritual soul that is distinct from the material body, so in human life, in general, there is a spiritual or sacred realm consisting of theological beliefs, personal piety, and morality which are separate from the secular realm of life, consisting of secular pursuits. The latter can be practiced successfully without reference to the principles of divine revelation. Thus business, science, politics, art, entertainment, and culture are seen as inherently secular pursuits which are not directly affected by religious values. Religion and faith must stay out of the secular world because the latter operate according to different criteria.

This dualistic mentality creates a false dichotomy between the religious and secular realms of life. It ignores that Biblical principles and the transforming power of the gospel can and must shape all human activities. It overlooks the Biblical wholistic view of human life and nature, according to which the body and soul, the physical and the spiritual, and the human and subhuman creation, are all the object of God's good creation and final restoration.

Moral Dualism. Body-soul dualism has contributed to a polarization or hierarchy of values within society. This trend can be seen in the historical tendency to consider the soul superior to the body and, consequently, intellectual pursuits more important than manual work. “In some circles,” notes John Cooper, “ministers, doctors, and professors are still esteemed more than plumbers and farmers simply because they are highly educated and work primarily with their minds rather than with their hands. There are Christians who regard the world as not just secular but as ‘dirty’ and not a proper place for the involvement of a truly spiritual person.”⁴⁷

Another significant distinction fostered by dualism is found between the clergy and the laity. Historically, people who devoted themselves to the sacred calling of a religious life have been viewed as holier than those who follow a secular profession. The holier status of the clergy is acknowledged by the use of ecclesiastical vestments and special titles such as “Reverend or Holy Father.” The calling of the clergy has been regarded as sacred because they devote themselves to saving souls, while the laity is preoccupied with meeting the needs of the body. This kind of moral dualism has accorded to certain professions or dimensions of life a primary or superior status while others have been regarded as secondary or inferior.

Social Dualism. The body-soul dualism also has been implicated in the illegitimate separation and devaluation of certain groups of people. The most blatant examples are classism and racism. A standard rationale for the subjection and exploitation of certain minority groups is that they lack fully human souls. White supremacists have argued that Black Africans and American Indians are not endowed with rational souls, hence they can be oppressed legitimately.

It is impossible to estimate the total impact of the body-soul dualism on our religious, social, and political structures. Dividing humans into body and soul has promoted all sorts of false dichotomies in human life. It has led to the surrender of vast areas of life, moral values, and knowledge to the forces of secularism and humanism.

The Need to Recover Biblical Wholism. The far-reaching doctrinal and practical implications of dualism we have considered during the course of this study should serve to impress the reader with the need to recover the Biblical wholistic vision of human nature and destiny. Biblical wholism challenges us to view positively both the physical and spiritual aspects of our life, because our body and soul are an indissoluble unit, created and redeemed by God. The way we treat our body reflects the spiritual condition of our soul because our body is “a temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:18). If we pollute

our bodies with tobacco, alcohol, drugs, and unhealthful food, we cause not only the *physical pollution* of our body but also the *spiritual pollution* of our soul.

Biblical wholism challenges us to be concerned about the whole person by seeking to meet both the spiritual needs of the soul and the physical needs of the body. In its outreach, the church should seek to save both the “souls” of people *and* to improve their living conditions by working in such areas as health, diet, and education.

Christian schools also should be concerned about the development of the whole person. The school programs should aim at the development of the mental, physical, and spiritual aspects of life. Health practitioners should treat illness in the context of the whole person, including physical, emotional, nutritional, and spiritual conditions.

The Biblical wholistic view of human nature presupposes a cosmic view of redemption that encompasses the body and the soul, the material and the spiritual world. It envisions not an ethereal paradise inhabited by glorified souls, but this planet earth restored to its original perfection and inhabited by real people who will engage in real-life and activities. In the world to come life will not be static and boring, but dynamic and creative.

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,

This will be the consummation of our redemption: the time when, as eloquently expressed by Ellen White, “Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare the God is love.”⁴⁹

NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1. Anthony J. Wilhelm, *Christ among Us. A Modern Presentation of the Catholic Faith* (New York, 1985), p. 417.
2. Ibid., p. 416.
3. Oscar Cullman, *Christ and Time* (Philadelphia, 1964), p. 147.
4. Cited by G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids, 1972), p. 34. The same view is expressed by Russell Foster Aldwincinckle, *Death in the Secular City* (London, 1972), p. 82.
5. Oscar Cullman (note 3), p. 234.
6. Stephen H. Travis, *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 171.
7. See chapter 7, “The Nature and Function of the Advent Signs,” in Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness* (Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1994).
8. Oscar Cullmann, *Salvation in History*, trans. S. G. Sowers (New York, 1967), p. 84.
9. See, for example, J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids, 1980), pp. 402-411.
10. Anthony A. Hoekema expresses the same view, saying: “The contrast here is not between the resurrection of believers and unbelievers, but between the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the rapture of believers who are still living when Christ returns. Paul is telling the Thessalonians that the resurrection of deceased believers will precede the transformation and rapture of living believers at the time of the Parousia” (*The Bible and the Future* [Grand Rapids, 1979], 244).
11. Seventh-day Adventists believe that at the Second Advent there will also be a “special resurrection” of certain wicked persons who have fiercely opposed the work of God. This belief rests primarily on Revelation 1:7 which says that even those “who pierced him [Christ]” will witness His glorious Coming (cf. Dan 12:2).
12. Anthony A. Hoekema (note 10), p. 247.
13. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York, 1960), p. 467.
14. George Eldon Ladd, *The Last Things* (Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 79.

15. See, for example, W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (New York, 1955), pp. 183, 308; R. Kabisch, *Die Eschatologie des Paulus* (Göttingen, 1893), pp. 113, 188, 206, 269; R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (London, 1952), Vol. 1, p. 198.

16. Murray J. Harris, *Raised Immortal. Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament* (London, 1986), p. 121.

17. Anthony A. Hoekema (note 10), p. 250.

18. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids, 1963), p. 192.

19. Ibid.

20. Anthony A. Hoekema (note 10), p. 250.

21. A comparative table listing the various versions of the Apostles' Creed is found in Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 181.

22. Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, Chapter 35, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, 1973), vol. 3, p. 571.

23. Michael Perry, *The Resurrection of Man* (Oxford, 1975), p. 119.

24. Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (New York, 1959), p. 154.

25. Helmut Thielicke, *Death and Life* (Philadelphia, 1970), p. 198.

26. John W. Cooper, "The Identity of the Resurrected Persons: Fatal Flaw of Monistic Anthropology," *Calvin Theological Journal* 23, no. 1 (April 1988), p. 26.

27. Ibid., p. 20.

28. Ibid., p. 27.

29. Charles Hartshorne, *The Logic of Perfection* (Lasalle, Illinois, 1962), pp. 177-178.

30. Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (Nashville, 1954), p. 229.

31. Ibid., pp. 164-165.

32. For a brief discussion of those theologians who either ignore or reject the future final judgment, see Leon Morris, *The Biblical Doctrine of Judgment* (Grand Rapids, 1960), pp. 54-58.

33. T. Francis Glasson, "The Last Judgment in Rev. 20 and Related Writings," *New Testament Studies* 28 (1982), p. 537.

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34. In *Tracts and Treatises in Defense of the Reformed Faith*, trans. H. Beveridge (Grand Rapids, 1965), Vol. 3, p. 152.
 35. Emil Brunner, *The Letter to the Romans* (London, 1959), p. 20.
 36. William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Philadelphia, 1960), pp. 232-234.
 37. Austin M. Farrar, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Oxford, 1964), p. 210.
 38. G. C. Berkouwer (note 18), p. 220.
 39. J. Behm, "Kainos," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, 1974), vol. 3, p. 447.
 40. Anthony A. Hoekema (n. 13), p. 281.
 41. Cited in Stephen Travis (note 6), p. 176.
 42. See, Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Sabbath in the New Testament* (Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1985), pp. 50-65; also, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* (Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1994), pp. 134-138.
 43. Shirley C. Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine* (Atlanta, 1968), p. 398.
 44. Augustine, *City of God* 22; 30.
 45. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, California, 1950), p. 677.
 46. Steve Travis, *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, 1985), p. 124.
 47. See, for example, Arvin Vos, *Aquinas, Calvin, and Contemporary Protestant Thought* (Grand Rapids, 1985), pp. 124-133.
 48. John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, 1989), p. 203.
 49. Ellen G. White (note 45), p. 678.