



# The Areopagus

## UPDATE

### Ruminations on Thanatology

By Jefrey Breshears

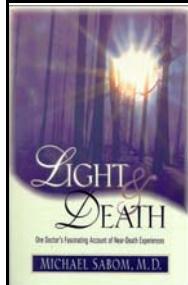
Last week I attended two funeral/memorial services in two days. I truly hope this was an anomaly rather than the beginning of a trend. I'm in no rush to reach the point in life, as my father occasionally quipped in his last years, when "most of the people I know are dead."

To paraphrase a quote by the renowned 18<sup>th</sup> century English essayist, Samuel Johnson, "The thought that one will hang in a fortnight has a wonderful effect in terms of concentrating one's mind." I feel somewhat the same way when I attend a memorial service: it's a stark and vivid reminder of just how ephemeral and transitory this life is – as well as a wonderful opportunity to focus on what really matters.

Thanatology is the study of death and dying, and in the next couple of months the Areopagus will sponsor forums on two kinds of Thanatos: personal/physical death and cultural death. As Christians, we should care about both.

The Bible says surprisingly little about physical death and what awaits us beyond the veil of this life. Likewise, few Christian philosophers and theologians throughout history have written much on the subject. Apparently, our time and energy is supposed to be focused on the development of our faith and character in this life rather than fixated on the next dimension of reality. But there's nothing improper about ruminating on the issue from time to time, and for those interested in a thoughtful approach to the subject, there are

three books I'd recommend: Gary Habermas and J. P. Moreland's *Beyond Death: Exploring the Evidence for Immortality* (1998); Dinesh D'Souza's *Life After Death: The Evidence* (2009); and Michael Sabom's *Light and Death* (1998).

Dr. Michael Sabom, our Areopagus Forum speaker on March 17, has researched and written extensively on the phenomena accompanying Near Death Experiences (NDE's) as evidence of life after death.

Beginning in 1994, Dr. Sabom conducted "the Atlanta Study" in which he interviewed nearly 50 people who had returned from death's door. In his book, *Light and Death*, he relates that, as these people came close to death, their "essence" or "spirit" actually seemed to leave their body, and upon recovery their testimonies revealed startling insights into the transition from this realm of reality to the next.

The following month, on April 21, Dr. Vishal Mangalwadi will

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March / April 2011



### The Areopagus Calendar

#### — Upcoming Forums —

##### "Is There Life After Death? The Biblical and Scientific Evidence"

Dr. Michael Sabom, M.D.

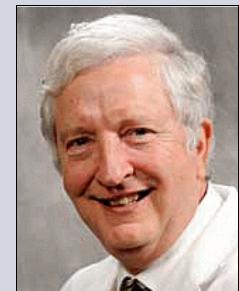
Tuesday, Mar. 17

7:30 PM

Perimeter Church

Since the publication in 1975 of Raymond Moody's best-seller, *Life After Life*, the issue of Near-Death Experiences (NDE's) has been a matter of great interest. It has also been the subject of great controversy as Moody's findings – along with those of his colleague, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross – were based exclusively on anecdotal testimonies and interpreted through a decidedly non-Christian worldview.

In the late 1970s Dr. Michael Sabom, a Christian cardiologist, began collecting and analyzing the testimonies of



medical patients who experienced the phenomena associated with Near-Death Experiences. The results of his research were published in 1983 in his ground-breaking book, *Recollections of Death*, the first scientifically-documented analysis of the evidence. After several additional years of research and reflection, Dr. Sabom summarized his findings in *Light and Death* (Zondervan, 1998).

In this special Areopagus Forum presentation, Dr. Sabom correlates more than 30 years of scientific research with Biblical insights into death and dying.

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# Ruminations on Thanatology

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address another kind of death – what we might refer to as Cultural Thanatology. Ours is a culture in crisis, and as Christians we are called to be a source of light and truth within a society that is becoming increasingly rude and crude. The erosion of Christian influence (not to mention simple decency and civility) in our society is apparent in every area of life from law and politics to business, education, the media, the arts and entertainment, public behavior, and private morality.

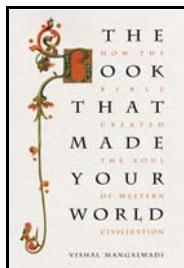
For the past twenty years Dr. Mangalwadi has lectured and written on the inevitable consequences resulting from the collapse of traditional biblically-based morality and ethics, and we're honored to have him with us as he begins a nationwide speaking tour to promote his latest book, *The Book That Made Your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization*.

As Christians, we understand that there is a third kind of death that is more tragic than either personal/physical death or cultural death – yet ironically it is the only form of death that isn't eventually inevitable. This is, of course, spiritual death – the kind referred to in Revelation 20 that will occur at the culmination of this present age with the Great White Throne Judgment. At that time, all humanity will be judged “according to what they have done,” and those whose names

are not found in the Book of Life will experience what Scripture calls “the second death.”

Ultimately, this is the only kind of death that we need fear because it is the only kind of death that separates us forever from the love, the grace, and the presence of God. But God has provided an alternative destiny through Jesus, who declared: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never [spiritually] die” [John 11:25].

It is the living Jesus, “the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” who we honor at every Areopagus event. Join us in March and April for two fascinating presentations on two different kinds of death as we correspondingly celebrate the One who is the source of all life – both in this world and in the one that awaits us.



**Warren Cole Smith,**  
associate publisher of *World*  
magazine, speaks at our Areopagus  
Forum in February on “The Greatest  
Challenge to American Christianity:  
Corruption, Hypocrisy, and Heresy  
in the Church”

## The Areopagus Calendar

### — Upcoming Forums —

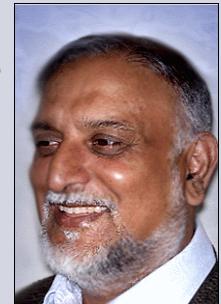
#### **“Must the Sun Set on America and the West?”**

by Dr. Vishal Mangalwadi

Thursday, April 21, 7:30 PM  
Perimeter Church

Is the decline of America inevitable, or is there still time to save our civilization?

Dr. Vishal Mangalwadi, a Christian philosopher, international lecturer, and author of thirteen books, is an astute observer of the state of Western civilization who is best known for his highly-acclaimed 2007 lecture series, **“Must the Sun Set on the West?”**



On April 21 the Areopagus will host Dr. Mangalwadi's global book launch, ***The Book That Made Your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization*** (Thomas Nelson, 2011), which is scheduled for broadcast on C-SPAN's Book TV soon thereafter.

#### **“Three Christian Views on Creation and Evolution”**

Thursday, May 19, 7:30 PM  
Perimeter Church

A special Areopagus Forum featuring presentations by three Christian scholars who represent different views on creation and evolution: Dr. David Mapes (Young Earth Creationism); Dr. Rod Nave (Old Earth Progressive Creation); and Dr. Mark Whorton (Theistic Evolution).

For background information on the key issues in this debate, attendees are encouraged to read J. P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds, eds., ***Three Views on Creation and Evolution*** (Zondervan, 1999).