



# The Outlook

*Devoted to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith*

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# Skeletons in the Closet of Christmas

*“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David”*  
(Matthew 1:1)

Skeletons lurk in the closet. Every family has at least one if we are honest enough to level with one another. Adultery, divorce, alcohol and drug addiction, suicide, and physical abuse are just some of the skeletons we keep under lock and key in our family’s basement cellar. The painful memories of relatives enslaved by the death grip of sin still haunt us today. Let’s face it: a private eye could dig up enough dirt on us to bury our family’s reputation.

The Christmas story tells us that we are in good company. There are skeletons in the closet of Christmas. What is amazing in Matthew’s Gospel is that God directs the skeletons to come out of the closet so that the stage may be set for Advent. God could have easily moved Matthew to air brush the rough edges of His Christmas message. However, God never glosses over the historical facts that the ancestors of Jesus were not what we might call “girl scouts” or “choirboys”.

God comes right out and tells us that Jesus Christ descended from a long line of hard-core sinners. But to echo Jesus’ tough talk: be my guest to throw the first stone if you are without sin (John 8:7). True enough: Jesus’ family tree is full of bad apples. However, God casts these shady characters in His drama of salvation to tell us the greatest news ever told.

For starters, take Adam and Eve. Our first parents were guilty of high treason. They would have rather ruled in perdition than serve in Paradise (Genesis 3:1-24). Even though she had it all, Eve took Satan’s bait—hook, line, and sinker. And Adam followed suit. Adam and Eve teamed up with Satan to go to war with God. Instead of washing His hands of the mess, God



Volume 52, No. 11 (ISSN 8750-5754) (USPS 633-980) *“And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands ... and they cried, ‘The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon’ (Judges 7:20).*

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promised Christmas to regain Paradise lost. God graciously curses the serpent to rescue the seed of the woman from the fall (Genesis 3:15).

Just when we thought it couldn't get any worse, Judah and Tamar hook up in a story of sexual immorality (Genesis 38:1-30). Judah was a man who up and left the church for the fast times of the nightlife. Tamar wanted a baby so badly that she committed prostitution. These are the kinds of Old Testament stories we usually skip over during family devotions because little ears are listening! In spite of all this high-handed sin, God sends Perez to continue the line of Judah for the sake of Christmas (Matthew 1:3).

The road to Bethlehem takes a turn through the pagan land of Jericho where we meet another bad girl of the Bible (Joshua 2:1-24). Rahab's neighbors would have thought nothing of two men getting a room at her place. After all, Rahab was a shady lady who turned tricks to make money. But despite Rahab's checkered past, God moves closer to the miracle in the manger. The Lord reaches outside of the church to turn this shameful prostitute into a mother of Jesus. God tied the knot between Salmon and Rahab and blessed them with Boaz from whom comes Jesus, the Kinsman-Redeemer (Matthew 1:5).

Jerusalem is our last stop on the road from the Garden of Eden to the little town of Bethlehem. Here is where King David was "on top of the world" and yet he is another ancestor of Jesus who blew it big time. David sinned royally. He slept with another man's wife. To make matters worse, David mur-

dered his girlfriend's husband to cover up the child he conceived out of wedlock (II Samuel 11:27; cf. Psalm 51:1-19). This story reads like one of those tabloid headlines you read at the grocery store check-out lane! David's sin found him out and he paid for it dearly. Nevertheless the God of new beginnings breaks more ground to pave the way for Advent. From great David, came his greater Son Jesus, the perfect Pastor of God's people (Matthew 1:6).

It is literally a miracle that Christmas ever came! No thanks to this

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***This cast of social riff raff standing in the backdrop of the Advent scene means that there's room around the cradle for you and me.***

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rough crowd, the God of grace sent His sinless Son in whom He forgives Adam and Eve's high treason, Judah and Tamar's sexual immorality, Rahab's prostitution, and David's adultery. That's the good news of Jesus' family tree we celebrate this Christmas season! This cast of social riff raff standing in the backdrop of the Advent scene means that there's room around the cradle for you and me.

We are looking in the mirror when we see these sinners. Come out of the closet with all your skeletons and go to God with your checkered past. Lay all your cards on the table this Christmas. Come clean with

Bethlehem's Baby by admitting that you have sinned royally. Believe in your heart that God laid the King of forgiveness in a manger to wash away all the dirt of sin He has on us.

Confess with your mouth that this man-child was born in Bethlehem's cradle to die at Calvary's cross for the forgiveness of your sins (Matthew 1:21). And then unite your voice with this choir of sinners turned saints to thank God for the indescribable gift of Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 9:15). Pray like you have never prayed before that God's surprising grace in the advent of Jesus would shock you into a change of heart and a transformation of life.

There was not much to that first Christmas: an ordinary looking baby boy born to peasants in a small city and cradled by a feed trough. But because it was not much, it's a fitting place this Christmas for us to kneel and confess in faith: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (II Timothy 1:15).

**Rev. Kevin Hossink** is the pastor of the Bethany Covenant Reformed Church in South Holland, Illinois.

# The Snare Of Misdirected Pity

## Part One

“Do not look on them with pity ...” Does it surprise you that God gave this command in the Bible? It is found in Deuteronomy in the context of Moses instructing the Israelites before entering the land of Canaan. In the passage, Moses gave the people this warning from God: “You must destroy all the peoples the Lord your God gives over to you. Do not look on them with pity and do not serve their gods, for that will be a snare to you” (Deut. 7:16). Israel did not obey that command as they should have. The Canaanites, whom the Israelites failed to destroy along with their gods, became a snare to them, just as God had said. They led Israel into intermarriage and idol worship. How slow God’s people were then and how slow God’s people still are today in learning that God knows what He is talking about!

Psalms 106:34-36 addresses Israel’s disobedience:

*They did not destroy the  
peoples  
as the Lord had com-  
manded them,  
but they mingled with the  
nations  
and adopted their cus-  
toms.  
They worshiped their  
idols,  
Which became a snare to  
them.*

Another passage in which God demands that no pity be shown is also

found in Deuteronomy: “But if a man hates his neighbor and lies in wait for him, assaults and kills him, and then flees to one of these cities, the elders of his town shall send for him, bring him back from the city, and hand him over to the avenger of blood to die. Show him no pity. You must purge from Israel the guilt of shedding innocent blood, so that

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***In our culture, the  
Christian has the  
temptation to have  
pity or compassion  
upon what God has  
spoken against in  
Scripture.***

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it may go well with you” (Deut. 19:11-13).

Later in Deuteronomy 19, God again instructs the Israelites to show no pity: “If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse a man of a crime, the two men involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the Lord, before the priests and the judges who are in office at the time. The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, then do to him as he intended to do to his brother. You must purge the evil from among

you. The rest of the people will hear of this and be afraid, and never again will such an evil thing be done among you. Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” (Deut. 19:16-21).

Notice that both Deuteronomy 19 passages state that the reason for God’s command, “Show no pity,” was for the purpose of purging evil from among His people. One passage gives the result of obedience: “so that it may go well with you” and the other: “and never again will such an evil thing be done among you.”

Still another such Scripture passage is Deuteronomy 13:6-9: “If your very own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, ‘Let us go and worship other gods’ (gods that neither you nor your fathers have known, gods of the peoples around you, whether near or far, from one end of the land to the other), do not yield to him or listen to him. Show him no pity. Do not spare him or shield him. You must certainly put him to death. Your hand must be the first in putting him to death, and then the hands of all the people.”

We are living in a society filled with tragic violence on one hand and extreme tolerance and pity on the other. Violence, of course, is very easy for the Christian to see as wrong and to be avoided. In reaction to the harshness and violence in our culture, the Christian has the temptation to have pity or compassion upon what God has spoken against in Scripture. When we pity what God does not want pitied, tolerated, nor accepted, it becomes a



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snare to us and prevents the individual Christian and the church from purging the evil from among God's people.

While the Scripture passages quoted are from the Old Testament, I believe they contain principles which are very applicable today. In the Old Testament God often used putting to death as a means of purging evil. In the New Testament God commands us to purge evil by not allowing nor tolerating the sin in the church nor in one's life. God goes on to list a number of sins as barriers to eternal life. We must be careful not to show compassion to, allow, nor tolerate that which God has specifically condemned or spoken against in His Word. If we fail to obey God it will become a snare to the Christian and the church.

The non-Christian does not believe in the justice and sovereignty of God. Because of this, humanism takes over. Instead of God's Word and His holiness and sovereignty, human pity and tolerance become the standard. Pity and tolerance practiced by Christians today, in areas where God has said otherwise in Scripture, have become a snare to religious leaders, lay people, and the church.

In the book, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*, Robert H. Bork gives equality as the cause for the extreme pity or compassion and tolerance present in our culture. Bork makes the following statements:

Equality is "the single most powerful and radical ideological force in all of American history and egalitarianism became our "triumphant passion" in this [20th] cen-

ture. This is having, and will continue to have, very unpleasant consequences (p. 81).

...Democratic man, thinking that others are like himself, identifies with anyone who suffers.<sup>1</sup> This compassion born of the passion for equality leads to the power of claiming victim status. We have become what Charles S. Sykes called a nation of victims.<sup>2</sup> (p. 81).

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***We must be careful  
not to show  
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His Word.***

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Homosexuality, euthanasia, radical feminism, abortion, lack of discipline, permissiveness, divorce, universal salvation, and no-lordship theology are some of the unpleasant consequences which are finding a foothold in the church and in the church community because professing Christians wrongfully "look on with pity" rather than hate what God detests and finds abominable. This results in encouraging people upon a path away from following what God has declared in His Word.

#### **Homosexuality**

One example of misdirected pity is the view many Christians have

taken toward homosexuality. Homosexual lifestyles are being accepted and tolerated by some church people today out of their pity for gays and lesbians as people. Professing Christians are accepting the belief that homosexuality is of genetic origin when the Bible clearly states that a homosexual lifestyle is detestable to God. (Lev. 18:22 and 20:13; Rom. 1:26-28,32). Scripture teaches that God condemns the behavior and holds the person responsible for it. When we pity a sinner and thereby let him continue in his sin, it will become a snare to the church and to the Christian.

In 1997, a well known theologian and author, Dr. Lewis Smedes, came to Grand Rapids for a lecture visit at Calvin Seminary. He was interviewed by the Grand Rapids Press Religion Editor, Charles Honey.

In Mr. Honey's report of the interview, March 15, 1997, he describes Dr. Smedes as "a man of principle and passion." In his article Honey writes:

...Smedes also draws heavily on the realities of human life. He saw some harsh realities as president of the Grand Rapids Urban League in the early 1960s. Today, the human condition tears at his heart.

But he also believes most gays cannot change orientation and certainly didn't choose it.

The oft-advised option that gays should be celibate, he [Smedes] thinks, is "asking more than most people can

bear.” For most, if celibacy is impossible, the best option is “a lifelong, committed partnership.

If Dr. Smedes has been quoted accurately, he appears to be putting human experience and compassion before God’s teachings in Scripture. Pity, human concern, and compassion come through so strongly as an attempt to justify Dr. Smedes’ stand, trying to portray him as a man of great compassion and concern but, nonetheless, compromising the stand of the Bible and many churches.

The following quote from *The Banner*, August 14, 2000, p. 23, written by Don and Carmen Bergman, in which they quote from Dr. Smedes’ book, exemplifies the ramifications of the beliefs and teachings of Dr. Smedes:

We accepted our gay son, asked the school and students to stop the harassment of gay individuals, and told our son that we expect him to remain celibate, but if that was not possible then to choose “the best moral option available” - to live in a committed relationship of love (see *Sex for Christians* by Lewis Smedes, p. 243).

An article in *The Banner*, June 3, 2002, entitled: “Our Agenda for Synod 2002 (Article 2 of 2),” by John Suk, p. 4, again states the beliefs and teachings of Dr. Lewis Smedes:

...The committee notes, however, that many gay people and even some Christian Reformed ministers, such as well-known author and retired Fuller Theo-

logical Seminary professor, Louis [sic] Smedes, have a different point of view.

Smedes argues that even though God intended for humans to be heterosexual, “God prefers homosexual people to live in committed and faithful monogamous relationships with each other when they cannot change their condition and do not have the gift to be celibate [sic]. (p. 322).

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***Why is it more difficult or impossible to expect a gay or lesbian person to be celibate than it is to expect it from a heterosexual unmarried man or woman?***

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Do you wonder, with me, how Dr. Lewis Smedes knows that God prefers this? Why is it more difficult or impossible to expect a gay or lesbian person to be celibate than it is to expect it from a heterosexual unmarried man or woman? Dr. James Dobson in his book, *Bringing Up Boys*, p. 129, addresses this thought:

If homosexuals can claim to be genetically predisposed to lust after their own sex, why does that make their circumstances different from unmarried heterosexuals? Single individuals are certainly programmed by hered-

ity to desire fulfillment with the opposite sex, but they are called to a world of purity. Promiscuity for unmarried heterosexuals is the moral equivalent of promiscuity for homosexuals. Liberal ministers who are revising Church standards to sanction sexual expression by homosexuals must, I would think, extend the same concession to heterosexual singles. But before they do, some Scriptural justification should be found to support the “new morality.” I think none exists.

Incidentally, in *The Banner* article by John Suk, quoted earlier, he writes: “. . . It [the committee] has replaced most references to homosexuality with the term “same sex attraction,” something that [CRC] Synod 1999 suggested.” The 2002 Synod telephone reporter used “same sex attraction” consistently rather than “homosexuality” in the reports about Synod. Do you see a parallel between this and calling abortion “pro-choice”? Softening the terminology hides the seriousness and truthfulness of the behavior or situation.

Much pity is shown to the gay and lesbian today because of the loud voices they sound in America in demanding and pleading for compassion and acceptance of their lifestyle. The church and individual Christian must be alert to this danger or snare in our present-day society with the homosexual community promoting their lifestyle as a genetic condition; and, therefore, proclaiming that their unbiblical behavior must be allowed and ac-



cepted out of pity for one in those circumstances.

In his book, *Bringing Up Boys*, p. 118, Dr. James Dobson states the following about the genetic origin debate:

[T]here is no evidence to indicate that homosexuality is inherited, despite everything you may have heard or read to the contrary. There are no respected geneticists in the world today who claim to have found a so-called "gay gene" or other indicator of genetic transmission. This is not to say that there may not be some kind of biological predisposition or an inherited temperament that makes one vulnerable to environmental influences. But efforts to identify such factors have been inconclusive. Despite this lack of evidence, the gay and lesbian organizations and their friends, the mainstream media, continue to tell the public that the issue is settled - that gays are "born that way".

In an article, "A change of tune on homosexuality," in the *Grand Rapids Press*, May 14, 2001, Cal Thomas elaborates on a study done by Dr. Robert L. Spitzer, a professor of psychiatry at Columbia University, and his consequent change of mind:

In 1973 he [Dr. Robert L. Spitzer] persuaded the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality from its official diagnostic manual of mental disorders. At the time, Dr. Spitzer was hailed by many

as a scientific Moses, leading homosexuals out of their closeted captivity.

Dr. Spitzer spoke again recently to the APA at its meeting in New Orleans. This time he had a different message:

... "Like most psychiatrists," Spitzer says, "I thought homosexual behavior could only be resisted, and that no one could really change their

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***Much pity is shown to the gay and lesbian today because of the loud voices they sound in America in demanding and pleading for compassion and acceptance of their lifestyle.***

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sexual orientation. I now believe that to be false. Some people can and do change."

Dr. Dobson commends Dr. Spitzer in *Bringing Up Boys*, P. 117, with the statement: "...We applaud Dr. Spitzer for having courage to examine and then expose the myth of inevitability."

In writing "The Greatest Spin Ever Sold," in *World* magazine May/June 2002, p. 10, Marvin Olasky declares:

...Look at the 1980's rebound of the gay movement

following the onslaught of AIDS. The disease spread because of reckless sexual behavior that, rationally, would have led to a reappraisal of such behavior and a realization that something about homosexuality is fundamentally wrong. But the news was spun, and gays came out as an oppressed minority deserving sympathy, rather than as people who were oppressing themselves and needed to change their ways.

In his book, *The Broken Hearth*, William S. Bennett, points out:

But here's the rub. The stated goal of homosexual activists is not merely tolerance; it is to force society to accept. It is normalization, validation, public legitimation, and finally public endorsement (p. 121).

*(to be continued next month.)*

#### Notes

1. Pierre Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 111.
2. Charles S. Sykes, *A Nation Of Victims: The Decay of the American Character* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).

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# Looking Back

In the first years of its existence (roughly a century) the Christian Reformed Church was not characterized by its evangelistic outreach. It had many strengths, some of which we still benefit from today, but evangelism was not one of them. There was a certain introverted spirit among us in those early years. Perhaps you could call it an immigrant mentality. In that sense the call to “burn the wooden shoes” was legitimate. The church is and must be international. I know several ministers and other members who came into the CRC from a non-Dutch background who were a great blessing to the CRC. They appreciated the Reformed heritage of the CRC more than those who grew up with it.

Things have changed during the last number of decades. Evangelism has become a top priority in the CRC. One might even say it is *the* top priority. Everything must be geared toward church growth. Remember “Evangelism Thrust” and “400,000 by 2000”? Lots of hype, but little results.

“All he preaches is missions,” said one veteran elder a couple of decades ago. “That’s the first sermon I’ve heard in fifteen years that hasn’t dealt with evangelism,” said another. I think we had a kind of guilty conscience for past performance, and so we went overboard the other way. We wanted to make up for lost time. The desire was

good, but we went from the frying pan into the fire.

Reliable polls show that among evangelicals, influence on society is minimal. There are as many divorces among evangelicals as there are in society in general. The same goes for drug abuse and gambling. The late Dr. P. Eldersveld whose preaching on the Back to God Hour had such blessed effects wrote:

But civilization appears to be largely un-changed. The process of spiritual decay has not been arrested. Society has become less Christian and more secular. Morality has sunk to a new low and not only in Chicago where police scandals make the headlines. Our culture is gradually degrading itself with materialism and vice and crime of all kinds. After reviewing the results of his gigantic New York crusade with all of its expenditure and effort Billy Graham is reported to have said that, in retrospect, it looks “like a fly on an elephant’s back.”

How do you explain this phenomenon? We have more Christians but less Christianity than ever before. Thousands of people are saying that they want to be followers of the Way, but evidently they don’t make any real impact upon our way of life. What’s wrong here? Has the gospel lost its power to transform the lives

of men? Can it no longer do what it did in Ephesus?

Well, maybe we ought to compare our preaching with the preaching of Paul. Are we preaching the same gospel? Or is it a more liberal gospel, or at least a more popular gospel? Some extremely cynical critics are saying that modern evangelism “looks like the last, desperate, dying gasp of a Christendom which has long ago dug its own theological grave.” Is that true? If it is, then we are not preaching the gospel which Paul preached in Ephesus and then we cannot expect to come to grips with the gods of this modern world ever, though we make ecclesiastical pronouncements on public issues and write learned articles on social problems.

Eldersveld said on another occasion: “This modern concern about the number of converts can have a disastrous effect upon evangelism.” Think of Hybels (Willow Creek) and Schuller (Crystal Cathedral). Is that what we want? Yet the CRC Home Missions has bought into this approach, especially Schuller’s “gospel” which is no gospel at all. It is an extreme form of the Seeker Service mentality.

Here we do well to read to some words from Kuyvenhoven (in *Daylight*):

The Word of God liberates. However, as soon as it is proclaimed with boldness, the problems multiply. And

*(continued on page 24)*

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*We have more Christians but less Christianity than ever before.*



# Irenaeus of Lyons

*And the sin that was wrought through the tree was undone by the obedience of the tree. (Proof of the Apostolic Preaching. 4)*

The city of Lyons, France contains the remains of a Roman amphitheater which was the site of the death of more than forty Christians in the year 177 A.D. The female servant, Blandina, was the most famous martyr tortured on that occasion. Notably absent from this bloodbath approved by the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180 A.D.) was the presbyter Irenaeus. The soon-to-be bishop of Lyons was instead at Rome on an embassy of peace, “showing himself worthy of his name” (i.e., “irenic”). Sovereignly exempted from the martyr’s arena, Irenaeus lived to become the dominant theologian of the second century. The first heresiologist (i.e., cataloguer and opposer of heresies) whose work is extant, Irenaeus provides a window on biblical theology in the century after the apostles.

In his battle with the Gnostics, Irenaeus left five books against these heretics. These chapters are remarkable for recounting Gnostic emanations. They display a trenchant opposition to the “knowledge falsely so-called” Gnosticism and its aberrant Christology which left Christianity with only an *apparent* Savior.

The Gnostics believed that the Son of God only *appeared* or “seemed” to take human flesh. They were therefore often referred to as Docetists and their Christology, Docetic. The radical Gnostic antithesis between the world of the flesh (visible, material arena) and the

world of the spirit (invisible, immaterial arena) made it unthinkable for the Son of God to become incarnate. Hence, the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth was one of appearances for Gnosticism; reality was a distinctly separate spiritual world having no concrete relationship with human nature. The incarnation was a chimera, a will-of-the-wisp, a phantasm, an illusion.

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## *The Son of God assumed real human nature in the womb of the virgin Mary.*

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Irenaeus responded with a vigorous defense of the salvation of man body and soul by the “man from heaven” who truly united human nature to his divine nature in order to redeem it. Countered Irenaeus, the Son of God did not “seem” to become flesh (John 1:14) He did not merely “appear” to become man; the Son of God assumed real human nature in the womb of the virgin Mary. And he did this for our salvation. Christology and soteriology are incarnational for Irenaeus.

Gnosticism’s anti-incarnational theology was not the only threat to the church in Irenaeus’s day. Marcion (fl. 140-150 AD) and his followers

were also troubling the visible kingdom of God. Marcion believed that he was directed by God to re-edit the Bible in a fashion more palatable to those developing (“growing”) both beyond Judaism as well as apostolic Christianity. Active in Rome about 145 A.D., Marcion eliminated the Old Testament from inspired Scripture (its “Jewish” God was cruel and vicious) and restricted his Canon to the New Testament writings. Yet even the twenty-seven books of the New Testament were not sufficiently MC (“Marcionite Correct”). So Marcion removed the portions which he judged offensive: all the gospels save Luke were dismissed as “Judaistic frauds” (he even abridged the third gospel); the Pastoral epistles were rejected; and he edited/abridged the remainder of Paul’s letters. Marcion’s “canon within a canon” presupposed his own subjective criteria for what constituted the Word of God.

Irenaeus came to the defense of the Biblical Canon, asserting the continuity between the God of the Old Testament and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The integrity of the Word written was as crucial to Irenaeus as the integrity of the Word incarnate. (Irenaeus promised a full-length treatment of Marcion’s errors, but this work, if actually completed, is not extant.)

Irenaeus was born in Asia Minor (possibly Smyrna), sojourned for a time in Rome (possibly as a pupil of Justin Martyr), but spent his mature years in Gaul (modern France), where he most likely died. Scholars do not know the precise year of his birth (he left few autobiographical clues in his writings), but Irenaeus

does mention the famous Christian martyr Polycarp as a person whom he had seen and heard preach in his youth. Since most scholars believe Polycarp was burned at the stake in Smyrna about 155/56 A.D., Irenaeus must have been born some time before mid-century (?ca. 130-140 A.D.). How he came to settle in the western portion of the Roman empire is unknown; his books, written in the Latin-speaking West, were penned in his native tongue—Greek. When the Lyons martyrs were executed (177 A.D.), bishop Potbinus was included in the pogrom. Upon his return from Rome, Irenaeus was chosen as his successor. Here he labored until his death (ca. 200 A.D.). There is a later tradition that he too was martyred but this cannot be substantiated.

Irenaeus is known to us chiefly from his two surviving works (the second, though known from antiquity by name, was first discovered in a complete Armenian edition in 1904): *Examination and Refutation of Falsely Named 'Knowledge'*; and *Proof (or Demonstration) of the Apostolic Preaching*. The first, and the most famous, is a detailed exposition of Gnosticism with an equally detailed defense of the incarnation of the Son of God. The second work is a brief, almost catechetical, outline of the gospel summarizing the history of redemption from Adam to Christ. Central to both works is Irenaeus's concept of recapitulation.

Recapitulation or "summing up" is Irenaeus's redemptive-historical approach to the organic unfolding of God's revelation. All of history indeed, all of mankind is summed up

("recapitulated") in two Adams: Adam, the first (Gen. 2-3) and Adam, the last (1 Cor. 15:45; Cf. Rom. 5:12-21). "[Christ] has therefore in his work of recapitulation, summed up all things, both waging war against our enemy, and crushing him who had at the beginning led us captives in Adam, and trampled upon his head" (*Against Heresies=A.H.*, 5.21.1).

Irenaeus explains salvation as the recovery (in the last/eschatological Adam) of what was lost (in the first/protological Adam).

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"In the times of the end, the Word of the Father and the Spirit of God, having become united with the ancient substance of Adam's formation, rendered man living and perfect, receptive of the perfect Father, in order that as in the natural Adam we all were dead, so in the spiritual Adam we may all be made alive. And for this reason in the last times, not by the will of the flesh, nor by the will of man, but by the good pleasure of the Father, his hands *formed* a living man, in order that Adam might be created again after the image and likeness of God" (*AH.*, 5.1.3).

This biblical-theological (indeed Pauline) approach to the progress of revelation is eminently covenantal. Irenaeus sees two heads, two covenant fathers, two races summed up (recapitulated) in the two Adams. All in the protological (first) Adam are lost through the Fall; all in the eschatological (last) Adam are saved through the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Son of God. "Remission of sins follows upon the Lord's advent, by which 'He has destroyed the handwriting' of our debt, and 'fastened it to the cross' (Col. 2:14) so that as by means of a tree we were made debtors to God, so also by means of a tree we may obtain remission of our debt" (*A.H.*, 5.17.2).

Against the heretics of his era who repudiated the history of redemption, the reality of the incarnation of God the Son, and the unity of the Bible, Irenaeus resolutely and brilliantly defended the orthodox teaching of Salvation in the second Adam -One who was truly man - so that the souls and bodies of men could be united to God forever in heaven. "Jesus Christ our Lord, the Son of the Most High God [was] promised by the law and the prophets that he would make his salvation visible to all flesh; so that he would become the Son of man for this purpose, that man also might become the son of God" (*A.H.*, 3.10.2).

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# The New Perspective on Paul

## *The Contribution of James D. G. Dunn*

Among advocates of a new view of the teaching of the apostle Paul, James D. G. Dunn is a figure of considerable prominence. Though Dunn, as we shall see, is not fully satisfied with E. P. Sanders' treatment of the apostle Paul, he acknowledges his indebtedness to Sanders' insights and writes as an articulate spokesman for the new perspective. As the author of a number of substantial volumes on the apostle Paul<sup>1</sup>, Dunn, who is the Lightfoot Professor of Divinity at the University of Durham, England, has contributed significantly to the advancement of the new perspective and has influenced another important writer whom we will consider in a subsequent article, N. T. Wright. Consequently, our summary of the development and articulation of the new perspective on Paul requires that we consider Dunn's contribution.

### **Basic Agreement with Sander's View of Judaism**

The starting point for Dunn's contribution to the new perspective on Paul is his fundamental agreement with Sanders' assessment of Second Temple Judaism. In a 1982 lecture, "The New Perspective on Paul," Dunn acknowledges that Sanders' study, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, represents a "new

pattern" of understanding the apostle Paul. This pattern of understanding, though significantly different than the Reformation's view of Paul, has "broken the mold" of traditional Pauline studies and established a new point of departure for future studies. In this lecture, Dunn credits Sanders with breaking the stranglehold of the older Reformation view that had dominated Pauline studies for centuries. So far as Dunn is concerned, any future assessment of Paul's teaching will have to reckon with Sanders' conclusions.

According to Dunn, Sanders' chief point is that the "picture of Judaism drawn from Paul's writings is historically false."<sup>2</sup> The idea that there is a basic antithesis between Judaism, which supposedly taught a doctrine of salvation by meritorious works of obedience to the law of God, and Paul, who taught a doctrine of salvation by faith apart from the works of the law, needs to be set aside once for all. This idea does not fit with what can be known of Second Temple Judaism through the proper use of historical sources. Judaism, as Sanders has convincingly demonstrated, was a religion of salvation that emphasized God's goodness and generosity toward his people, Israel. Far from teaching salvation by meritorious works, Ju-

daism taught that God graciously elected his people in his love and mercy. To use Sanders' language, Judaism taught that one "gets in" the covenant community by God's gracious initiative and "remains in" by obeying the law of the covenant. Therefore, Judaism is not a legalistic religion, which teaches that salvation comes through obedience to the law. Rather, it begins with God's grace and the provisions of his mercy. The law was given to Israel, not as a means for procuring favor with God, but as a means to uphold and confirm the covenant relationship previously established by grace. Dunn fully concurs with Sanders' argument that Judaism's pattern of religion was that of *covenantal nomism*: God's graciously elect people, Israel, were obliged to obey the requirements of the law (Torah), not as a way of obtaining favor with God but only as a way of preserving the covenant relationship first initiated by grace.

Because he largely agrees with Sanders' interpretation of the religion of Judaism, Dunn also shares Sanders' rejection of the Reformation reading of the Apostle Paul's doctrine of justification. The Reformation approached Paul's teaching on justification from the standpoint of its opposition to the legalism of the medieval Roman Catholic Church. In the struggle of Luther and others to obtain assurance of God's favor and mercy, particularly in the face of the Catholic teaching of the necessity of meritorious good works, the Reformers read the

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*Dunn shares Sanders' rejection of the Reformation reading of the Apostle Paul's doctrine of justification.*

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apostle Paul's indictment of the Judaizers through the lens of their own struggles with Catholicism. Thus, the legalism represented by the medieval Catholic teaching of meritorious good works was thought to be an error similar to that of the Judaizers, who allegedly taught salvation by the merits of our obedience to the law. This Reformation reading of the apostle Paul is a fundamental misreading. Judaism at the time of Paul's writing did not teach that obedience to the law of God was a means of obtaining favor with God. Therefore, whatever the error of the Judaizers to which Paul responds in his epistles (especially Galatians and Romans), it could not be the kind of legalism that characterized medieval teaching on justification. No such legalism was present in the Judaism of Paul's day.

Thus, Dunn maintains that a new reading of the apostle Paul is required, one which acknowledges the basic correctness of Sanders' insights into the nature of Second Temple Judaism. This means that whatever erroneous teaching about the law that Paul opposes in his writings, it cannot be the kind of legalism that the Reformation opposed. The doctrine of justification, which plays such an important role in the apostle Paul's argument with some of his contemporaries, was not developed as an antidote to Judaistic legalism.<sup>3</sup> Paul's doctrine of justification must be reconsidered in the light of what we now know about Judaism.

### **Sander's Failure to Understand Paul's View of the Law**

Despite Dunn's general agreement with Sanders' understanding of Judaism, he differs with Sanders in his understanding of Paul's relation to Judaism in general, and in his understanding of justification in relation to the law of God in particular. Dunn finds fault with Sanders' understanding of the apostle Paul, particularly with his sharp distinction between Paul's understanding of the Christian faith and the religion of Judaism. Rather than attempting to interpret Paul's teaching in relation to the "covenantal nomism" of Judaism, Sanders represents Paul as making a clean break with Judaism.

The system or pattern of religion that Paul articulated requires faith in the crucified and risen Christ as the means of gaining entrance into covenant with God. Contrary to the religion of Judaism, which continues to uphold the law of God and insist upon its abiding validity, Paul draws a radical contrast between faith in Christ and the law. In Paul's understanding of the gospel, Judaism and the law must be abandoned in favor of the Christian religion. Consequently, despite Sanders' rehabilitation of Judaism as a religion of grace and not of legalistic obedience to the law, he still treats Paul's newfound faith as though it required a wholesale abandonment of Judaism with its positive evaluation of the law of God.

He [Sanders] still speaks of Paul breaking with the law, he still has Paul making an arbitrary jump from

one system to another and posing an antithesis between faith in Christ and his Jewish heritage in such sharp, black-and-white terms, that Paul's occasional defence of Jewish prerogative (as in Romans 9:4-6) seems equally arbitrary and bewildering, his treatment of the law and of its place in God's purpose becomes inconsistent and illogical, and we are left with an abrupt discontinuity between the new movement centered in Jesus and the religion of Israel which makes little sense in particular of Paul's olive tree allegory in Romans 11.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of Sanders' groundbreaking insight into the nature of Judaism, he fails, according to Dunn, to provide a coherent or convincing explanation of Paul's relation to Judaism and its view of the law of God. Sanders leaves his readers with the impression that Paul rejected Judaism entirely, and embraced an understanding of the Christian faith that was largely disconnected from his Jewish past. In this respect, Dunn believes that Sanders fails to do for the interpretation of Paul what he does so masterfully for the interpretation of Judaism: he fails to interpret Paul within the context of first century Judaism. Particularly perplexing in Sanders' understanding of Paul is his suggestion that Paul repudiated the law of God altogether, as though it were wholly antithetical to the gospel of Christ. But, if within Judaism itself the law was never understood to be a means of meriting favor with God, why would Paul find it necessary to reject Judaism's view of the law in order to emphasize God's grace in

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*Sanders represents Paul as making a clean break with Judaism.*



Christ? Was Paul rejecting the law as such, when he contrasts the works of the law with faith in Christ? These questions are left unresolved by Sanders and lead Dunn to take a closer look at Paul's teaching on the law in relation to justification. Sanders' assessment of Judaism raises, but fails to answer, the question: how does the new view of Judaism contribute to a new perspective on Paul?

"The new perspective on Paul," by forcing a reassessment of what Paul was reacting against [the Judaism of his day], has given fresh impetus to this line of inquiry. What was at issue between Paul and "those of the circumcision"? Can we continue to speak in terms of Jewish boasting in self-achieved merit? What is about "works of the law" to which Paul objects this strenuously?<sup>5</sup>

Though Sanders has provided the basis for a new perspective on Paul, his own interpretation of Paul's gospel fails to show how Paul's view of the law arises within the context of the Judaism of his day. Or, to put the matter a bit differently, if the problem with Judaism's understanding of the law was not legalism, which teaches that obedience to the law's requirements is the basis for inclusion among God's covenant people, what was wrong with its teaching? To what error is the apostle Paul responding, when he speaks of a justification that is not according to "works of the law" but according to faith?

### **The 'Works of the Law' as 'Boundary Markers'**

If we approach the apostle Paul from the perspective of the new

view of Judaism, we will discover, Dunn argues, that Paul was objecting to Jewish *exclusivism* and *not legalism*. The problem with the use of the law among the Judaizers whom Paul opposes was not their attempt to find favor with God on the basis of their obedience to the law, but their use of the "works of the law" to exclude Gentiles from membership in the covenant community. The problem with the Judaizers is that they were empha-

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sizing certain "works of the law" that served as "boundary markers" for inclusion or exclusion from the number of God's people. The law functioned in the thinking and practice of these Judaizers as a means of identifying who properly belongs to the community of faith. It was this *social* use of the law as a means of excluding Gentiles that receives Paul's rebuke, not an alleged appeal to the law as a means of self-justification.

According to Dunn, Paul's real objection to the Judaizers' appeal to "works of the law" is clearly disclosed in passages like Galatians 2:15-16 and Galatians 3:10-14. A brief review of Dunn's treatment of these passages will suffice to illustrate the shape of his argument.

### **Galatians 2: 15-16**

In Galatians 2:15-16, the apostle Paul writes: "We are Jews by nature, and not sinners from among the Gentiles; nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified."

When we read this passage in the historical context of the Judaism of Paul's day, Dunn maintains that several things will become clear:

1. The apostle Paul is speaking in language that was typical to Jewish Christians ("we who are Jews by nature"). This language reflects an understanding of what it means to belong to the covenant community and thereby to be separated from Gentile sinners. The particular focus of these verses is upon the question of who belongs to God's covenant people and who does not.

2. Because Paul is speaking from within the context of a common Jewish framework of understanding, his concept of righteousness and what it is to "be justified" are likewise "thoroughly Jewish."<sup>6</sup> To be justified means, in this context, to be acknowledged by God as a member of his covenant people. God's righteousness in justifying his people is his covenant faithfulness expressed by way of his gracious and merciful "verdict in favour of Israel on grounds of his covenant with Israel."<sup>7</sup> Justification is not an exclusively initiatory act (as Sanders tends to argue) whereby God introduces someone into the covenant community. Rather, as in the

Judaism with which Paul was undoubtedly familiar, it is God's gracious "acknowledgment that someone is in the covenant."

This understanding of justification—indeed the teaching of "justification by faith" itself—was common to the Judaism of Paul's day and to the teaching of Paul. If we read the apostle Paul's language in this passage within the historical setting of Judaism, we will not conclude that he is introducing a new doctrine of justification, or that he opposing a Jewish teaching that we can earn our acquittal with God on the basis of "meritorious works." Such a reading of the apostle Paul is incompatible with what we know about Judaism, which also emphasized the grace and covenant faithfulness of God in acknowledging those who are his people.

3. This leads Dunn to identify the crux of the issue in Galatians 2:15-16. When Paul attacks the idea of being justified by "the works of the law," he is attacking those observances required in the law that served to distinguish the Jews from the Gentiles. The "works of the law" is a phrase that refers, not to all the observances required in the law of God, but to those "particular observances" that "functioned as identity markers . . . to identify their practitioners as Jewish in the eyes of the wider public."<sup>8</sup> These observances—such as circumcision, food laws, and feast-days—"were the peculiar rites which marked out the Jews as that peculiar people." The "works of the law," therefore, are those "badges of covenant membership" that served to separate the true covenant people, the Jews, from those who were outside of the covenant, the Gentiles.

Upon the basis of these considerations, Dunn concludes that Galatians 2:15-16 does not present an attack upon Judaism or its "covenantal nomism." Paul was not opposing an allegedly legalistic teaching that obedience to the law of God in general is the basis for finding favor with God. Rather, Paul was opposing the idea that the "works of the law," that is, those observances that particularly distinguish Jews from Gentiles, are necessary badges of covenant membership. The gospel, according to

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Paul, teaches that faith in Christ is the chief badge of covenant membership. What Paul objects to are the "works of the law," that is, those ritual markers of identity that separated Jews from Gentiles. This does not mean, however, that Paul is disparaging the law or law-keeping in general. Paul only takes exception to the law "as a Jewish prerogative and national monopoly."<sup>9</sup> He does not take exception to the law when it is understood in terms of its more basic command to love your neighbor as yourself (Galatians 5:14).

**Galatians 3:10-14**

Dunn also appeals to Galatians 3:10-14 to illustrate his interpretation of Paul's understanding of the law. While admitting that any inter-

pretation of Paul's writings must also consider his other epistles, especially the epistle to the Romans, Dunn believes that this passage confirms his understanding of Galatians 2:15-16 in particular, and of Paul's general understanding in his other writings as well.

The more traditional or Reformation reading of this passage is well known. The apostle Paul declares in this passage that those who seek to achieve their own righteousness before God are doomed to failure. When Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26, he means to remind his readers that it is impossible to fulfill the law's demands and that all sinners lie under the curse of God for their failure to do so. Salvation does not come through our obedience to the law, but rather through the work of Christ who became a "curse" for us. Christ, who alone kept the law wholly, has become a curse by suffering the liability of the law on behalf of those who put their trust in him.

The promise of salvation for Jew and Gentile alike comes by faith in Jesus Christ, who suffered the curse of the law in his crucifixion, and not through obedience to the law's demands. Only through faith in Christ, and not on the basis of works done in obedience to the law, are guilty sinners able to be saved.

Dunn argues that this is a fundamental misreading of the passage. As in Galatians 2:15-16, Paul's concern is not chiefly about how a guilty sinner can find a gracious God or be saved, but about how God is pleased to acknowledge Gentiles as well as Jews as members of his covenant community. He develops his argument for this interpretation



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along lines similar to those used in his treatment of Galatians 2:15-16.

1. To understand Paul's point in this passage, we must recognize that he is "deliberately denying what his fellow countrymen . . . would take for granted."<sup>10</sup> Jews of Paul's day would understand being "of the works of the law" to mean living in obedience to all that the law requires. Paul denies this understanding and maintains that "[t]o be of the works of the law is *not* the same as fulfilling the law, is *less* than what the law requires and so falls under the law's curse."<sup>11</sup> By the "works of the law," Paul refers to the Jewish claim that only those who fulfill the law's ritual requirements (circumcision, food laws, feast days) fall within the scope of God's covenant promise.

The contrast in the passage is not between the law, which Paul continues to affirm in its deeper meaning and demands (compare Romans 2:14-16, 26-29), and faith in Christ. The contrast is between those who regard obedience to the ritual requirements of the law so far as they separate the Jews from the Gentiles, and those who recognize that faith in Christ is the way whereby the promise of inclusion within the covenant is fulfilled. The curse of which Paul speaks in this passage, accordingly, is not some general curse upon all sinners who fail to do what the law demands. It is the particular curse that falls upon Israel when she exhibits a restrictive and nationalistic misunderstanding of the scope of God's grace.

2. The contrasts in verses 11-12 of this passage (e.g., between "by the law" and "by faith" in verse 11) are

not to be interpreted in an absolute way. Paul is not disparaging the idea of "doing the law" as such. He is not arguing that the law and faith are mutually exclusive. Rather, Paul is maintaining that the Judaizers have a misplaced set of priorities. Whereas many of his fellow Jews were emphasizing faithfulness by the standard of the law's ritual requirements more than faith in Christ, Paul is insisting that faith in Christ is paramount. The call to faith in Christ surpasses Judaism and the legitimate obligations of

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***For it is now only by  
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covenantal nomism. For it is *now* only by faith in Christ that the promise of the covenant is fulfilled for Jews and Gentiles alike. The relation between Judaism and Christianity is, in this respect, not so much an "either-or" as it is a "both-and," with the emphasis falling upon the "eschatological life of faith" foreshadowed by Habakkuk 2:4.<sup>12</sup>

3. The language of verses 13-14, which speak of Christ having redeemed us "from the curse of the law, having become a curse on our behalf," should not be interpreted in a general sense. Paul is not speaking of a generalized curse or condemnation that every sinner deserves, which Christ vicariously suffered on behalf of his people.

According to Dunn, "[t]he curse of the law here has to do primarily with that attitude which confines the covenant promise to Jews as Jews: it falls on those who live within the law in such a way as to exclude the Gentile as Gentile from the promise."<sup>13</sup> The curse that Christ's death removes is the curse of a wrong understanding of the law, one which restricts the reach of God's grace to Jews alone.

Galatians 3:10-14 confirms, then, that Paul's polemic against the Judaizers and their understanding of the role of the law was not a general polemic against legalism or the law as such. Paul was opposing Jewish exclusivism, the teaching that the covenant community was limited to those who obeyed the ritual demands of the law. Such "works of the law" do not justify, that is, count as badges of covenant membership. The chief badge of covenant membership in these days of the fulfillment of the covenant promise is faith in Christ.

### **The Doctrine of Justification Redefined**

Based upon this understanding of Paul's view of the "works of the law," Dunn articulates a very specific understanding of Paul's doctrine of justification. This understanding can best be summarized in the following points.

1. Paul's doctrine of justification is not addressed to the problem of legalism. The Reformation's view of justification proceeds from a false assumption, namely, that Paul's opponents were people who were attempting to find acceptance with God on the basis of their meritorious obedience to the requirements of the law. In the Reformation view,

justification answers the question, how can a guilty sinner find acceptance with God? However, the specific problem addressed in Paul's formulation of the doctrine of justification by faith is the exclusivism of those Jews who insisted upon obedience to the ritual requirements of the law as a prior condition for acceptance into God's favor and covenant membership.

2. Because Paul's understanding of justification has its roots in the traditional Jewish idea of God's "righteousness" as his covenant faithfulness, he uses the language, "to be justified," to refer to God's gracious acknowledgment of his covenant people. Though Judaism also taught justification by faith, the Christian gospel fulfills and surpasses Judaism by teaching that God *now* graciously acknowledges *all who believe in Christ* as his covenant people. The gospel announces that God in his righteousness has declared that all who believe in Christ, whether Jews or Gentiles, are acceptable to him. Paul teaches that justification is by "faith alone" in the sense that faith in the crucified and risen Christ is now the *chief badge* of covenant membership.

3. Justification, though it has to do with God's verdict or pronouncement regarding who he acknowledges as his people, does not involve the kind of legal transaction that the Reformation view envisions. God does not justify believers by granting and imputing to them the righteousness of Christ. The righteousness of God is his covenant faithfulness, not the righteousness of Christ who, by his substitutionary life of obedience and endurance of the law's curse, obtains God's favor toward guilty sinners. Dunn has no place in his

understanding of the doctrine of justification for the idea that Christ's "active" and "passive" obedience, which is granted and imputed to those who believe in him, constitutes the basis for their acceptance with God. The death of Christ is not a vicarious or substitutionary atonement, which involved Christ's suffering the curse of the law against guilty sinners. Rather, it is a "representative" death in which believers share or participate.<sup>14</sup>

4. Because justification is an act of God's covenant faithfulness whereby he accepts those who are his people in Christ, it is not, strictly speaking, a "once-for-all-act of God." The relationship with God that justification declares requires a continual exercise of God's righteousness. Furthermore, the initial justification of believers is always enacted with a view to God's final act of judgment and acquittal. Justification, consequently, has several stages in its progressive enactment. It begins with God's acceptance of the believer, and it ends with God's vindication of the believer who remains steadfast by the obedience of faith to the end.<sup>15</sup>

5. Though Dunn embraces the formulation of a justification "by faith alone," he insists that the "covenantal nomism" of Judaism is not rejected in favor of Paul's understanding of the gospel of justification. Faith in Christ, though the distinctively Christian badge of covenant membership, is not opposed to the basic requirements of the law of God (e.g., the love commandment, the "law of Christ"). Paul's understanding of the gospel does not deny but affirms the pattern of religion known as covenantal nomism. Believers are obligated to keep the law

in order to confirm and maintain their covenant relationship with God. Without the obedience of faith, there can be no expectation of final vindication by God, since "only the doers of the law will be justified" (Rom. 2:13).<sup>16</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Among the more important sources for an understanding of Dunn's view are the following: James D. G. Dunn, "The New Perspective on Paul," in *Jesus, Paul and the Law. Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1970), pp. 183-215; idem, "Paul and 'covenantal nomism,'" in *The Partings of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), pp. 117-139; idem, "Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3.10-14)," *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985): 523-42; idem, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); and idem, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38a: *Romans 1-8*, and vol. 38b: *Romans 9-16* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> "The New Perspective," p. 184.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *The Theology of Paul*, p. 338. One of the important impulses that necessitates this new view of Judaism, according to Dunn, is the "fundamental issue of Christianity's relation to Judaism, in particular the relation of Paul's gospel and theology to his ancestral religion" (p. 338). Dunn believes that it is no longer possible, in a post-Holocaust and post-Vatican II context, to embrace the older Protestant claim that Judaism and catholicism are forms of legalism.

<sup>4</sup> "The New Perspective," p. 188.

<sup>5</sup> *The Theology of Paul*, p. 340.

<sup>6</sup> "The New Perspective on Paul," p. 190.

<sup>7</sup> "The New Perspective on Paul," p. 190. It should be observed that Dunn simply assumes at this point that the "to be justified" means "to be



acknowledged as a member of the covenant community.” It is not, as the Reformation commonly understood it, an act whereby God receives a guilty sinner into fellowship with himself on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

<sup>8</sup> “The New Perspective,” p. 192.

<sup>9</sup> “The New Perspective,” p. 200.

<sup>10</sup> “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law,” p. 534.

<sup>11</sup> “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law,” p. 534.

<sup>12</sup> “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law,” p. 536.

<sup>13</sup> “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law,” p. 536.

<sup>14</sup> *The Theology of Paul*, p. 386. Though this language is rather bland and unclear, it is Dunn’s language. When we take up our evaluation of the new perspective on Paul, we will have to return to this way of viewing Christ’s death, not as a substitutionary but as a representative death. One of the more disconcerting features of the new perspective is the absence of a significant appreciation of Christ’s atoning work in all of its dimensions. This is not surprising, however, since the doctrine of justification is only a reflex of a proper understanding of Christ’s work. The gospel is always the gospel of Christ and the glory of his saving work. So soon as we diminish the problem of sin (as I shall argue the new perspective most emphatically does), we inevitably diminish the accomplishments of the Savior.

<sup>15</sup> *The Theology of Paul*, p. 386.

<sup>16</sup> *The Theology of Paul*, p. 365; “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law,” p. 535.

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# Martyrdom

*Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.* -Blaise Pascal

Since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, which impacted the world, there has been renewed interest in Islam. Secular as well as Christian bookstores feature literature analyzing this second largest religion after Christianity. Why did these young and well-educated Muslims willingly go to their death? Why were they ready to cause so much structural damage and so many deaths? Why were they called “martyrs” by millions of their co-religionists? Why do young Palestinians blow themselves up in the name of Allah and for the sake of their people?

Do they commit suicide in the name of Allah? Suicide is not once referred to in the Koran. It is forbidden in the Hadith [the oral tradition of Islam, sayings or deeds attributed to Muhammad] where the Prophet claimed to have said, “Whosoever shall kill himself shall suffer in the fire of hell.” He shall “be excluded from heaven forever.”

The secular West, which refuses to take religion seriously, can’t understand why people are willing to die for their faith. Martyrdom has become a foreign idea even for modern Western Christians. But in radi-

cal Islam martyrdom is a key element. It has a religious as well as a political function.

## Martyrdom in Islam

If suicide is forbidden in Islam, why is suicide then morally justified in the eyes of radical Islamists? In their ideology, voluntary death is a

fulfillment of a “sacred” mission. They are not victims but volunteers. They die for a higher cause and are entitled to the rank of a martyr.

A perfect martyr is one who has either been slain in a religious war or has been killed unjustly. A special

blessing is promised to those who die in a jihad, or holy war. The Koran declares: “Think not of those, who are slain in the way of Allah as dead. Nay, they are living. With their Lord they have provision.” [Surah iii: 169] “Let those fight in the way of Allah who sell the life of this world for the other. Whoso fighteth in the way of Allah, be he slain or victorious, on him, we shall bestow a vast reward.” [Surah iv: 74]

Long chapters in the Hadith are devoted to the Jihad, from which the following are quotations of the sayings of the Prophet “He who assists another with arms to fight in

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the way of God, is as the champion, and as a sharer of rewards. And he who stayeth behind to take charge of the family of a warrior is even as a champion in war.” In other words, the benefactors of a family who has lost a son are also promised a reward by Allah.

The wrath of Allah is a strong element in Islam ideology. In the Hadith, Allah comes to the assistance of those who serve him. But he is the destroyer of his enemies, the infidels. However, it appears that those radical Muslims, who are totally committed to martyrdom for the cause of Allah, are frustrated with him for postponing the outpouring of his wrath. They see themselves as Allah’s instruments in protecting his name and advancing his cause at all cost. They are men of action, who seek martyrdom on the battlefields and in terrorist acts. Success in action is secondary. They argue that Muslims should have an attitude of jihad in order to grow in discipleship. A young radical Muslim may say, “ Even if I do not succeed, that is not the issue. I might become a martyr and a model to be followed. After all, what is ahead of me is paradise, but as for you, the fires of hell are waiting to receive you.”

For many Muslims the Iranian revolution was an inspiration and a model that was reproducible. The late Ayatollah Khomeini greatly influenced Iranian youth. He also had an impact on many parts of the world, especially on radical forms of Islam. Ayatollah Khomeini was a Shiite - a branch of Islam much more dogmatic and militant than Sunni Islam - and he was an outright autocrat. He didn’t allow any

opposition to his regime. “ There is no place for opinions and whims in the government of Islam,” he declared. “ The prophet, the imans and the people obey God’s will and Sharia.” He practiced what he preached. He declared and showed his willingness to be a martyr in “the struggle between Islam and the infidels.” He defined “jihad” as a holy war with its stated purpose the conquest of all non-Muslim countries. “Such a war may well be de-

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clared after the formation of an Islamic government of that name, at the direction of the Imam . . . or under his orders. It will then be the duty of every able-bodied adult male to volunteer for this war of conquest, the final aim of which is to put Koranic law in power from one end of the earth to the other.”

In his blueprint Islamic Government Ayatollah Khomeini carefully outlined his plan for an Islamic state. In this book he often referred to the need for a jihad as a means to achieve the goals of Islam. He called upon holy men to sacrifice themselves to gain God’s approval. He told his followers that the Friday sermons in the mosques are meant to influence and to serve as an inspiration to the extent of preparing

the people to fight with courage and valour and even make people proceed to battle fronts without any fear of poverty, sickness, death or loss because people fear Allah alone and nobody else. And he left no one in the dark about the fate of infidels. He wrote: “Christian, Jewish and Baha’i missionary centers are spread in Tehran to deceive people and to lead them away from the teaching principles of religion. Isn’t the duty to destroy these centers?” And he called upon young people to “help and rescue Islam because Islam is crying out for your help.”

One example of Khomeini’s influence outside of Iran was the 1981 assassination of Egypt’s president Sadat. A casual observer of Egyptian politics may wonder why Sadat was assassinated. He didn’t prevent the spread of Islam in Egypt. In fact, he encouraged those who wanted the Islamic law code, the Sharia, to become the source of his nation’s legislation. The policies he followed tended toward its Islamization. Volunteers were sent with Sadat’s blessing to fight the Soviet forces; these men, now called mujahidin or the Afghan Arabs, were among the military groups fighting security forces in Egypt and Algeria in the mid-1990s.

Sadat’s assassins did not belong to some anti-Islam faction. They were members of Al-Jihad (holy war movement). Why then did they kill Sadat? Because they believed they were Allah’s instruments in executing justice. Sadat was accused of making the peace treaty with Israel, fighting the Muslims in Libya, and offering the possibility of extended Nile water to reach Israel.



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## Christian Martyrdom

In Biblical spirituality a Christian doesn't choose martyrdom. He becomes a martyr. He doesn't commit "suicide" for the sake of becoming a martyr with the prospect of earning a heavenly reward. He doesn't seek martyrdom. The glory promised to suffering Christians is not based on their suffering, but on Christ's atoning-meritorious work on the cross.

During the fierce persecutions the Christians underwent in the Roman empire, the early church equated voluntary martyrdom with suicide and deplored it.

A Christian is not called upon to be brave so much as he is called upon to be faithful to his Lord, which is a far more exacting standard than the one of radical Islam. He doesn't seek revenge when suffering wrong. He remembers the words of his Lord, which says, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay" (Romans 12:19). He isn't overcome by evil, but overcomes evil with good (Romans 12:21).

In a world marked by strife and injustice of all sorts, the Christian will proclaim the message found in the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. He reminds himself of the apostolic command to have his "feet fitted with the Gospel of peace" (Ephesians 5:15). For the Christian the Word of the Lord is his only weapon in this world. He does not turn ploughshares into weapons.

But throughout the long history of the church many believers have been persecuted or even killed when they were faithful ambassadors of the Gospel of reconciliation. (2 Cor. 5:19) It is good to remember, therefore, that the Biblical word witness, the Greek word *marturein*, is linked to martyrdom. A martyr is one who witnesses for Christ by his death (Acts 22:20; Rev. 2:13). The New Testament describes martyrs as the "the cloud of witnesses" who surround us (Hebrews 12:1). No more and no less. They loved the Lord even into their death. One scholar attributes the survival of the church through the first three centuries of persecution to "its clear and uncompromising idea of martyrdom."

A classical example of a suffering church in the early annals of church history comes from Armenia, the first Christian kingdom. It served as a refuge for Christians from the Roman Empire between 301-312 A.D. In the fifth century it succumbed to irresistible forces and fell under a succession of foreign rulers. In 451 A.D. Armenia was defeated. Thousands of Armenians, mostly Christians fled to the mountains. A contemporary description put it as follows:

"They preferred to live in caves like wild beasts, in godliness, rather than softly, each in his own mansion, in apostasy . . . Psalms were the burden of their songs, and the reading of Scripture

their perfect delight. Each was a church in his own person, himself the priest thereof, each body a holy altar, and every spirit an acceptable sacrifice."

The Biblical definition of a martyr has a message for us today. It means that a faithful church - witnessing in word and deed - can expect to be wounded. On the basis of Biblical evidence and the testimony of history, researcher and number cruncher David Barrett, whose summaries of annual statistics of the state of worldwide Christianity are published in the International Bulletin of Missionary Research, offers this important definition of a martyr: "A martyr is a Christian believer who loses his or her life prematurely, in a situation of witness, and as a result of human hostility." And he points out that martyrdom was not just a scourge for the church in ancient history. He estimates that in our modern times there are 150,000 martyrs each year.

Christians can expect to be persecuted. When Jesus spoke to His disciples He told them that just as He was being persecuted, so would they. The entire history of the church has substantiated that Jesus was not speaking only of His disciples in His own generation. As strangers and pilgrims on earth, Christians can never claim a privileged position in society. If they are truly faithful to their Lord and the Gospel, society normally finds this

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witness intolerable and will react by persecuting them. They are involved in a spiritual warfare, contending not against men, but “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”(Ephesians 6:12). Persecution is a result of Satan’s attack and is intended to strike out at God. When Saul was on the road to Damascus to wipe out the Christian church in that city, the risen Christ encountered him with this question: “Why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4).

Christians suffering and even perishing for their faith by the most brutal means are not without hope. The New Testament descriptions of suffering have a curious upbeat tone that is mixed with painful realities. The Saviour is depicted as “the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of God” (Hebrews 12: 2).

Thus the joy in the midst of terrible suffering comes from putting suffering in its true context. And this context is the hope of glory awaiting the people of God when Jesus Christ returns. His ultimate victory over all His enemies will be shared by His faithful disciples. From this perspective Paul could testify in the midst of his trials: “We are afflicted in every way but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bod-

ies” (2 Corinthians 4:8-10).

The apostle Paul went to Rome to witness. He never sought suffering and death. Although he viewed suffering as a positive element in his spiritual journey. He could be a faithful witness because he had appropriated the Gospel and was changed by the Gospel. From a persecutor he became a missionary of the Gospel of reconciliation and a martyr. He was beheaded during the rule of the cruel emperor Nero.

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**Conclusion**

If suffering for the sake of the Lord is so predominant in the Scriptures, why are we so estranged from this difficult road set aside for the children of God? I believe that in the Western world we give the wrong impression to people about knowing and following the Lord. We talk about it too sweetly, forgetting that it is the lot of the sheep in the fold of their Shepherd to be shorn by the world. We would rather accept a “health and wealth gospel” and a consumer’s church mentality than the challenge of cross bearing.

We must remind ourselves and teach our youth that to belong to Jesus means to walk a difficult, lonely, and even a dangerous path in

a world antagonistic to the claims of the Gospel, a world unwilling to submit to the Lordship of Christ. We need to learn the cost of discipleship in our hedonistic, entertainment saturated culture. The progress of the Gospel in the line of generations is unthinkable without martyrdom.

The historical records of martyrdom, the recent martyrdom of missionaries, and the accounts of severe persecution of Christians in Islamic dominated nations confirm and illustrate the Biblical definition of a witness. They serve to prepare us better for what could befall any of us. They also show us why we should help Christians who are suffering for their faith.

We also need to bring the plight of the persecuted to the attention of our politicians. Turning a blind eye to persecution would be a betrayal of the Christian heritage of Canada and the USA. Furthermore, we should regularly and systematically acquire information about persecuted Christians, to remember them in prayer and seek to meet their needs. We need interaction with organizations such as the Voice of the Martyrs, which provides reliable information and offers persecuted churches aid in word and deed. If one part of the church suffers, “every part suffers with it.” ( 1 Cor. 12: 26).

**The Author** of this article writes under the alias of “Dick Wunnink” due to past threats received from the Islam community when writing about this subject.



# Kingdom Seekers Girls' Clubs of North America.

On Friday evenings in Wellandport, Ontario a group of about 35 girls and 10 counselors (along with 5 Junior Counselors) gather at the church for Bible Study, crafts and fellowship. The opening devotions with the entire club consist of repeating the Guideposts of Kingdom Seekers; our motto from Matthew 6:33; our theme verses from Psalm 119:2, 10 & 11 done responsively and singing the theme song "Seeking God's Kingdom". The meeting then moves to a Bible study time of 30 - 45 minutes in small groups divided according to age (9-13).

The two youngest groups study either *Wise Friendships* by Rev. K. Anema of Messiah's Independent Reformed Church of Holland, Mich. or *Kingdom Seekers Theme Lessons* based on the Matthew 6 passage by Rev. B. Shouwstra of Balmoral, Ontario URC. These lessons bring home the truths of Scripture in a very meaningful way. The girls learn how God's Word directs every facet of our lives as well as what it means to seek first God's Kingdom.

The older girls study any one of several Bible lessons written by Dr. P.Y. De Jong of Beecher, Ill; Rev. K. Anema, Rev. A. Bezuyen of St. Catharines, Ont; Rev. J. Dykstra of Wellandport, Ont., and Mr. W. Rang of Dunnville, Ont. We share some refreshments and have a break for about 15 minutes. Then we have about 45 minutes of badge work and/or craft time.

Aside from the blessings of spending

the evening together in this fashion, we are also excited about the fact that this scene is being repeated in over thirty churches across North America.

Beginning in October of 1999 at a meeting of the Niagara area URC's girls' club counselors, Kingdom Seekers has since grown quickly. At that meeting the focus was to be on

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how to find uniformity of Bible lessons among the Niagara area churches girls' clubs. There was no direction among the six Niagara churches and solid Reformed material was just not available (or so we thought).

Word of this meeting had spread and two other churches from Classis Southern Ontario joined us at our first meeting. Someone suggested that we contact Dr. P. Y. De Jong for lesson material. Talk shifted to starting our own club and things sort of snowballed from there.

A committee was commissioned under the direction of the consistory of Wellandport URC. The committee consisted of Rev. A. Bezuyen, pastor of Trinity URC of St. Catharines,

Ontario; Mr. D. Allen Stares, teacher at heritage Christian School in Jordan, Ontario, Mr. J. Snieder, elder in Wellandport, Ontario; and 3 girls club counselors: Mrs. Ingrid Sikkens of Wellandport, Mrs. Sheila Koning of Hamilton URC and Mrs. Bonnie Baarda of Wellandport.

The committee met for the first time in January 2000 and quickly set to work developing a program known as Kingdom Seekers Girls' Clubs. Guideposts were selected, a theme song was written (in a rather remarkable way), badges were written and a uniform and logo were designed. Bible study material was submitted by ministers and lay people almost faster than we could read and assess them. There were 20 badges submitted within 6 months. Word spread and soon requests for materials flooded in. What was first thought to be a program for the Niagara area churches soon spread across North America. By September of 2001 a full program was available for churches. To say we were overwhelmed by the requests for such a program would be an understatement.

During the developmental stage the committee was amazed again and again by the providence and care of our Father in Heaven. We have witnessed God's leading in so many wonderful ways. In our feeble little minds we thought that only our immediate neighborhood was dissatisfied with the options available to us in the way of girls club programs. We found out very quickly that the need was greater than we thought. Malachi 3:10 is a verse who's truth has been impressed upon us time and again. "And try Me now in this,"

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says the Lord of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it."

Once requests and orders started to come in, we were amazed at the variety of churches contacting us. As of August 2002, there are 32 Kingdom Seekers clubs. Most are in United Reformed Churches but there are also two Canadian Reformed Churches, two Orthodox Presbyterian Churches, two Christian Reformed Churches, and one Orthodox Christian Reformed Church involved. There are also now over thirty badges in the manual as well as a handbook outlining the guidelines for meetings and outings, the recruitment of counselors and the responsibilities of all involved with the program in the local church.

What does it take to begin a Kingdom Seekers Club? A willingness to work in God's kingdom in youth ministry. There is no membership fee but there is a charge for Bible material and uniforms. Even though the Bible study lessons go through a three-fold process of screening (Kingdom Seekers committee to Education Committee of Wellandport and then on to consistory) we strongly urge each and every consistory to approve the lessons. If a club ordered every set of the eleven Bible studies offered (order one copy and photocopy as many as you need for your group) a club could have enough material for about ten years, given the five year format of the program. Lessons are available through Reformed Fellowship of Grandville, Michigan.

Badge development is an on-going process. We encourage the submission of badges from anywhere. Most of the badges were written by counselors. One may also order one manual which contains all the badges, counselor helps, handbook, sheet music for the theme song and a copy of the guideposts and photocopy the pertinent pages for the girls and counselors.

We do not stress that a church must use the entire program. There are churches that use the Bible curriculum exclusively. Neither do we limit the program to five years. Some

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clubs begin at a younger age than nine and include older girls as well.

Information may be obtained from the Kingdom Seekers web site, [www.kingdomseekers.org](http://www.kingdomseekers.org). The site includes printable order forms, a copy of the handbook and a list of contacts with telephone and fax numbers and addresses both web and postal.

Friday nights are special for the girls in Wellandport, but that's not all that they do as Kingdom Seekers. The girls attend a kick-off in September and a rally in March. At these events there is a speaker, workshops, games, lots and lots of sing-

ing and much fellowship with the neighboring clubs. Every other summer the Wellandport club goes camping for three days, usually a Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Devotions are held every morning before we go on with the day. Usually a theme is studied such as a psalm, or a Biblical persons' life. The highlight of the campout is the campfire of Wednesday evening. The girls are required, with the help of their counselors, to lead a devotional, lead in singing a song out of our songbooks, perform a skit provided by the counselors (these are normally fun in nature) and sing a fun song. We share many a laugh and also many wonderful and meaningful truths are learned from God's Word.

Most counselors will concur that a season goes much too fast, which leads me to believe that the season has been enjoyed by all. This article was written in August so that means it is soon time to have a counselors' meeting to decide the focus of the year and assign counselors to age groups, decide which badges to do this year, press the uniform ..... so many things to do to get ready for the season. Can't wait to get started.

**Bonnie Baarda** is one of the founders of Kingdom Seekers. She lives in Wellandport, Canada.

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# Sound Bites

## *Torch and Trumpet 1968*

### January 1968

“We must remember that not all controversy is warranted and that we must seek the peace of Christ’s church, but we must especially beware of putting peace ahead of God’s truth.”

*Truth or Peace*  
Peter De Jong

### February 1968

“Our day suffers from an unwillingness to do the truly difficult but indispensable task of learning and responding obediently to the guiding principles laid down in God’s Word.”

*Dialogue*  
B. J. Haan

“What is ‘church music’? Negatively stated, it is not a time-killer, a performance or entertainment .... Positively stated, church music is, as one author has literally and aptly described it, ‘bride of Christ music’ .... This music must be worthy of the bridegroom.”

*Sing to the Glory of God*  
Laurie Vanden Heuvel

### March 1968

“In our mobile, distracted society we read and talk about better homes but then we use our better cars on our better roads to get away from home too often, too fast, and too far!”

*The Christian Home*  
C. Holtrop

“The people who prattle, ‘No book but the Bible’ usually publish the most books.”

*Letter to the Editor*  
Howard W. Long

“The greatest danger that faces our Christian schools and us, the teachers, is that of imitating the secular schools.”

*Servants of Christ*  
B. J. Haan

### April 1968

“When we saturate our sermons with prayer, depending not upon ourselves but upon the Holy Spirit for an effective transmission of God’s truth, why shouldn’t we believe that this truth is reaching these young hearts?”

*Underestimating Our Children*  
Leonard Greenway

### May - June 1968

“The maxim ‘Scripture is its own interpreter’ certainly applies to the first chapters of Genesis, for already in these chapters there is ample evidence that the writer does not symbolically convey a theory about the creation of man and his fall into sin, but that he writes history.”

*Interpreting Genesis 2 and 3*  
Simon Kistemaker

“Instead of seeking novelty by discarding the grand old truths of the Bible, let us find novelty by probing afresh the unfathomable depths and unreachable riches of the Word of God.”

*Novelty*  
Edwin H. Palmer

### July - August 1968

“In so many denominations, it is sad to note how it started out with a staunch biblical faith, slowly reduced to a revised faith. At a certain stage, as faith in the Bible weakens and faith in science grows, then they discover that their faith is out-moded, then ‘their eyes are opened’ to see how far they are behind. That feeling comes only to those who bow their knee to Baal Human Brain.”

*Nothing New Under the Sun*  
L. T. Schalkwyk

### September 1968

“Men who are called to confront a confused generation with the liberating Word of the Lord frequently add to mankind’s burden by echoing the utter nonsense vainly fabricated by secularized scholarship.”

*Christian Commitment - Do We Show It?*  
Gerald VandeZande

### October 1968


“If neither elders nor members have a Biblical conception of their respective offices and places in the congregation, there is apt to be a cynical attitude toward every part of the church’s ministry toward her people.”

*What’s an Elder to Do?*  
Jay Wesseling


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since the result of Word-proclamation is trouble, people will always be inclined to say to their preachers: "Take it easy. You are going to cause problems. Don't rock the boat."

When God's people as a whole, to whom God has entrusted His message of deliverance, begin to speak that Word with boldness the enemy will be aroused and the burdens will become heavier. If all of us show the courage to speak the Word and live according to that Word at all times and in all places, we must not immediately expect an influx of new members into the church. We must be prepared, first of all, to face the consequences without fear of men or what they can do to us.

**Rev. Jelle Tuininga** is an emeritus pastor in the URC living in Lethbridge, Alberta.