



# The Outlook

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

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# Who Dies for a Lost Son?

“...for this brother of yours was dead, and is alive again.”  
(Luke 15:32b)

## The First Death and the Son's Wealth

My New Testament professor at seminary taught us to look for surprises in the parables. I see two of them when the son comes with his request to his father. The first surprise? His demand to receive his inheritance NOW. A responsible father would most certainly divide his possessions and land while he was still healthy. But that inheritance would rarely, if ever, pass to his sons BEFORE he died. You see, when this son demands his inheritance NOW, he is expressing his wish for the death of his father.

Can't wait, gotta have it now, wish you were gone! He asks his father to jeopardize his own future and that of the rest of his family, in order to provide him with independent wealth to squander.

The second surprise? The father fulfills the son's request! It would be harder in ancient times to come up with a more insidious corrosion of the father/son relationship than is found in the younger son's request. In fact, I don't think anyone would have blamed the father if he treated his son as dead, having forfeited the rights to his love and wealth. And yet, instead of slamming the door in

his son's face, the text literally says that he divides up his own life. He gives his life away so that his son might become rich. One-third to him, two-thirds to the eldest son, empire gone.

## The Second Death and the Son's Restoration

I hardly need to outline the details of younger son's life since you know them. He sells what his father gives him and skips town. He journeys to a far country, which for the listeners meant outside of Israel among the Gentiles. He wasted his inheritance in some kind of dissolute fashion. His father's work, his father's life, his father's name, his father's inheritance, meant that little to him.

Disaster soon struck. The money



Volume 52, No. 8 (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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runs out and at the same time a drought infects the land. He is able to compel a citizen of the country to give him a job. He becomes the lowest of the low: a feeder of pigs. The pods the pigs ate were practically useless to a human, covered in black, bitter berries as they were. Look on the side for the nutritional value of the meal and you won't find any. He is slowly starving to death.

His strategy for returning to his father is well thought out and not without sincerity. He will present himself as a hired servant. Not a bondsman, that is, a servant who lived as a part of the family and estate. Not one of the lower class slaves who also lived in-house. No, a hired servant, an independent man with his own income (verse 19). "Father, I won't take anymore of your wealth, I am outside of the family, I'm dead, I know that. I'll live outside, and even begin to perhaps pay you back some of what I stole from you." The son is convinced that the seriousness of his sin lay in stealing from his father's hard-earned savings.

"I am no longer worthy to be called your son." No kidding! Basically, he had treated his father as dead. He has wasted his beautiful inheritance among unclean Gentiles. He ended up feeding and living with pigs, those unclean animals. What do you think the citizens were thinking when they saw the prodigal coming through the gates of the village? "How dare you show your face around here again?" comes to mind. This parable seems headed for an unpromising conclusion.

There is only one thing that will cure this appalling scene, and that is a

scene that is even more appalling in appearance. Keep your eyes on the father and you'll see another surprise. You see, noblemen in the ancient Middle East do not run with their expensive, flowing robes through the streets of the village (verse 20). Noblemen do not fall on the necks of unclean traitors like this man and kiss them. Except for this nobleman. The ugly sight of this rebellious son returning is overwhelmed by the unthinkable sight of his dignified father doing very undignified, unexpected things. The father takes the burden of shame upon himself. He dies again so that

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***The father...dies  
again so that his son  
does not need to be  
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his son does not need to be ashamed and humiliated, but rather, restored.

Did you notice the change in the son's words in verse 21? It's the rehearsed lines, all right. Or is it? He leaves the crucial part out, the part about becoming a hired servant. Why? Because he has come apart at the seams, he has come undone, he has wilted, he has surrendered, he has given up and he has given in. He asks for no favors, no monthly repayment plan. Here is what he finally does: he confesses that he is dead unless someone else breathes life into him.

His father's love convinced him. Nothing else. It is not as if his father's actions have convinced him to think, "Hey, things are better than I thought, a robe, a ring, sandals, the whole bit. Forget the servant thing!" No! He repents, plain and simple. His father's love has convinced him that the squandering of the inheritance was never the issue. The issue was always the covenant between himself and his father, the family relationship. The love of his father, in the context of his hatred and murder and waste and uncleanness and misery, finally drives him to the end of himself. One author writes, "Confession is not a transaction, not a negotiation in order to secure forgiveness; it is the after-the-last gasp of a corpse that finally can afford to admit it's dead and accept resurrection. Forgiveness surrounds us, beats upon our lives."

### **The Third Death and the Son's Party**

The third and final death occurs at the party. The calf has been getting fat, just waiting for a time like this to die. And the father who twice died on behalf of his son, the son he always loved, now throws a party because his son is back. And his son finally gets the picture.

You can't help but see our Father in heaven in this father, giving up His only begotten Son for our sake. You can't help but see Christ taking on human flesh in a picture that seems so wrong and unholy. You can't help but see Him slaughtered like that fatted calf in order to seal the relationship between His Father and us! You can't help but see and know that the Christ, who wailed over Jerusalem, voluntarily set His

face towards that city and prepares to die.

The Pharisees complained of Jesus: "This man receive sinners and eats with them." You had better believe it! Them and no others. Does this gospel sound almost too good to be true? You had better believe that, too! I wonder if we can find ourselves in this story. Have we returned home by losing our spiritual composure in the light of our sin? We're not still bargaining with God, looking to make payments, wanting to remain hired servants, out of the household, away from His care and concern and judgment and discipline and love, are we?

The Reformation story is one of grace in the midst of sure death. Even while Christ was suffering unspeakable torment on the cross, He spoke of places like Paradise, He spoke of forgiveness, He spoke of His Father. The message of the prodigal son is the message of the infiltration of the gospel of grace into the sinews of our lives, giving life where there seems to be death.

Funny thing about grace. Only dead people understand it. And once they do, they begin to live for the first time. Life is found in the Son's death and resurrection on that third day. That's the gospel. And when that gospel infiltrates our lives more and more, the ultimate goal becomes attainable: the God of the gospel, the God of grace, receives the glory.

**Rev. Mark Stewart** is the pastor of the Newton Covenant Reformed Church in Newton, New Jersey.

# Sound Bites

## *Torch and Trumpet 1966*

### January 1966

"Christ is not preached aright unless His shed blood is emphasized as the only way guilty human beings can find peace with the righteous God. We can never advance beyond the cross; we can never outgrow it and go on to other things."

*The Offense of the Cross*  
Johannes G. Vos

"The question is not whether Scripture forbids the ordination of women, but whether Scripture positively prescribes their ordination."

*Evaluating the Work of General Synod*  
Gordon Girod

"It has always required great courage to dare to declare that one wills to be free from all influences which militate against the Word of God! It is easier to let the commonly esteemed and recognized 'greats' of our day determine just how we shall think, just what we shall accept and what we shall reject."

*Persevere!*  
John H. Piersma

### February 1966

"Christians should not be surprised when our sophisticated world angrily rejects this witness about the all-inclusive authority of our Lord. It will certainly not swallow anything that is basically at odds with its proud faith in the humanistic idea of man's inalienable right of self-determination. After all, the slightest admission on the part of modern man that he is dependent on his Maker strikes at the very root of humanism which boldly

imagines that man is autonomous, sovereign and self-sufficient."

*Must Christians Form Power Organizations?*  
Gerald Vandezande

"Jesus - God and man - has been revealed to us as the miracle of miracles, and this supreme miracle can not be explained in terms of modern methodology."

*The Historical Jesus*  
Simon Kistemaker

### March 1966

"The advocates of the 'God is Dead' theology are hardly in a position to identify the corpus delicti of the historic Christian faith because they never knew Him to begin with."

*Whose God Is Dead?*  
Rein Leestma

"Apart from the doctrine of hell it is not only impossible to show men clearly the consequences of sin but it is also impossible to shut men up clearly to the absolute indispensability of the righteousness of Christ."

*Why Preach on Hell?*  
Ronald Brown

### April 1966

"[A] wrong attitude toward the Psalms, if not checked by an intelligent appreciation of their real character and value, will ultimately lead as it already has in several denominations to the abandonment of the Psalter as the book of praise."

\*\*\*\*\*  
"The trend of modern hymnbooks is largely toward the



over-emphasis of the subjective experience at the expense of the objective foundation. Even those churches which do not use the hymns, often show the same tendency by the people's manner of picking and choosing among the Psalms."

*Ashamed of the Tents of Shem?*  
Johannes G. Vos

"...we not only have a revolt against authority, we have people in authority who refuse to accept the responsibility of authority."

\* \* \* \* \*

"...religious rebels are afraid to accept the consequences of their position, they don't want to start new institutions, they want to take over old institutions."

*Christian Atheism and the Churches*  
Dale Francis

#### May - June 1966

"Human logic has at least two limitations - the limitation of finiteness and that of being darkened by sin. That man is to be pitied whose reach of faith stops with the humanly comprehensible."

*Election and Human Responsibility*  
Johanna Timmer

#### July - August 1966

"Instead of using our Psalter Hymnal...many are using other hymnals and song books, some decidedly Arminian in words and music. By the use of these we are developing a taste for the more simple subjective type of religious hymns and losing taste for the truly God-centered Reformed hymns."

*The Great Influence of Song and Music*  
Cecil W. Tuininga

(Sound Bites continued on page 12)

## Why the Message of the Reformation is Meaningless to Modern Men and Women

At a seminar for pastors one of the speakers, a psychologist, noted that the Reformation movement sparked by Martin Luther assumed that people had a sense of guilt and a deep desire for atonement. He argued that today this is clearly not the case. As he put it, "In our modern culture most individuals are not seeking atonement; they are seeking *meaning*." In other words, the citizens of the modern world are not looking for a way to overcome a rupture with God, for they do not even realize that a rupture exists. Rather, they are looking for a way to overcome a host of other problems, such as loneliness, brokenness, fear, and lack of self-esteem. The speaker went on to imply that if the church is going to reach this generation, it must tailor its address to meet those needs, not the need for atonement.

What are we to make of this? Is it true that the vast majority of people in our modern age are not interested in atonement for guilt? How does the modern age compare with the Reformation age in that respect? Should the church continue to address modern men and women with God's atonement as a remedy for human sin?

It is very apparent that our modern world has little sense of estrangement from God, nor do they seem much interested in overcoming whatever estrangement they do sense. In *Habits of the Heart*, the classic study of the religious patterns in modern North America, Robert Bellah noted that most participants in his study saw the church as merely a means to meet their own personal goals. He also described the tendency in many churches to de-emphasize the Biblical language of sin and redemption, while promoting the idea of Jesus as the friend who will help us find happiness and self-fulfillment.

#### A Desire to Overcome Guilt

In the early 1500's it was quite a different story. When Martin Luther lit the Reformation fire, overcoming guilt in order to be returned to God's favor was of foremost concern.

Luther himself was a prime example. Luther clearly had a deeply religious nature, and from his childhood he suffered from a keen awareness of a guilty standing before God. Much of Luther's early life can only be explained in terms of his attempts to overcome his sense of estrangement from God.

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*Citizens of the modern world are not looking for a way to overcome a rupture with God, for they do not even realize that a rupture exists.*

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Historian Kenneth Scott Latourette (*A History of Christianity*, Vol. II, Harper and Row, 1975) describes Luther's anguished quest this way:

He sought by the means set forth by the church and the monastic tradition to make himself acceptable to God and to earn the salvation of his soul. He mortified his body. He fasted, sometimes for days on end without a morsel of food. He gave himself to prayers and vigils beyond those required by the rule of his order. He went to confession often daily and for hours at a time. Yet assurance of God's favor and inward peace did not come.

Finally, in the well-known account of his conversion, Luther saw the way of salvation opened up before him while he was in his study cell in Wittenberg in 1512. As Luther later explained it, "Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement, 'the just shall live by faith' Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through sheer mercy, God justifies us through faith. Thereupon, I felt myself to be reborn and to have, through grace, open doors to paradise"

As the reformation flame spread, it became obvious that Luther had touched a responsive chord with his generation. His message of grace was good news, indeed, to people who were much aware of their need for atonement. Church historian Williston Walker (*A History of the Christian Church*, Scribners, 1959) has pointed out that a deep sense of

sinfulness was the ground note of the religious revival Luther fathered in Germany.

But today the landscape has been altered drastically! One would be hard pressed to find many "Martin Luthers" in today's culture who are desperately trying to overcome a deep awareness of guilt.

### No Shame

My own recent experience confirms the problem. A young couple from

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the neighborhood stopped in to see me. They said, "You don't know us, but we are planning to get married in a few months in another state. The pastor whom we have asked to marry us insists that we receive pre-marriage counseling from a local pastor before he will tie the knot. Will you do it for us?"

Frankly, I looked at this request as an opportunity. This couple obviously was not committed to Christ. They both had received some exposure to various churches when they were growing up, but neither was active now. I sensed that in counseling them, I would have an opportunity to talk about the Lord.

In the course of the counseling I

discovered that they were living together and had been doing so for some months. When I gently asked them about this, they were totally open about their cohabitation. There was no hesitation whatever.

I am not a naive pastor with his head stuck under the pulpit. I fully realize that unmarried couples living together has become well accepted in our society. Still, I thought maybe in talking to a clergyman, a man of God, they would be a little apologetic or embarrassed by their situation, but there was none of it. I have a hunch that 30 or 40 years ago such a couple would have been somewhat ashamed of their living arrangement in talking to a pastor, but this couple was not ashamed in the least.

I prodded them a little by asking, "Does it bother you at all that you have been living together without being married?" They just looked at me and said, "No, why should it?" I pushed a little farther and said, "The Bible indicates that intimacy of the kind you are experiencing is reserved only for those who commit themselves to each other in marriage." But they just looked at each other and smiled, as if to say, "Is this guy a visitor from another planet or what?"

Suppose I had said to this couple: "Hey, guess what? I have good news for you. All of us have sinned and have fallen short of what we should be, but Jesus came to die so that we could be forgiven. Isn't that great?" Would such a proclamation have any meaning for this couple? I think not.



## What Message to Bring

How then can we hope to get a hearing from such people for the Gospel? As noted earlier, there are voices today who say that the way to reach this generation, the way to “witness” if you will, is to address the loneliness that so many feel and emphasize that Jesus can be our best friend. Or, they say, we should address the sense of meaninglessness that troubles so many and remind them that living for Jesus gives us a depth of purpose which we will not find in living for ourselves; or we should address the deep sense of fear that affects countless thousands in the aftermath of the World Trade Towers attack and urge them to put their trust in Christ who drives out fear. But we should not talk to the modern unbeliever about the fact their sins can be covered and forgiven, for such things are unintelligible and monumentally unimportant to a post-Christian generation.

What can we say in response to such voices? Simply this: Jesus did not come to merely meet the need we think we have; He came to meet the need God knows we have, and that is the need for repentance and acknowledgment of His atoning grace.

Somehow the church must help modern unbelievers see that they are in a desperate and lost condition, even though they have no awareness of their predicament. This is a challenge. Like a person who has inoperable cancer, but who is totally unaware of it and feels fine, there are many that are in a doomed condition spiritually but are quite unaware of it.

How then do we make people aware of their predicament? The answer is neither new nor popular. A creed, born out of the reformation and breathing its spirit, puts it this way:

*Q.* How do you come to know your misery?

*A.* The law of God tells me.

*(Heidelberg Catechism, q. 3)*

The law of God, as the phrase is used here, is really the totality of His

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***Jesus did not come to merely meet the need we think we have; He came to meet the need God knows we have.***

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revealed will. It is everything that God has said to us about how He wants us to live in this world. It is through being exposed to this will of God that we become conscious of sin and of our need for a Savior.

That was clearly Paul’s experience was it not? He says. “I would not have known what sin was except through the law” (Rom. 7:7). And then he gives a specific example: “I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet.’”

Like a carefree airline pilot who is heading straight for a mid-air collision but is blissfully unaware of it, Paul says there was a time in his life in which he was unaware of the extent of his sinfulness before the Lord. But the Holy Spirit used ex-

posure to the law to show him who he really was, Paul Q. Sinner.

We must rely on the Holy Spirit to do the same kind of work today. That’s His job (Jn 16:8). But our job is to declare the full orb Word of God and let the Holy Spirit to do His Work.

Devotion to Christ as Savior and Lord is only drawn from the reservoirs of deep human need. Where there is no sense of lostness, there can be no joy in being found. Where there is no need for atonement, there can be no rejoicing in the good news of the ages: “Friend, your sins are forgiven” (Luke 5:20).

**Rev. John Van Regenmorter** is an ordained pastor in the Christian Reformed Church. Currently he serves as chaplain for Bethany Christian Services, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

# Creating God's Kingdom

## *Genesis One as Good News*

Archaeologist William Dever from the University of Arizona teaches many, many American college students. In his estimation, 90% of his students are ignorant of the Bible and its contents. What is worse, they are not only uninterested in the Bible, he cannot even arouse interest in them with regard to the Bible.

Ignorance of the Bible in general and Genesis One in particular leaves a spiritual vacuum that competing worldviews and secular philosophies are only too eager to fill. This ignorance is fertile soil for the rise of cults with their strange beliefs and practices.

The cultural air we breathe in North America is one of religious pluriformity, syncretism, and deism. This was sadly evident at the prayer service held in Yankee Stadium on a Sunday afternoon, September 23, 2001. The prayer service was one of many responses to the tragic events of September 11, 2001. Representatives from all the major religious groups of New York were represented: Romanist, Greek Orthodox, Armenian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and various Protestant bodies. With rare exceptions, the Christian representatives imposed on themselves self-censorship so that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ was hardly mentioned,

even cut out of the reading from Romans 8, as done by a New York City fire fighter. But without Christ, what or who is the God being addressed by these various clergypersons?

The religious and cultural climate of present-day America is that of a great civil religion in which all religions are tolerated as long as they do not challenge America or each other. Thus, we are being told that Islam is a peace-loving religion, and that the god "Allah" is simply the Arabic name for the God of the Christians. The details of worship are simply different, that's all, we are led to believe. All of this is a lie.

First of all, as Christians we hold to the infallibility and absolute authority of the Holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testament. These two Testaments are the written Word of the Triune God. Contrast that confession with Islam, in which Muslims claim that the Bible, including the accounts in Genesis, is full of errors. Genesis is obsolete to a Muslim, while the Qur'an, it is claimed, is directly from Allah.

### What do We Mean by "Kingdom"?

The sovereignty of God is announced in Genesis 1:1 with clarity and without ambiguity. The kingdom

is that realm or region that is under the absolute power and regal dominion of the LORD God Himself. This truth was celebrated in the Old Testament as the following psalms demonstrate:

"For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a skillful psalm. God reigns over the nations. God sits on His holy throne. The princes of the people have assembled themselves as the people of the God of Abraham; for the shields of the earth belong to God."

(Psalm 47:1,2)

"The LORD reigns, He is clothed with majesty . . . Thy throne is established from of old; Thou art from everlasting."

(Psalm 93: 1a,2).

"The LORD reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the many islands be glad... The mountains melted like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth." (Psalm 97:1,5)

"The LORD reigns, let the peoples tremble; He is enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth shake!" (Psalm 90:1)

"I will extol Thee, my God, O King and I will bless Thy

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***Ignorance of the Bible in general and Genesis one in particular leaves a spiritual vacuum that competing worldviews and secular philosophies are only too eager to fill.***

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name forever and ever ...  
All Thy works shall give  
thanks to Thee, O LORD,  
and Thy godly ones shall  
bless Thee. They shall speak  
of the glory of Thy kingdom,  
and talk of Thy power; to  
make known to the sons of  
men Thy mighty acts, and  
the glory of the majesty of  
Thy kingdom. Thy kingdom  
is an everlasting kingdom,  
and Thy dominion endures  
throughout all generations.”  
(Psalm 145:1,10-13)

God had created mankind in the beginning to rule and have dominion over all things. When mankind rebelled against the Word of the heavenly King, then the LORD Himself reclaims the creation realm for Himself through the Sovereign might of His own Son (cf. Psalm 110) in the power of His Holy Spirit.

### **An Announcement of Good News**

In the Greek world, when a new king came to the throne it was called an *evangelion*, a ‘good message’ or ‘good news.’ The written Scriptures are the announcement in text what is true in fact. The divine King reigns over all things, and He has ruled over His creation and all its inhabitants from the very beginning.

Not all subjects in the world believe or acknowledge this fact. Many of the world’s inhabitants do not approve of God’s rule. But Genesis One sets the record straight with a ‘good message’ that our God is both creator and true Universal Ruler. Genesis One opens the windows to allow us to look inside

matters and see what is really going on. It is a breath of fresh air. It is sunshine in the midst of darkness. It is clarity in the midst of muddle and confusion. It orders and reorders our worldview and thus our priorities.

Genesis and its opening chapters are going to define who God is, what the world is, who man is, and what our role is before this God in this world. All of that is the opening overture, the definitive melody that sets the stage for the gospel of our

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## ***Genesis One sets the record straight with a ‘good message’ that our God is both creator and true Universal Ruler.***

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Lord Jesus Christ. If we do not get this right, then there are vast areas of the Bible that go dark for us. The good news is already being announced, trumpeted, in these opening verses of the Bible.

### **Genesis 1.1: God the King Clears the Deck of False Views**

#### **The reality of an eternal God: *no atheism***

The first subject of the Bible’s first sentence is God. The reader is not given any cosmogony that seeks to explain from where God came. His existence is simply posited and assumed. “Before the mountains were born or You brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting You are God,” writes

Moses, the man of God (Psalm 90:2). Atheism as a worldview was hardly an option in the ancient Near East. Still, atheism is the professed faith of some today. Even ancient man might live as if God did not exist, saying in his heart, “There is no God” (see Psalm 14:1; 53:1).

Yet atheism requires a great deal of “faith” as it seeks to maintain itself against the vast and overwhelming evidence written in “that most elegant book” of creation. Everything that “may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them,” writes Paul in Romans 1:19. Genesis 1:1 reveals in text what the creation says without words: God exists, and thus atheism is not an option. “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities - His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20).

#### **The reality of one God: *no polytheism***

In Moses’ day this was truly a sign of mankind’s rebellion against the heavenly King. The Egyptians worshiped thousands of deities, and the Canaanites were ensnared in the service of many Baals and the Asheroth. The pagans had their many myths about the creation of the gods and the creation of the world, including how and why man was made.

Having a knowledge of the pagan views of Moses’ day does provide some enlightening insights into how Moses wrote Genesis One and following. For instance, God created the sun and the moon on the 4th day. But notice that in the text the

words *sun* and *moon* are not used. Rather, the words “greater light” and “lesser light” are the preferred terms. Why? Because when you said “sun” in the ancient world, you meant ‘sun god.’ And that is not what God created, the sun god. God is revealing the marvels of His handiwork as He is refuting the false gods of the pagans. God through Moses does not even name the false gods.

### **The Creator — Creature distinction; no pantheism**

The first verb of the Bible is the word “create.” This already should set the pace for the vocabulary of our Christian speech. We speak of *creation*, not nature in a secular sense. The one and only God created everything. All that exists is a creation. Thus we cannot speak of “Mother Nature.” The world does not give birth to us. There is no earth goddess that is the source of our life or existence. Everything is created. God is now known as the Creator.

What follows from this is that the creation is distinct from the Creator Himself. Dr. Cornelius Van Til of Westminster Seminary (Philadelphia) pressed the phrase upon his students the “Creator — creature distinction.” Henri Blocher (*In the Beginning*, p. 61) says the following: “For creation to take place, in fact, God must be free and distinct from the world, and that is the case only with the God of Genesis.”

The entirety of what exists is there and is kept intact not because of some impersonal laws of a far away deity, nor because the creation is itself god. Pantheism, the belief that god is everything and everything is

god, is refuted or denied by Genesis 1:1. New Age philosophies do not get a great deal of press or attention today, but this does not mean that they are not around to influence many in the modern-day environmentalist movement.

The Bible clearly breaks with all the false religions of Moses’ day. It also denies the lies of our present time.

### **God the King sets up His Kingdom**

#### **The days of creation: *time***

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***The first verb of the Bible is the word “create.” This already should set the pace for the vocabulary of our Christian speech.***

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#### ***Created ‘in the beginning’***

The first subject of the Bible is God. The first speaker of the Bible is God, as well. By His words, “Let there be light,” He wills light into existence. So it will be with the other events of the creation week and with the other elements that are made in these first six days of history.

In Genesis One these phrases are often repeated: “And God said,” and “God blessed them and said.” Creation begins with divine, royal words. Later, at Mount Sinai, the Ten Words will come from the heavenly King, covenantally binding Israel as a people, divinely-created,

to their royal Master and sovereign Father. In the beginning God’s Word creates His kingdom; at Sinai God’s word creates His kingdom of priests, Israel. The Spirit of God will hover over the deep in the beginning (Gen. 1:2) to give order and life to the creation, just as later at Mount Sinai the great glory-cloud will descend upon the mountain to manifest God’s presence as He will give order through His Law-Word of sacred covenant.

Israel’s life is organized according to six days of labor with a day of rest and refreshment, patterned as the creation was from the very beginning of time, when God created the heavens, the earth, the seas, and everything in them, while then resting on the holy day of rest.

#### **The structure of the creation: *divine patterns of division and population***

God did not create a chaotic mess. In fact, the rest of the creation week will be God’s work that will *divide* the various areas of the earth (understood broadly as that all that which is not “the heavens,” God’s special throne room), and then He will *populate* the areas that have been formed through division. What is formless receives form through separation on roughly the first three days, and what is empty receives occupants on the last three (or four) days of the creation week. The wisdom of divine design is about to be held up before the believers’ eyes! Thus “formless and empty” are not seen as something inherently evil, but rather the phrase describes “the earth” as it was in the beginning, at that initial point when our God brought it into existence.



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**The divisions within Creation:  
*orderliness ‘in the beginning’***

God speaks, it happens, He gives it an identity. He judges it good, and then He does it again! In this way the inspired writer keeps pressing upon the reader certain critical matters. Genesis One is not written in classic poetic style, nor is it a flat, two dimensional reporting of “just the facts.” He is busy putting together His Kingdom in place, stage by careful stage.

The various kinds of vegetation (plants, trees, etc.) are said to be produced by the land, and the plants and trees are made “according to their kinds.” Admittedly, the ancient world did not work with the precise categories of species that scientists use today, but the ancient peoples knew for example, the differences between the palm and the oak, the myrtle and the thorn bush. We should also recognize that diversity and differentiation within God’s creation are already in place from the very start. It is not the case that all life forms (plant, bird, animal) evolved out of one single primitive cell. Many of God’s creatures may be like each other in many different ways (e.g.. they breathe oxygen, have two legs, etc.). Such similarities do not constitute proof of development from the one to the other. Diversity in the plant and animal realms (1:24,25) of God’s creation was from the beginning. “And God saw that it was good” (1:12).

Whatever else we want to say about this - and a lot could be said - we see clearly that the modern-day myth of evolutionism is undermined and cast down. In the kingdom of God, all things are created by the Word of the Lord after their kind,

and they are maintained providentially by God’s Law-Word. Evolutionism leads to either the denigration of man to the level of the animal (and its ‘law of the jungle’), or, to the elevation of animals to the level of people. After all, the “baby seals are people too,” we might hear it said.

Genesis 1:26-28 demonstrates the goodness of God in that He reveals, first of all, His claim to the whole earth by placing His very own image in the territory He made. Mankind, male and female, is that very

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image! That truth shows mankind’s exalted beginning as that crowning entity placed into office in the beginning. All the races of mankind are descended from one set of parents. That image-bearing couple knew God’s will from the beginning, thus constituting mankind a prophet. That image-bearing couple had access to God’s very presence, thus making them serve as priest. That image-bearing couple was charged with rule and dominion, thus installing them as king and queen. The new covenant of grace in the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, must then re-create God’s elect in true righteousness, holiness, and knowledge

of God so that God’s elect may be reinstalled in Christ to share His anointing as prophets, priests, and kings (see Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 12).

**The evaluation of creation:  
*no dualism***

Creation is evaluated on a daily basis. After each day, the Lord gave His own verdict, that everything was good. But the Lord concludes the entire creation process with the verdict in Verse 31, “very good; excellent!” The Lord evaluated His handiwork and pronounced it very, very fine!

In doing this, God has undercut all ideologies and philosophies that declare evil to be an eternal principle or eternal force in the universe. The stuff, the material, the earth that was created was good in every sense of the term. There are very subtle ideas that hover in some Christian circles that see physical things as less than good, less than serviceable in the Kingdom of God. But God saw light, the skies, the seas, the tuna fish and the starlings, the dogs and the cats, the lions and the oxen, and He saw the crown of Creation, man, as very good in the beginning.

Consider then this announcement as good news: man’s most basic problem is not that he is human. We sometimes hear this said: “I just can’t help it; I’m only human.” While it is true that man was not created infinite in knowledge and power, nevertheless we were created morally good. Our profound problem is not that we are human; our problem today is that we are sinners, dead in sins and trespasses

until God's gives us new birth (See Eph. 2:1-10)

The consequence of this is the following: in God's sovereign redemption one can be truly Christian and very human at the same time. We are not saved to escape our skin. We are saved to serve God in our skin. In the light of Christ's own resurrection from the dead, and with the prospect of our own glorious resurrection in Him, we now live in the light of Paul's mandate, "Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (I Cor. 15:58b). by body and soul, the totality of me, belongs to God (*Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Day 1).

Genesis one is genuinely good news as it breaks with false worldviews and rearranges our thinking and hopefully, our priorities. Not a square inch nor a single acre of this world may be treated apart from God's holy Will as revealed in His Word. Thus our labor and our recreation must be conducted in the light of the end. When the Garden-City of New Jerusalem will descend from heaven so that God's redeemed people might live in the joy of the Lord forever.

**Rev. Mark Vander Hart**  
teaches Old Testament at the  
Mid-America Reformed  
Seminary in Dyer, Indiana.

## Sound Bites

(continued from page 5)

"When Neo-orthodoxy sets aside the historic creeds and turn to the Holy Spirit to guide them...they want to be free from the living God who speaks in the Scriptures, and to make man the end and goal of things."

*Theology or Christ  
- A False Antithesis*  
Cecil W. Tuininga

## September 1966

"...it is precisely the inability of idols to do anything that marks them as idols....A 'God' that does nothing is nothing."

*Funeral on the Campus*  
Edward Heerema

"One cannot sin against God except he use the good gifts God provides and the holy offices to which He calls us in a way and for a purpose that is contrary to God's intention."

*The Identity of Satan*  
Richard R. De Ridder

"...devastating to the whole system of Christian Education is the home that uses the school as an end in itself. The parent must never say that Christian Education is a substitute for his work. Rather he must see it as a supplement."

*Are Our Christian  
Schools in Danger?*  
Jerome Julien

## November 1966

"What shall we preach in the twentieth century? Shall the church accommodate itself to such questions as may be raised by the scientist, the economist and the politician? Or shall we continue to preach the gospel, as from time

immemorial: the sin of man, his need of a Savior and the life of gratitude?"

\* \* \* \* \*

"If you were to come upon a hobo in the train yards...and he were to say to you, 'I do not believe in God,' you would pay him no heed. Perhaps you would say to yourself, 'What more could one expect from this kind of man?' Again, if you were to come upon a derelict in a doorway...and he were to say to you, 'I do not believe in God,' you would not be surprised or confused or troubled. Ah, but when a college professor tells you he does not believe in God, you are awed by his learning. Paul's point is simply this: Unless the Spirit of God speaks to the college professor's heart, he knows no more about God than does the drunk or the derelict."

*Research, Reason or Revelation*  
Gordon Girod

## December 1966

"To accommodate the gospel to people's feelings and prejudices is to emasculate the gospel."

*Unoffensively Offensive*  
Edwin H. Palmer

"The unregenerate scientist is bound to go astray from ultimate truth. The regenerate scientist may go astray from ultimate truth. This is not to say that the regenerate scientist cannot discover truth from nature; it is only to affirm that the truth he discovers from nature is relative and provisional, lacking the absolute and final character of truth derived from Scripture."

*The Bearing of Scriptural  
Revelation on the Evolutionary  
World View*  
Johannes G. Vos



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# An Anniversary Tribute

*for Rev. Edward J. Knott*

On October 19, 2002, Rev. Edward J. Knott, who until recently served as the president of the board of Reformed Fellowship, will observe the 55th anniversary of his ordination as a Minister of the Word and Sacraments.

Rev. Knott is a graduate of Calvin College and of the Seminary of the Protestant Reformed Churches. In 1947 he was ordained to serve as a Home Missionary for the Protestant Reformed Churches. This service took him to various parts of the United States. In 1950 Rev. Knott accepted the call to serve the Protestant Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan. After a pastorate of nine years in Kalamazoo, he and his family moved to Grand Rapids where he became the pastor of the Second Protestant Reformed Church. Two years later he accepted the call to the Beverly Christian Reformed Church of Wyoming, Michigan. After ten years at Beverly Church, the Knotts moved to the West Leonard Christian Reformed Church of Grand Rapids. In 1978 Rev. Knott accepted the call extended to him by the Calvin Christian Reformed Church of Rock Valley, Iowa. In 1983 the Knotts moved back to Michigan when Rev. Knott became the pastor of the Forest Grove Christian Reformed Church. From this pastorate he retired in 1988.

Upon retirement Rev. and Mrs. Knott became members of the Beverly Church in Wyoming where

they had earlier served. They remain members of this congregation which is now known as the Bethany United Reformed Church of Wyoming.

Throughout his ministry Rev. Knott has been highly esteemed for his deep commitment to the truth of the Reformed Faith and for his wise

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counsel in matters ecclesiastical. His exceptional leadership abilities have been widely recognized and used in the work of the Kingdom of God. He has been delegated to Synod upon a number of occasions. He was elected to serve as an officer of synod both in the Christian Reformed Church and in the United Reformed Churches. He served for a number of years on the Home Missions Board of the Christian Reformed Church. That board called upon him to serve as its president. He was also a member of the Board of Trustees of Calvin College and Seminary. He has served for many years on the board of Reformed Fellowship. He is one of

the founders of Mid-America Reformed Seminary now located in Dyer, Indiana. He currently serves that institution as Vice-President of the Board of Trustees.

Rev. Knott rendered great service on the Board of the Concerned Members of the Christian Reformed Church and also on the Board of the Alliance of Reformed Churches, both of which organizations he served as an officer. He served as Chairman of the meeting of Independent Reformed Churches meeting in 1995 which led to the organization of the Federation of United Reformed Churches in North America of whose first synod he served as president.

Rev. Knott remains in demand for pulpit supply, for leading Bible Studies and is often looked to for wise counsel by both church members and church councils. During the years of his ministry he has been ably assisted and encouraged by his wife, the former Harriet Doezema whom he married in 1946.

The Board and membership of Reformed Fellowship are grateful for the services rendered by Rev. Knott during his many years of affiliation with them and extend congratulations to him upon this significant milestone in his ministry.

# Athanasius, the Son of God and Salvation

Readers of *The Outlook* may be familiar with Henry Coray's, *Against the World: The Odyssey of Athanasius* (1992). This is a brief (yet commendable), popular, fictionalized biography of the champion of Nicene orthodoxy. Inveterate defender of the creed of Nicaea (325 A.D.), Athanasius has been revered by the church catholic for his unswerving insistence on the essential deity of the Son of God. This insistence was not without cost. Five times he was banished from his church, fleeing for his life to be protected or secreted by his friends. At several points in his career it seemed as if he alone stood for orthodoxy; hence the phrase *Athanasius contra mundum* ("Athanasius against the world").

However, modern church historians of fourth century Christological controversies are revising the traditional portrait of Athanasius by labeling him, among other epithets, "a liar", "gangster", "violent political manipulator". Revisionism, like the poor, is ever with us; unlike the poor, revisionists are ever driven by agendas. The current revisionist agenda vis-à-vis Athanasius is the unabashed rehabilitation of his antagonist Arius of Alexandria,

Egypt. Contemporary revisionist historians have placed a white hat on the head of this traditional heretic, even though Arius was roundly condemned by the First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea. Revisionists, so we are informed, have (re)discovered the 'orthodox' Arius and (surprise! surprise!) he is more 'orthodox' than his nemesis, Athanasius (who increasingly wears a black hat). The Christology of Arius as well as his soteriology is viewed as more Scriptural than that of Athanasius.

The upshot of all this revisionist ink is that Nicene orthodoxy triumphed after 325, not because it was biblical, not because it was right, but because of political might. The emperor Constantine was eager to consolidate his Christian political power through the display of his own magisterial theological savvy. Nicaea was the theological tool in advancing the imperial agenda. Revisionists quickly point out that it was not coincidental that Constantine attended the Council of Nicaea. He was there to advance his own "imperial theology".

All of this should cause us to review the traditional orthodoxy which we confess when we use the Nicene Creed in worship.

Arius, a young presbyter in Alexandria, began to raise the eyebrows of his supervising bishop Alexander, also of Alexandria, when he announced that the Son of God was a creature. It is clear and uncontroverted that the famous statement "there was a time when he (the Son of God) was not" came from Arius's lips and pen (the primary source is Arius's *Thai/a* ["The Banquet"]; see also Arius's letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia).

If there was a time when the Son of God was not in existence, then it follows that He was made or created at a point in time. Once, the Son of God was not; then He was. In other words, once upon a time, God was alone - no other divine person existed alongside Him, And then, this lone God created a Son so as to have Him become, for the first time, a Father. Thus, God was not always Father; once, before the creation of the son, He was only God.

Bishop Alexander and his young deacon, Athanasius, were alarmed. To reduce the Son of God to a created being (even the highest created being) was unbiblical. It was to deny the Trinity, to affirm a Unitarian concept of the Godhead and to reject three persons in one essence.

At the Council of Nicaca, the fathers of the church affirmed that the Son of God was "begotten, not made" thus *not* a creature. They further affirmed that the Son was "of the same substance" (Greek, *homoousios*) as the Father with respect to His essence. Consub-

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*Revisionists have (re)discovered the 'orthodox' Arius and he is more 'orthodox' than his nemesis, Athanasius.*



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stantial (i.e., equal in substance) essentially; begotten, not made, personally.

Arius's error was to define "begetting" as a creaturely function (as human creatures beget sons). But since God is not a creature, when he begets, he begets in accordance with his own uncreated, eternal nature. Hence the begetting of the Son is as eternal as the existence of God the Father himself. And so the orthodox church has affirmed that the Son of God is *eternally* begotten of the Father (i.e., has been eternally begotten, is being eternally begotten, shall be eternally begotten).

Athanasius wrote an important book (*On the Incarnation of the Word*) in which he explained the biblical doctrine of the deity of the Son. The eternal Word (Logos) becomes man (incarnate) in order to bring men and women to God (cf. Jn. 1:14). Athanasius realized that the question "Who is Jesus?" was intimately related to the question "How shall we be saved?" If the Son of God were a creature (as Arius maintained), salvation would be impossible. A creature could not save a creature. To be rightly related (or united) to God would take God rightly related (or united) to human nature. Hence the incarnation for Athanasius was a paradigm of mankind's salvation: God and man united. If the Savior is *not* God incarnate, there can be no salvation. Athanasius was persistent in defending the essential or consubstantial deity of the Son of God because he deemed this truth essential to the salvation of sinners.

Here is the fundamental bottom line. How could one who was not

God, one who was a mere creature—how could such a one save a multitude of sinners; how could such a one save even *one* sinner? How could a mere creature satisfy the debt owed the infinite God?

Arius's answer was "by imitation". A very good creature (Christ) provided the pattern for goodness for human creatures. Arius's notion that Jesus possessed a mutable nature ("the Word/Logos himself also is subject to change") and that He (as a creature) earned His heavenly reward by choosing good amounted

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to a reduction of grace. Grace was no longer a divine or heavenly intervention to remedy human helplessness. Grace (for Arius) was the merit of a mere creature now held out as an example of "salvation" for other creatures. To Athanasius and the other defenders of Nicaea, this was a counsel of despair: "What help can creatures derive from a creature that itself needs salvation?"

Athanasius not only opposed the world with respect to the essential deity of the Son of God, he also recognized the implications of a "Savior" who was a mere creature. Only if God Himself condescended to unite human flesh to His own di-

vine nature could sinful men and women ever hope to be united to God "He became sin for us and a curse, though not having sinned Himself, but because He Himself bare our sin and our curse."

We are deeply indebted to Athanasius, not only for enunciating more clearly than ever before the *homoousios* of our Savior: we are indebted to him for defending the biblical doctrine of salvation as union with Christ (and God, the Father, through God, the Holy Spirit) via incarnation.

Revisionists may rehabilitate Arius. But the person of the Son whom they represent is incapable of saving other sinful Creatures. Athanasius understood this and so we too stand with the great Alexandrian *contra mundum* (if necessary).

**Rev. James T. Dennison, Jr.** is Academic Dean and Professor of Church History and Biblical Theology at Northwest Theological Seminary in Lynnwood, Washington.

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# RYS Convention

## *“Faith to Move Mountains”*

### **RYS Convention draws more than 500 attendees**

*by Ed DeGraaf, Director of Reformed Youth Services*

From July 15-19, Reformed Youth Services held its 2002 youth convention in Colorado Springs, Colorado. It was the first time RYS-member churches had traveled out west for their annual national conference. More than 500 young people and sponsors from 36 member churches and others attended the convention held on the campus of the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. Main speakers Mr. Rip Pratt of Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Dallas, Texas and Rev. Phil Vos of Escondido United Reformed Church in California thoroughly explored the convention theme of “Faith to Move Mountains” with biblical and personal applications.

In his opening address, Mr. Pratt challenged the young people to live a radical Christian life, one that gets them noticed by the world. Rev. Vos followed up that introduction to the convention with a definition of the elements of true faith, highlighting Heidelberg Catechism question and answer twenty-one in his talk. Later in the week, Rev. Vos shared his personal story of struggling with Hodgkins lymphoma. He said that the experience taught him that we need to thank God for even the hard times and to trust the Lord’s leading. Rev. Vos concluded his address with a heartfelt rendition of “Find Us Faithful.”

Mr. Pratt also challenged the conventioners to remember God’s faithfulness in tangible ways and urged the teens to have “faith with feet.” “Build yourself up in the faith,” said Pratt, who has worked with youth for more than 20 years. “Faith comes from hearing the Word of God. Be pleasing to Him by going out and serving as living epistles.”

In response to conventioner request, RYS added another workshop to the schedule this year. The young people attended five of the seminars, choosing from 10 faith-related topics led by nine pastors and an elder. Not surprisingly, the most popular workshop numerically was entitled “Boy Meets Girl—Then What?” led by Rev. Bob VanManen, an OPC pastor from Michigan. All of the main sessions and workshops were taped and

made available to conference attendees for a fee.

In addition to approximately 370 teens, about 100 adult sponsors attended the convention. Those youth leaders learned more about Reformed Youth Services, its ministries and materials at the convention’s annual sponsor dinner.

Once again, the convention was ably served by a large hard-working volunteer committee that made sure the details of the event flowed smoothly. We also praise God that everyone arrived and departed home safely. To God be the glory! Lord willing, next year’s national convention will be held July 28-August 1 at Lake Williamson Christian Center in Carlinville, Illinois. The theme of the convention will be “Fishers of Men.” For more information about RYS or the convention, please contact RYS director Ed DeGraaf at (616) 667-0694.







### **In God Alone**

*by Laurie Ellens*

*Youth Leader*

*Hudsonville, Michigan*

As a sponsor, there are many events and outings that fill our youth group schedules. The most recent one was the Reformed Youth Services national convention in Colorado. What a joy it was to attend! So often our teens are faced with tough choices, and it is our job as parents, youth leaders and church members to lead them in their decision making. The world that we have left behind for our teens is not an easy one. It has lost much of its innocence. This makes our job more important than ever.

First, I would like to thank the convention committee for their months of work. Their dedication is greatly appreciated, and God greatly blessed their efforts. As churches we need to continue to support RYS with our prayers and gifts. Their assistance to youth leaders and the opportunities for growth and service to our teens is invaluable.

Our main speakers, Mr. Rip Pratt and Rev. Phil Vos did an excellent job of driving the point home, that “In God Alone” are the answers for which we search. So often we look within ourselves, and don’t use the weapons of faith that have been given to us. When struggles and conflicts arise we ask ourselves “why me?” We should be asking “why NOT me?” God has promised us that He would never leave us.

We have to take him at his Word, leave the doubt behind, and remember His faithfulness to us.

The workshops that were offered did an excellent job of taking the different aspects of everyday living and bringing them into the light of God’s Word. Issues such as modesty, relationships, daily devotions, evangelism, our heritage, being a servant to others, and trusting God in daily living and in challenging times were some of topics that were discussed. Praise God for lives that were changed as a result of these workshops!

One of the things that warmed my heart was the singing of the hymns that are an important part of our heritage. It was such a blessing to hear 500 people sing “Amazing Grace” and “When Peace like a River” from their hearts. It brought tears to many eyes. I’d like to leave you with a few phrases of songs that were also from the heart “My name is graven on His hands; My name is written on His heart”, “Let every breath, all that I am, never

cease to worship You”, “Nothing compares to the promise I have in You”. On Thursday evening, at our final Son-set group meeting, this was the prayer of our teens: “may all who come behind us find us faithful”. Praise God for his everlasting love!

### **Faith to Move Mountains**

*by Swandel Dykstra*

*Young Person*

*Everson, Washington*

Colorado Springs, Colorado proved to be prime location for this year’s Reformed Youth Services (RYS) Convention with it’s majestic mountains surrounding the campus. Mr. Rip Pratt and Reverend Phil Vos spoke at the main sessions, while a variety of speakers spoke and led ten different workshops.

This year the teens of the convention all attended five sessions and five of the ten workshops.

Mr. Pratt spoke for three of the five sessions. In his first session he had everyone respond to his questions with, “In God alone”. Where is our



comfort? Our security? Our hope? All were answered with “In God alone”. His second session was about leaving memorials, ebenezers, or standing stones. They were left in the past to show and tell a story of God’s faithfulness to his people. Believers too are to leave memorials behind so generations to come may hear of times when God has been faithful to them. “Faith with Feet” entitled Mr. Pratt’s third session. This talk focused on pleasing Christ and God, not one’s self. Also he showed that God keeps His chosen ones to Himself and that believers should live their lives as living examples of Christ for unbelievers.

Rev. Phil Vos spoke at the other two sessions. His first session dealt with what faith is. It’s a knowledge of the Bible, an agreement that all the Bible holds is true, and a trust that God’s promises are for each individual. His second session covered true faith. He shared his battle with cancer and showed us that true faith impacts situations differ-



ently than what the world thinks.

The workshops each covered a different perspective of faith. “Faith of our Fathers”, by Rev. David Feddes explained about martyrs of the faith and their stories. “Answering Challenges to Your Faith”, by Rev. Alan Strange, explained how to stand up for one’s faith, and why people challenge it. “Trusting God in the Midst of Turmoil”, by Rev. Rich Kuiken, went over God’s providence. Everything happens with God’s knowledge, so God knows the struggles that His people face. “Everyday Faith”, by Mr. Rick Poll, said that one’s walk of faith will never be greater than one’s life of prayer. “Daily Devotions: Duty or Delight” by Rev. Iain Wright, was about personal relationships with Jesus Christ. Other workshops included “Where is the Lord Leading Me?” by Rev. Keith Davis, “Boy Meets Girl - Then What?” by Rev Bob Van Manen, “Mirror, Mirror on the Wall” by Rev. Jason Tuinstra, “Why Not Share It?” by Rev. Duane Vedders, and “Servanthood 101” by Rev. John Sale. All the workshops blessed the attendants each in their own way.

Along with sessions and workshops, there were many activities each

day to get involved with. Some organized activities included a mixer, volleyball, girls and guys 3-on-3 basketball, and ultimate frisbee tournaments. During the hours of free time impromptu games of volleyball, soccer, frisbee and football broke out. Free time also allowed the teens to mix with each other, make new friends and explore the campus.

The warm sunny weather proved to be perfect conditions for water fights which erupted almost every day with the provided water bottles.

Every morning one hour was set aside for Son-rise groups. Same sex groups of eight teens and two leaders met and had devotions and prayer time. Each night time was set aside for Son-set groups. This provided time for each youth group to meet, discuss the day, and pray for concerns among them.

“In God alone” was heard all week in sessions, workshops, and small groups. Mr. Rip Pratt and Rev. Phil Vos along with the other pastors and elder challenged the attendants of the convention to look past simple faith and explore deeper into it. The knowledge gained, the friendships started, and the memories made, will not likely leave the teens or leaders minds for some time.



# Looking Back

There was a time when the average man in the pew hardly knew the meaning of the word “liturgy.” At least not much attention was given to it. Worship services in the Christian Reformed Church were relatively simple and uniform.

All that has changed over the last few decades. “Liturgy” is now the in thing. Since historically we are not “high church,” our “liturgy” is often a flop, and also boring. If we really want to be “liturgical” we should join the high-church: Anglican or the Eastern Orthodox (as Franky Schaeffer has done).

The liturgical nonsense that has characterized the CRC over the last years has contributed not a little to the exodus of members from the CRC. They were sick of all the innovations introduced into the worship services. What a joy not to have to fight with “Worship Committees” anymore. And what a joy to have simple, reverent God-honoring worship services on Sunday. What people often forget is that if you attract people to the church by way of a circus, one will only be able to keep them with a bigger circus. And that isn’t only true for Hybels and Schuller.

One of the early symptoms and concomitants of a new way of looking at worship was the so-called “youth services.” In such a service the entire focus was on youth. Often the young people themselves led various facets of the service. No one asked the question: What is so special about the young people? If they need a special service for

themselves, don’t we need a special service for older folks too, and for moms and dads and educated members and non-educated ones too?

No one has addressed this subject better than the late Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his book *Preaching and Preachers*.

The whole idea, I say, is utterly ridiculous because on that argument and supposition one could never preach to a mixed general congregation. You would have to have

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***If you attract people to the church by way of a circus, one will only be able to keep them with a bigger circus.***

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one service for, and one congregation of, the non-intellectuals; then you would have a special service for the intellectuals, and then you would have one, probably, for those who are somewhere in between. Then you might have services for the different ages, then one for the factory workers and one for professional people and so on endlessly. The result would be that you would be dividing up and atomizing your congregation; you

would never have a common public act of worship and a sermon preached at all. You would have to be dividing yourself up in this way and your work would be endless. In any case it would be entirely destructive of this great fundamental principle of the New Testament, that we are all one: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, Barbarian, Scythion, bond nor free, male or female.” I add, there is neither intellectual nor non-intellectual, factory worker, professional man or anything else. We are all one in sin, one in failure, one in hopelessness, one in need of the Lord Jesus Christ and His great Salvation.

Closely related to the above is the prevalent idea that we must have a special message for the children. They are then called to the front and some one has a “children’s sermon” for them. (Talk about a miniature circus, and you have one here!) It’s part of the idea that children need a “special service” for themselves. It’s called “children’s church.” Either by themselves in the basement, or upstairs at the front. What a way to make clear to them that they are not really a part of the “adult” service upstairs. They have to have “children’s church”. Try to “un-teach” them that when they grow older! What thoroughly un-Reformed nonsense!

*Let youth, yea, all the  
throng  
Who to Thy Church  
belong,  
Unite to swell the Song  
to Christ Our King,*

*Hither our children bring  
To shout Thy praise.*  
(#414 Shepherd of Tender Youth)

How strong this pull was to have a children's message in the service can be seen in the fact that ministers who should have known better capitulated.

A colleague once used this illustration: When we sit down for dinner, we don't all eat pabulum first (the children's sermon), and then the regular fare. Of course not. Early on when the rest are eating regular fare, mom breaks little pieces of meat and vegetables and feeds that to junior. Later on he will be able to eat more solid food. We eat together as family, junior included.

In the sixties Mrs. Marianne Radius wrote a children's book about the work and ministry of Jesus and called it *God With Us*. A good title. Later on she reprinted this book in paperback and gave it the title: *Ninety Story Sermons for Children's Church*. What an awful title! 'Wir setzen uns mit tranen nieder.'

Listen once more to Lloyd-Jones:

The general preaching of the Gospel is applied in particular by the Holy Spirit to the particular cases. Men and women are brought to see their same common fundamental need, and they are converted and regenerated in the same way by the same Spirit. So they mix together in the same Church; and if they feel that they cannot, and do not, well, then they are not regenerated. It just comes to that. If some of them feel that they are being neglected be-

cause of their great intellects it shows that there is a fundamental lack of humility in them. They have not been humbled as they should have been. The glory of the Church is that she consists of all these types and kinds and all the possible varieties and variations of humanity; and yet because they all share this common life they are able to participate together and to enjoy the same preaching.

There is no greater fallacy than to think that you need a gospel for special types of people. It is entirely contrary to plain biblical teaching. It is also contradicted completely by what we read in the biographies of all the great preachers such as Whitefield, Spurgeon and also in the stories of evangelists such as D. L. Moody. They never recognized these false distinctions, and their ministries were blessed to all types intellectual, social etc. of people.

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# The New Perspective on Paul

## *The Contribution of E. P. Sanders*

(Part One)

In order to find our way through the thicket of literature on the new perspective on Paul, we must give special attention to the figure of E. P. Sanders. Even though Sanders was not the first to question the older, more traditional understanding of the teaching of the apostle Paul, his writings have become a kind of benchmark for the development of the new view. Figures like J. D. G. Dunn and T. F. Wright, whom we will consider in subsequent articles, have built significantly upon Sanders' work. To the extent that we may properly speak of a new perspective, Sanders is the figure whose arguments dominate the debate and whose writings form a point of reference for the ongoing discussion. Though Dunn and Wright do not fully agree with Sanders on a number of points, as we shall see, their work is certainly dependent upon the pioneering labor of Sanders. Were it not for Sanders and his arguments for a new view of the apostle Paul's understanding of the gospel, we would not be able to speak of something like a consensus or new perspective on Paul.

### Important Forerunners to the New Perspective

Before considering Sanders position, however, it should be noted that Sanders work also stands in a longer line of revisionist treatment of the writings of the apostle Paul. In

the orbit of New Testament studies in general and Pauline studies in particular, there has been a long history of debate regarding the accuracy of the Reformation's understanding of the apostle Paul. Therefore, in order to appreciate Sanders' contribution to the development of a new perspective, we need to consider briefly several more recent and important forerunners of his view.

### Claude G. Montefiore

The first figure of note is the Jewish theologian Claude G. Montefiore. In a highly influential study written early in the twentieth century, *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays*, Montefiore argued that the religion of Palestinian Judaism differed greatly from the picture of Judaism that emerges from the apostle Paul's writings.<sup>1</sup> Whereas Paul portrays the Judaizers as proponents of a joyless, legalistic religion, rabbinic Judaism of the first century "was a better, happier, and more noble religion than one might infer from the writings of the Apostle."<sup>2</sup> Based upon his study of rabbinic Judaism, Montefiore claimed that it was a religion that emphasized God's mercy and love as much as His holiness. Rabbinic Judaism taught that God gave the law to His peculiar people, Israel, not that it might be a burden or means of salvation by works, but that it might be a means of life and blessing. Rather than a

religion that encouraged pride and self-righteousness, rabbinic Judaism emphasized that Israel would inherit the blessings of the covenant through God's grace and mercy. Furthermore, the religion of rabbinic Judaism made provision for God's gracious atonement of the sins of His people, and emphasized the mercy of God in finally vindicating their cause. As a result of this new evaluation of the teaching of Palestinian Judaism, Montefiore concluded that the only feature of Judaism that conflicted with this generally positive outlook was its particularism or tendency to exclude non-Jews from the reach of God's grace.

Though some aspects of Montefiore's interpretation of rabbinic Judaism are not embraced by proponents of the new perspective, the general portrait of Judaism that he painted has become a significant element of the new approach to Paul. Few New Testament students today agree with Montefiore's explanation of Paul's assessment of Judaism, namely, that Paul was not a rabbinic Jew before his conversion but a member of diaspora Judaism, whose religion was of a distinctly more legalistic or graceless cast. However, many believe that Montefiore successfully refuted the traditional view of Judaism, and demonstrated the importance of a proper understanding of first-century Judaism to a new interpretation of the New Testament.

### George Foot Moore

A second figure whose studies of Judaism have played an important role in the emergence of the new perspective on Paul, is George Foot Moore, an American rabbinics

scholar. Moore, in a substantial and oft-quoted article in the *Harvard Theological Review*, argued that the traditional Christian interpretation of Judaism was largely distorted by polemical interests.<sup>3</sup> Rather than providing an accurate and fair assessment of Judaism, most traditional views were improperly shaped by the desire to enhance some feature of Christian teaching on the one hand, and to refute Judaism on the other. As a result, Moore maintained, Judaism was largely misunderstood by the Christian theological tradition.

Moore's study of Judaism served two purposes, both of which are evident in the new perspective. One purpose was to view Judaism in its own right, and not in terms of the distinctive themes of Christian theology. The other purpose was to refute the distortion of Judaism in traditional Protestant theology. Rather than viewing Judaism through the lens of the New Testament letters of the apostle Paul, Moore insisted that Judaism deserved to be an independent subject of study. Such an independent study of Judaism sheds as much light upon the New Testament as the New Testament sheds upon Judaism. Instead of taking the New Testament's account of Judaism as our standard, we must view Judaism from a historical perspective, seeking to discover its character without the bias or influence of Christian interests. Since the time of the Protestant Reformation, the theological bias of interpreters has often distorted their view of Judaism. Much of the study, for example, of Paul's writings, has served to support the Protestant, and especially Lutheran, polemic

against Roman Catholicism's legalism. In this study, Roman Catholicism is regarded as little more than a later expression of the same legalistic religion that characterized Judaism at the time of the writing of the New Testament. Judaism is not viewed from the standpoint of its own witnesses. Rather, Judaism serves as a kind of "whipping boy" for the typical Protestant criticism of any religion that views obedience to the law as the means of finding favor with God. In Moore's study, as in Montefiore's before him, this approach is strongly rejected.

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***Schweitzer calls into  
question the  
Reformation's  
insistence that  
justification was the  
center of Paul's  
religious thought.***

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**Albert Schweitzer**

Unlike Montefiore and Foote, the next figure of note, Albert Schweitzer, represents a tendency in New Testament studies to question the centrality of the doctrine of justification in Paul's understanding of the gospel. With the two previous writers we have considered, Montefiore and Moore, the primary emphasis is upon a new and revised understanding of Judaism. Schweitzer represents a different emphasis. Whatever our interpretation of Judaism, Schweitzer illustrates a trend in biblical studies that calls into question the Reformation's insistence that justi-

fication was the center of Paul's religious thought. Contrary to Luther and Calvin's opinion that the gospel is principally a message about the sinner's free acceptance with God on account of the righteousness of Christ (and not the righteousness of works performed in obedience to the law), Schweitzer and others argue that this is at best a secondary feature of the gospel.

In his book *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, Schweitzer maintained that Paul's primary emphasis was upon the believer's union with Christ.<sup>4</sup> With the coming of Christ, the law no longer remains in force as before. Though Paul argued for a kind of status quo position on the role of the law—it remains to be observed by Jews who become Christians, but it has no binding force for Gentiles—his real concern lies, not with observance or non-observance of the requirements of the law, but with the believer's salvation through mystical union with the crucified and risen Christ. Within the context of Paul's primary emphasis upon union with Christ, the problem of justification is really only a minor and subordinate one. Justification solves the issue of how Gentiles could be members of Christ without having to obey the requirements of the law. But it plays no other role. Consequently, Schweitzer concluded that "the doctrine of righteousness by faith is a therefore a subsidiary crater [in Paul's thought], which has formed within the rim of the main crater—the mystical doctrine of redemption through the being-in-Christ."<sup>5</sup>



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## Krister Stendahl

The last figure who deserves mention is Krister Stendahl. Though a theologian in the Lutheran tradition, Stendahl has played a significant role in questioning the traditional Reformation conviction that the apostle Paul's thought was dominated by the doctrine of justification. In a highly influential article, "Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," Stendahl challenged the entire western tradition's reading of the apostle Paul.<sup>6</sup> According to Stendahl, this tradition, beginning with Augustine through Luther and Calvin and including the work of many Protestant scholars to the present day, has misread Paul as though he developed his doctrine of justification to solve the problem of his troubled conscience. In this traditional reading of Paul, Luther's struggle with a stricken conscience before God, which was born of his awareness that he could never keep the law perfectly enough to assure himself of God's favor, justification answers the problem or predicament of human sin. No one can find justification or acceptance with God on the basis of works performed in obedience to the law. Paul's doctrine of justification, in this traditional understanding, is the pivot or center of his teaching. Justification, which is the chief article of the Christian faith, reassures anxious and stricken consciences that there is acceptance with God, not on the basis of the works of the law, but on the basis of Christ's perfect righteousness.

Stendahl argues that this is a basic misreading of Paul's writings: "Where Paul was concerned about the possibility for Gentiles to be in-

cluded in the messianic community, his statements are now read as answers to the quest for assurance about man's salvation out of a common human predicament."<sup>7</sup> The Western tradition, and particularly its Protestant expression, has wrongly read the apostle Paul through the experience of those who are grappling with the problem of finding assurance of God's favor in the face of the reality of human sin and brokenness. This tradition reads Paul's account of the doctrine of justification, accordingly, not as Paul intended it, but as the experi-

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### *Paul's doctrine of justification is the pivot or center of his teaching.*

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ence of an introspective conscience requires. In Stendahl's reading of Paul, however, the apostle exhibited little or no unease of conscience before God. As a matter of fact, Stendahl insists, Paul had a robust and confident conscience before God, and exhibits little or none of the anxiety about human salvation from sin that has characterized the western view of salvation. When Paul spoke of justification, therefore, he was not attempting to solve the problem of an uneasy conscience, but to account for how Gentiles are included with Jews among the people of God.

## Conclusion

I have taken the trouble to consider

briefly these forerunners of the new perspective, since they are characteristic of developments in New Testament and Pauline studies that form the background to the work of E. P. Sanders and other leading proponents of the new view. Though Sanders is undoubtedly the leading figure in the formation of a new perspective on Paul, he has acknowledged his indebtedness to the pioneering work of others. Sanders' own argument against the older view of Judaism, together with its implications for an interpretation of Paul's understanding of the gospel, builds upon what might be regarded as a significantly new tradition of Pauline studies.

When we consider Sanders' contribution to the new perspective in our next article, it will be evident that he stands in the line of those who believe the traditional Protestant view of Paul's gospel is mistaken. This view is mistaken in part because it is based upon a misreading or misunderstanding of the nature of Palestinian Judaism. Contrary to the claim of many Protestant interpreters, Judaism, at the time of the writing of the New Testament, was not a legalistic religion that taught salvation by works rather than faith. Judaism was a religion marked by clear emphasis upon God's grace and electing initiative in the salvation of his people, Israel. But this view is also mistaken in its interpretation of the importance and meaning of Paul's understanding of justification. Justification was neither the central point in Paul's understanding of the gospel nor the answer to the problem of legalism. Justification, so far as it plays a role

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in Paul's understanding of the gospel, was a subordinate theme. The theme of justification in Paul's thought was only aimed at explaining how in the new covenant Gentiles are also now included among the number of God's covenant people.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> London: Max Goschen, 1914.
- <sup>2</sup> *Judaism and St. Paul*, p. 87.
- <sup>3</sup> "Christian Writers on Judaism," *Harvard Theological Review* (1921), pp. 197-254.
- <sup>4</sup> London: A. and C. Black, 1931.
- <sup>5</sup> *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, p. 225.
- <sup>6</sup> *In Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (London: SCM, 1977), pp. 78-96.
- <sup>7</sup> "Paul and the Introspective Conscience," p. 86.

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