

# L'Abri

INTERNATIONAL



'Agnus Dei' by Willem Zijlstra (2004) ([www.kunstdevee.nl](http://www.kunstdevee.nl))

**'Terrifying.' 'Repulsive.'**  
**'Barbaric.'** These were some responses at a recent lecture in the Netherlands when I asked the group what they thought of the Biblical claim that there can be no forgiveness without a blood sacrifice. Are they right?

Both the Christians and the non-Christians in the audience agreed that the idea made them uneasy, if not upset or even downright indignant. And they are certainly not alone. In a sense it does seem difficult to reconcile a gospel message of love and grace with a message of punishment and judgment. The Old and New Testaments are often pitted against each other in this way, as though the former has been made invalid and replaced by the latter. The answer sometimes given is that, theoretically and theologically speaking, the message of the New Testament needs the message of the Old, that a gospel of grace is not comprehensible without a principle of judgment.

But intuitively it still seems something must be wrong with this picture. Could God not have come up with some other way? How

can the God of the Bible say that He is the God of love and of life, if He Himself demands the lives of others – especially that of His own Son Jesus? Does such a God deserve our trust, our respect and our praise? In other words, is the claim that “there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood” (Hebrews 9:22) not only *inconsistent* and *unnecessary*, but even therefore *immoral*?

#### Inconsistent

Let's consider first whether such a claim is inconsistent. If God says time and again in His revelation that it is wrong to take another person's life, how could this very act be an integral part of His own plan of salvation? It sounds hypocritical, as though God is allowed to break His own law. If that is true, then we could dare to say that God is

immoral. Before we try to answer such a charge, however, we should recognize a very interesting question looming in the background. On the basis of what moral law would we be calling God immoral? On which authority are we saying that life is worth our protection?

Interestingly enough, that is actually where God's law begins: that we are meant for life. If we love life, if we want to enjoy life, if we find purpose in the growth and flourishing we associate with life, where all kinds of relationships are fruitful and constructive, then we should know that the Creator has made this world according to a law that supports exactly these things.

In his book *Reason for God* Tim Keller repeatedly refers to *shalom* as the basis of the biblical vision for life. *Shalom* is a biblical de-

## '... the shedding of blood ...'

Robb Ludwick

Dear Friends,

In this issue we have an article adapted from a lecture by Robb Ludwick. It was part of a series offered by the Dutch L'Abri called "Longing for a Better World", in which several basic objections to the Christian faith were examined in their current forms. The longer version is at the moment only available in Dutch (!) but if you are interested please feel free to email him at labri@labri.nl.

Robb begins by examining the accusation that any redemptive message involving a blood sacrifice is barbaric, and that any God who would demand such a sacrifice must be immoral. Tensions within these accusations themselves actually reveal our need for a just God. Furthermore, our own longings for justice in and redemption from a broken world create a dilemma for which the biblical gospel is an especially appropriate answer. Though there is certainly more to say about the atonement than what is covered here, we find it an interesting way of opening the door to further dialogue about the 'good news'.

In the Family Letter Clark and Julia Scheibe let us hear how things have been going in the Canadian L'Abri on Bowen Island. Be sure to check out their link on the L'Abri website if you are interested in seeing or hearing more.

And as always, if you have any questions, comments or tips for us concerning our website or this newsletter, please feel free to contact us at labri@labri.nl.

Blessings,  
The L'Abri Workers

scription of the world as it is meant to be, characterized by peace, not just peace in the negative sense - the absence of conflict and pain - but in the positive sense - that life can freely flourish without anything holding it back.

The goal of life is to be and to develop in a creative order, as nature but also as culture, in a blend of creativity and rest, in all the relationships for which we were built with each other and with our environment. The Bible tells us that humans are made in God's image, able to recognize and to value these different relationships within creation. God's law is then His revelation to us about how to nourish and protect these relationships. "Choose life," God tells us, by holding on to Him and holding on to what He tells us (Deuteronomy 20:15-20). God reveals these things to us because He loves His creation so much. It is precious to Him and His will is to see it develop freely as He intended it to. That is why we are told that in a loving, communicative relationship with God we learn to live in loving relationships with everything in creation. That is *shalom*.

But if we look around us now, we can easily see that we for a very large part do not live in *shalom*. The Bible says this came about because humans turned away from God in distrust, having chosen not to believe that He was truly concerned with their life and well-being. And whether we believe this or not, we can look around us and quickly conclude that if things ever had a start in paradise, things certainly are different now. Our relationships are deeply and regularly fractured by human choices made not out of love but out of fear, selfishness, hate and condemnation. Much is broken.

### Just

And what does God say about this? Let's first think of ourselves. It is deep within us to know and feel that justice is important. If Jack steals something from Jill, most of us will think that he should at least be required to pay Jill the amount back and maybe also spend some time in jail. If Jill tells lies about Jack, most of us will think that it's good for the truth about Jack to be made known, and especially if she doesn't want to participate, that Jill should also undergo some kind of punishment.

Why? Because we know that stealing and lying damage the freedom and fruitfulness of our relationships. We know we need not only to discourage such things, but also to be ready to give a response when they do

happen. Look how many people are rejoicing that dictators are losing ground in North Africa and the Middle East, and how many want to see them have their day in court. When Archbishop Desmond Tutu was working with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Africa, where for two years people could come freely tell the horrible things they had endured - and sometimes the horrible things they themselves had done - some criticism that arose. Is the purpose of this forum, some people complained, simply to forgive and forget? Naming things is important, but is that itself enough? Should there not be court cases that follow up on this information, so that real justice gets a chance?

*To protect the meaningfulness of my life, God promises an ultimate justice that only He could provide*

Tutu was of course rightly concerned to stop the cycle of violence, but it is a sensitive point. If the crimes receive no chance of a just answer, then it can amount to saying that, in the end, it does not matter what happened. It has been named, it is over, and we should let go and move on. We will come back to this in a moment, because part of us does see such letting go as a sign of true freedom and maturity.

But part of us still longs also for that just answer, an answer that says 'no, you do not have to simply forgive and forget, your life is so intrinsically valuable that no one is allowed to damage it without repercussions.' We want to believe that life, our lives and the lives of others, must not only be nourished but protected.

It may sometimes be difficult to distinguish such a longing for justice from a longing for revenge. But even in a longing for revenge, though it is twisted and corrupt, there is something understandable: does my pain actually meaningful or not? The pain I have because something has been done to me, or the pain I have from something I myself have done to another, does it deserve more than simply recognition and sympathy? Is there anything that will answer it justly, to defend the fact that it should not have happened, to defend me as violated?



In short: is there any authority outside of myself that can tell me this pain actually has meaning? Is it ... justified?

### Letting Go

Justice does therefore seem important. The problem is, as we well know, that 'setting things right' never works completely. In cases of stealing and lying there are always scars which remain, even after justice has been met, and this is of course even more so in cases of abuse and murder.

*Shalom* is still the principle at work here: because life is not meant to be broken in these ways, it hurts when it happens. Deep within we know it deserves an answer, to defend and protect the basic value of life. But deep within we also know that true life cannot be restored simply by justice. Letting go and moving on also has its place, because a bitter, frustrated and imprisoned existence is also not life as it was intended. We do not want to believe that scars have the last word. But what makes this possible? According to recent clinical psychological research, abuse victims who 'forgive' experience a faster, more thorough and more sustained recovery than those who do not 'forgive'. They seem more free, statistically speaking, to look again toward new relationships, not as much under the shadow and continued influence of the perpetrator.<sup>1</sup>

But the key question is: what does it mean to 'forgive'? The writers are careful enough first to tell us what it is *not*: it is not a compromise, or saying that 'it just takes time', or simply asking someone to move on and try to live as though something wrong has not happened. Forgiveness only comes when there is first a serious recognition that what was done to you (or what you have done)

*Because He loves His creation, God takes very seriously the pain we feel when things go wrong. It is a justified pain*

really is wrong, morally and legally. That it should not have happened, that it is not permitted. And that in our society it deserves a lawful, legal answer – and that you have a right to want to see that happen.

If we *demand* to see that justice now, we risk setting ourselves up for a problem. Sometimes justice simply is not attainable in this world. But to recognize that I have a right to long deeply for it is very important. Otherwise the pain I experience from injustice becomes meaningless. Only in letting go

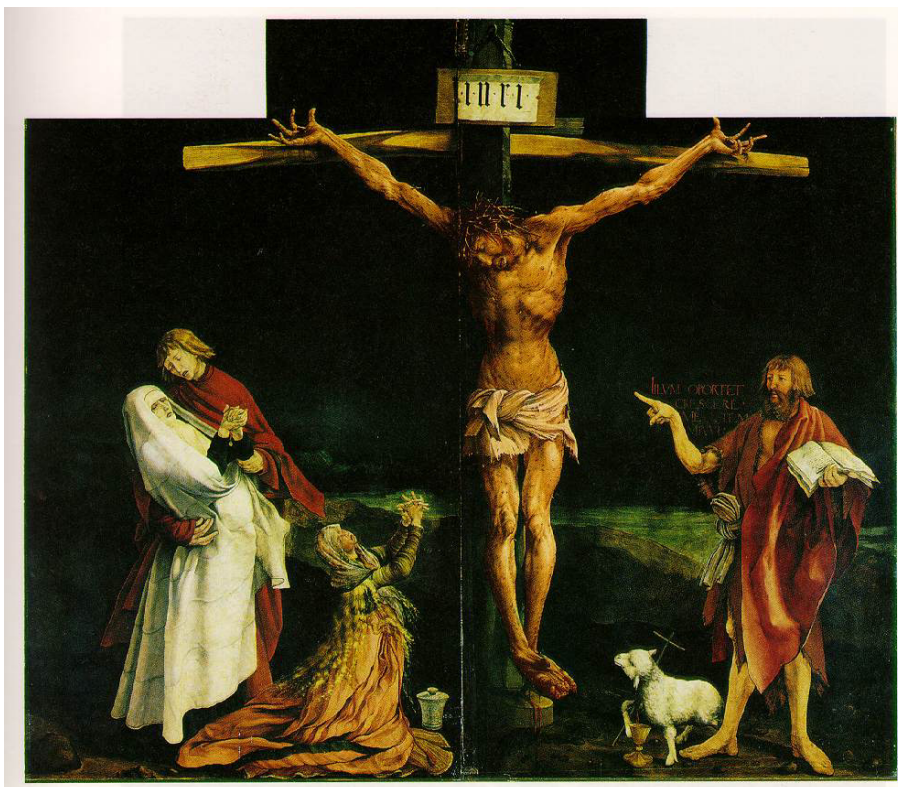
of something to which I have such a recognized right, can I be set free in forgiveness. But the large question remains: how can I at the same time hold on to and let go of this right to a recognition of the meaningfulness of my pain? It seems contradictory. And it is contradictory, if I am told just 'let it go into the cosmos'. But if I let it go into the hands of a capable Judge, so that I am set free from the responsibility to arrange for that justice myself, something interesting happens. Suddenly for there to be a God who says He loves me and loves life, but who also demands strict justice, no longer seems an inconsistent or immoral claim. Just the opposite, actually. Out of love for me and to protect the meaningfulness of my life, God promises an ultimate justice that only He could provide anyway. It is actually very consistent, and actually very moral.

### Unnecessary

But is the death penalty really necessary to attain this justice? If God is really God, can He not think of or arrange something better than such a punishment, especially in the name of salvation? If it is not really necessary, and if God chooses for it anyway, then it is difficult to avoid calling God an immoral despot.

If we think just for a moment about 'blood' in general, we quickly come to a basic idea that the value of life is somehow rooted in blood. I remember the first time that I saw the blood of my own children on the ground: on the porch where my daughter had cut her lip, on the gravel where my son had fallen from his bicycle. In such a moment you know intuitively and deeply: this is not right! This is not how it is meant to be! Blood does not belong on the ground, it should be flowing healthily through the body. And this feeling only intensifies, of course, if blood is spilled by someone's hand.

In the specific message of the Bible, this is what God's law is actually about. We are made to have the blood of life flowing healthily through our bodies, and to nourish and protect that life blood in each other. That is the core of *shalom*. And if that is interrupted, if that law is broken, it is built into us to know intuitively that this should not be happening. And if it does happen, what should we then say? That it doesn't matter? Forgive and forget? With some time and some distance we will eventually get over it? Or should we jump



The Crucifixion

to the other extreme and demand some kind of immediate answer, a visible justice in this moment, out of a fear that our stability and trust and confidence in life will otherwise never be restored?

No, says the Bible, these are both misguided! How? On the one hand, a crime definitely deserves an answer. I take all the choices which damage My beloved creation very seriously, says God. This is how much I love My creation and the life I brought into it: that I take very seriously the pain that you feel when things go wrong there. It is a justified pain. Meaningful, not meaningless.

And this is how I show you: that all choices which damage this wonderful and valuable creation, all choices against life as it is meant to be in *shalom*, will be punished. That is how *moral* I am. Because it would actually be immoral and inconsistent to say that I love you and then that such things will receive no answer. That you just need to forget it and move on. That I as God cannot or will not do anything about it. Only an immoral and inconsistent God could say that life is valuable and that He loves it and then give no answer to what damages it. Even the smallest violation counts, that's how much He loves His creation.

### Jesus

But here God has a problem. The goal of the law is to protect life, so how can God remain both moral and consistent by demanding a death penalty? Even if it seems necessary for justice, isn't there a problem with saying you defend the value of life by demanding a death?

Here Jesus steps in. Give me this problem, he says. So that we always will be able to say the we can trust God to call a crime a crime, to call evil evil and to say that it is not allowed to go unanswered, I will take that deserved answer upon myself for anyone who wants it. For anyone who has damaged any part of creation in any way, I will take the necessary answer upon myself for them, because I can handle it. I can take it on. Why? Because the cords of death cannot hold me! And here we come to the true role of Jesus as our Redeemer. This role has two sides: a death and a resurrection. Death is the first element, to uphold the needed answer of the law. But as Francis Schaeffer often would say, it is not 'death for the sake of death'. It is not just a punishment to balance the

books. It is death for the sake of life. It is all about life.

That life may go on. Therefore I will also rise, says Jesus, and everyone who has taken my offer will rise with me! We rise in a newly restored relationship with God, where we again can look to the law to learn how we can nourish our relationships with Him, with our neighbors and with our environment.

*With Jesus, what seemed impossible is suddenly – and perfectly – possible.*

Only now we do not look at our obedience to the law in fear, where every mistake demands again from us the severe answer.

We still grieve when God's creation is damaged by our own choices or the choices of others. But now we know: such things do not have the last word over us. We fall and stand again in the resurrecting forgiveness of Jesus, who reminds us that he has taken that answer once and for all for us. So we look to the law no longer in fear, but actually with some curiosity: how will it now bear fruit in my life? What new ways can I learn to obey it?

The law will continue to point out all the ways I abuse God's gifts, but the fear of failing no longer holds me back. I move forward and live in it, running to the throne of grace without shame whenever I need to (Hebrews 4:16). And yes, we will continue to be upset when we see and experience the effects of evil around us. We are even still called to fight and struggle against it. But our freedom is no longer dependent on us being the punishing Judge ourselves. We can leave the final answer to God, who has promised to give it. And our freedom is no longer dependent on us being the saving Redeemer, solving the pain and problems of ourselves or others in our own strength. That job we leave to Jesus, who calls us to follow his example only as we ask for his power and help to do so.

### Good news

What does this look like? For some concrete examples look at Ephesians 4. Speaking a timely and powerful word that builds up instead of a timely and powerful word that tears down. Recognizing the value of things by making and sharing them instead of by stealing them. Speaking the truth with one another, even in anger, but instead of taking on

the role of Judge or Redeemer ourselves, going together to the source of grace.

This is how *shalom* comes. And the lawful answer to sin as a condition of forgiveness makes very deep sense as a defense of this *shalom* and of our lives here on earth. It is exactly what we need to understand and to affirm both our desire to see justice done and our desire to grow and move forward as meaningful. Both at the same time. And in this sense it is very loving of God to offer us a salvation which does justice to both of these very different longings.

It could have been a very difficult puzzle. Humanly speaking, there is no way to imagine how we ourselves could solve it. The struggle of when to prefer justice or mercy, or how to find a fair and true balance between them, seems impossible. It leaves us with difficult choices between contradictory and perhaps even immoral options, which is why the complaint quickly rises in us that God Himself has a similar problem.

But such a conclusion should not be drawn too quickly, as we have seen. If we look long enough at what God is actually offering us in the gospel, and at what Jesus has done, we will see that what seemed impossible is suddenly – and perfectly – possible. It is exactly what we need and what we are looking for. And we might even dare to say that it is necessary that God does it this way for us out of the great love He has for us. And that is good news!

<sup>1</sup> Enright, Robert D. and Richard P. Fitzgibbons, *Helping Clients Forgive: An Empirical Guide for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2002.



**Robb Ludwick** has been a worker in the Dutch L'Abri since 1999. Following a Bachelors in English Literature he has studied theology (M.Div. Covenant Seminary '96) and philosophical anthropology (M.A. Vrije Universiteit '05). In L'Abri his work has focused on cultural apologetics and personal spirituality. He and his wife Christa have 4 children.

# To the Praying Family ...

For up-to-date information on speaking schedules and prayer points you can always visit the different branch sites at [www.labri.org](http://www.labri.org). But in each issue of the newsletter we highlight a few aspects of the international work. This time we bring you a letter from Clark Scheibe at the Canadian L'Abri.

Dear Praying Family,

For the past four years Julia and I have called L'Abri Canada home. In those brief but significant years we have seen real growth. While some of that growth has been the rapid growth of salal on the massive property, we have also seen growth in numbers of guests. Applying ourselves to the leading of the Lord we put our elbows into the work and into this large piece of rugged land. As I tell our guests, I have become all the more convinced of the Lord's active provision for all that we need; we have always received what is sufficient. We have seen the Lord bless those here and those who have moved on their ways, for their next steps. With that in mind I want to lay out our prayers before you so that you might join us in praying for these needs, as we do so before the Lord, looking for his provision and for his leading.

Recently on the property we discovered that the well we use regularly is losing its capacity. It is sufficient for our two families but not for the influx of guests we have. A week before this summer term our pump failed. Within a month we saw such significant support that we were able to put a new pump in the well! However the new pump revealed that the well has decreased in its capacity, due to the demand we have been putting on it over the years. We are still struggling to find alternate water sources; we are considering "sunk pumps" in ponds, rain catchments, and lost and forgotten wells. The family just down the hill depends on bottled water for their cooking and drinking! Please pray that a solution presents itself quickly.

And now that the summer term is coming to an end we are saying goodbye to our colleague Jessica Bell. She came for a month as a guest and then stayed for two and a half years! She has worked extremely hard and she proved gifted in the many ways we needed. She transformed much of how the property looked and she, with her experience, cooked healthy food on a low budget. She also had the excitement and the energy the students needed on those wet dark nights. Yet she leaves this coming August and we pray that the Lord will raise up a worker of his choosing so that as Carrie Adams has her second child in September, we will still be able to welcome students with grace and with sufficient help for the fall term. My wife Julia is then due at the end of December. So this need for extra help becomes all the more pressing. We are praying that the Lord will provide whatever help we may need in these upcoming months.

Lastly we pray that we might be wise on how to use the facilities we have been given. We pray that they will not only be livable but also beautiful. With the blessing of more children on the way, we are faced with the difficult choices of how to situate families in the places where we live. We are also praying for the daunting task of painting the student house. With a lack of water and with a real lack of finances we find painting the house an overwhelming prospect. Please pray that we might be encouraged in this work and that we might see solutions opening up before us.

I look up in the sky and see the airplanes fly overhead, as they circle over Bowen Island to head to the Vancouver International Airport. I am amazed at the power and advancement done by the work and ingenuity of human hands. It boggles the mind that God has gifted us with such mastery; yet that mastery never escapes our constant dependence on the Creator. Nearer to the ground I see the quiet and sure work of the Lord; I see the ravens, the hummingbirds, the chickadees, the yellow finches and others have all that they need, as they fly from hemlock to fir. They even have time for a song or two. They remind me of the promises of Jesus, that we should not worry but should have confidence in the Lord who cares for us much more than the birds or the wildflowers. Yet we name our needs because we want to lay them at the feet of the One who provides and before God's people. So please pray with us in confidence that we will see the Lord provide abundantly.

Blessings from Bowen Island,  
**Clarke Scheibe**  
**L'Abri Canada**

*The Scheibe family*

