

# “Good News”

Official Newsletter for the Christian Reformed Campus Minister's Association (CRCMA)

## Sharing Good News with Each Other

**W**elcome to the first edition of “Good News”, the CRCMA’s official newsletter! The executive of the CRCMA hopes that this modest newsletter will be a forum for us campus ministers and others involved in campus ministry to share ideas, best practices, (maybe even best crashes) and share resources and just plain news or info with each other. In short, our hopes are that this medium will indeed be a way for us to share good news to each other!

In that spirit, you will find in this first edition, a best practice of student initiated prayer vigil, a prayer used in a tsunami memorial, two book reviews, a film review, registration information on our upcoming annual conference and even a reminder for all of us to make use of the prayer cards. This is a snapshot of what we hope to deliver in future issues of this newsletter—thought provoking stuff, practical useful stuff, newsy stuff, etc.

But the key to this newsletter’s success is the verb “sharing”. Only when we share our practices, ideas, experiences, stories, readings, with each other in ink (or virtual ink) will this newsletter fulfill its purpose. At the risk of

sounding cliché, this is YOUR newsletter.

And on that note, we would like YOU to name this newsletter. “Good News” may suffice for now, but we think that you creative folks can come up with far better names than that! So, we are holding a naming contest among the CRCMA membership for this newsletter. Please submit your name ideas to Shiao Chong at [ycm@sympatico.ca](mailto:ycm@sympatico.ca) by April 30, 2005. The best name will be selected by the CRCMA executive. Winner will be announced in the next issue and at the annual CRCMA conference on May 12-14. The winner will receive a book prize for his/her ingenuity. We look forward to your creative ideas.

Until then, enjoy the newsletter.

*Shiao Chong is the CRC Chaplain at York U, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.*

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# A Prayer Vigil Initiated by a Student

By Grace Miedema

**H**ave you ever done a prayer vigil? I know God wants a relationship with us and he can change things if we ask. I know prayer can change us. But I'd never been part of a prayer 'vigil' before. However one of our students, Amy, was quite passionate about holding a vigil, so Francois, my Pentecostal colleague, and I in typical 'busy person' fashion, said "Sure, the Chaplain Center space is available for a vigil, go ahead, we're behind you all the way. But where are you getting your guidance for this?" She directed us to a website [www.24-7prayer.com](http://www.24-7prayer.com), so named for getting people to pray around the clock for seven days. Checking it out I found an energetic youth oriented site originating in the UK. The feel was a bit haphazard and it had a light touch so I looked for its roots and its emphasis. It seems to have come out of an urban ministry setting and started to spread about 10 years ago. They claim to have historical precedent with Count Nicholas Von Zinzendorf whose followers held round the clock prayers for weeks at a time. I was impressed with the piety of Zinzendorf, but a bit hesitant about getting on board with what felt like a Pentecostal Holy Spirit emphasis. Then the internal cajoling started "Come on Grace, get out of your comfort zone, prayer is a good thing. How can you not be in favour of students praying?" 24/7's vision is 'to transform the world through Christ centered and mission-minded prayer. I'm thinking "Yeah, I've heard that before, focus on heaven, saving souls, and forgetting the kingdom starts here" But then maybe I need to expand my horizons a little. If we're snuggling up to the evangelical camp maybe I should get inside the feeling a bit too. I read on.

24/7's 12 values outlined on the home page are:

1. Obedient to the Holy Spirit- He has the right to break our rules and offend our sensibilities. (No surprise here, sounds like real evangelical language to me)
2. Relational- a community of friends, shared values, driven by friendship rather than function. (sounds good, student level, a bit postmodern)
3. Indigenous- respect, value, and honour cul-

tural diversity (Yes!! It may be 1,000 miles wide and an inch thick, but Christianity HAS spread, and what do we think we are? Real Deep?)

4. Inclusive- (good value, difficult to live out, wonder if that includes gay folks)
5. Like Jesus- "For us, the means do not necessarily justify the ends." (?)
6. Deeply rooted- committed to growth in maturity rather than size
7. Creative and innovative- embracing God-inspired creativity as integral to authentic expressions of prayer (this came out very nicely in our students at Fanshawe with posters and poetry all over the walls after the vigil was over)
8. Just- pursue justice (I later noticed other references to buying Fair Trade products- so prayer changes things)
9. Good Stewards- "We take responsibility for ourselves, those around us, and the things God has entrusted to us" (rings true as a value for us reformed folk I thought)
10. Sacrificial- "We believe that a lifestyle of prayer is costly on every level
11. Celebratory- Jesus came to bring life to the full and we have the Christian duty to celebrate it. Fun and laughter are central to the 24/7 movement. (This attitude reverberates gently throughout the site, making prayer and Christianity gently clear-eyed and non-threatening. I appreciated this tone)
12. Raw/simple- 'just a network of like-minded people, unpolished but passionate about developing people' (For me the 'unpolished but passionate' emphasis gives the movement its distinctive UK rather than US flavour)

The methods the movement uses is to develop praying communities, or rooms, houses or 'boiler rooms', virtual prayer communities through the web, developing prayer resources, (Some of these I personally had a hard time with e.g. the 'warfare prayer' material, but there again the problem may lie more with my naivete than with their focus on the realm of spiritual evil.) They also provide active support (I'm not sure how beyond the resources) and host events and festivals. They have yearly evalua-

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tions of the direction of the movement and evolve in response to these evaluations.

### **SO, WHAT HAPPENED?**

At Fanshawe we decided 24/7 was too ambitious for the number of people who would be ready to participate, but we thought we could manage a 12/3. We took three days, a Wednesday, Thursday and Friday and made a schedule of one hour time blocks from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. each day. Students signed up for an hour or two when they didn't have class. My ideal would have been to have 36 people participate but this didn't happen. We had about 15 students take part. The surprising thing for me was that we had some participate who really never come to the center, and a couple who are still very new in their relationship with Christ and Christianity. On the other hand some students who have a clear understanding of their faith and participate in many of our activities were shy about focusing on prayer for an hour. We made resources available from the 24/7 site, but also from Don Postma and from the CRC's [faithaliveresources.org](http://faithaliveresources.org) – [The Praying Church Source Book](#) by Alvin VanderGriend, and [The Praying Church Idea Book](#) by VanderGriend and Douglas Kam-

stra. These two books are chock full of ideas and guidance on prayer, for people of all levels of familiarity with prayer, including ideas on how to do a prayer vigil.

Did the vigil make any difference? It helped bind together a loose community. It helped the students who participated to experience God's graciousness in their conversation with him. It helped some focus on their relationship with their families and their responsibilities in those relationships. It helped some see they needed to take action for lifestyle changes. Our center has many silent testimonies of student faith and struggle displayed on the walls now. I was impressed by the amount of material available for guidance in prayer, and refreshed in my experience of the variety in communication with God, listening and expressing pain and praise. God is indeed gracious. Amy said "We should do that again."

*Grace Miedema is the CRC Campus Chaplain at Fanshawe College, London, Ontario, Canada.*

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## **Did you Remember to Fill in your Prayer Card?**

**T**here are 24 campus ministries sponsored by the CRC in North America. We are part of the Home Missions outreach of the denomination. We are one of the few denominational ministires still active on secular campuses. Our church wants to support us with its prayers. Please take the time to fill in the information form and send it to Jack Stulp at Home Missions. Thanks to Neil and Virginia Lettinga, Hernan and Rachel Zapata, and Ken Vander Wall for completing their forms.

That leaves about 20 people who still need to fill this in!!! You can trim and scan a flattering picture of yourself, or of you and your significant other(s), or send in something formal. Prayer cards are one way to keep the ministry alive in the minds and hearts of the people in the pews.

If you have trouble opening the separate attachment (via email only) go to the website. [www.crhm.org](http://www.crhm.org) find Ministries on the right handside, click, go to the bottom of the page to Ministry Development Guidelines, click, go down the list to find B1-19, the document entitled "Ministry Leader Information Card Form" click. You got it, now use it.

Thanks,

Grace Miedema

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# A Generous Orthodoxy

Book Review by Neil Lettinga

McLaren, Brian D. *A Generous Orthodoxy*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.

**B**rian McLaren is one of the spokesmen in a fluid movement of Christians – the emergent, or post-modern church – who are grappling with their dissatisfaction with churches as they are and with culture as it seems to be reorienting itself. He founded Cedar Ridge Community Church in the Baltimore/Washington area and is one of the moving spirits behind the Emergent Village website, (Google’s first hit under the term “emergent”). The books that he’s written include *The Church on the Other Side*, *Finding Faith*, *A New Kind of Christian*, *More Ready than You Realize*, *The Story We Find Ourselves In*, *A is for Abductive*, *Adventures in Missing the Point*, *Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, and *A Generous Orthodoxy*. Coming soon is *The Last Word and the Word After That*.

McLaren’s general approach is pastoral, personal, and pop culture, but some of his observations are nevertheless trenchant. Although the blog-like self-consciousness of his writing can grate on my nerves, and occasionally his assertions seem more calculated to gain attention than stir thought, I resonate with his refusal to reduce the Biblical message to neat modernist categories and abstractions.

Many earnest believers loathe McLaren. Challies.com’s review of *A Generous Orthodoxy* asserts that “Brian McLaren has consistently, deliberately and systematically dismantled historical Protestantism. From *Sola Scriptura* to hell to biblical inerrancy, nothing is sacred.” But after teaching history in Christian colleges for more than twenty years, I’m used to the systematic (if inadvertent) dismantling of historical Protestantism. Sweet and sincere students are convinced that they are saved by the Bible alone, that God’s love depends on their good behaviour, that they earn grace because they neither smoke nor drink, and that their salvation is fully their personal choice. But they still love Christ as their Saviour, they still read the Bible as God’s Word, and they still seek to live faithful lives of witness in word and deed.

In this discussion of *A Generous Orthodoxy*, I will only briefly tip my hat to the book at large, and will instead focus on two specific elements: how McLaren’s fundamental premise – distasteful or welcomed – is mir-

rored among Christian university students, and what McLaren wishes to draw from the Calvinist tradition into the emergent church.

McLaren’s main point in *A Generous Orthodoxy* is to advocate for an inclusive understanding of Christianity, one he summarizes in his subtitle as “missional + evangelical + post/protestant + liberal/conservative + mystical/poetic + biblical + charismatic/contemplative + fundamentalist/Calvinist + Anabaptist/Anglican + Methodist + catholic + green + incarnational + depressed-yet-hopeful + emergent + unfinished.” The book devotes a chapter to each element.

In the title and the book, McLaren articulates a kind of “both/and” spirit that we certainly see among the Christian students at UNBC, and perhaps you, too, have noticed. For example, a young man who attends weekly mass on Saturday and is a serious, practicing Roman Catholic leads the Wednesday night Young Adult group at the local Baptist Church, where he has attended for years. A Christian Reformed student regularly attends a Pentecostal prayer meeting for a “charismatic/worship fix” as well as volunteering with the local Salvation Army. These students struggle to explain their motives, but they seem to see various churches and ministries as differing parts of Christ’s body, rather than as competing, sealed units with carefully drawn boundaries. Many of them deliberately reject the boundaries they encounter in churches, whether the boundaries are doctrinal, behavioural, racial and ethnic, socio-economic, gender, age, or musical style. We have discovered CRC and Canadian Reformed young people who visit a CRC service once a month or so, but attend the Anglican Church most Sundays, and participate in both IVCF and the Young Adult group at the Mennonite Brethren church. Whether or not we are comfortable with this bricolage of church traditions, a significant number of Christian young adults are participating in it. Moreover, most of us have moments when we wholeheartedly affirm crossing over traditions. We borrow Taizé and Anglican prayers, we sing Roman Catholic praise songs, or we divide into Wesleyan-style cell groups.

McLaren affirms this kind of inclusivity and claims that it is characteristic of a new generation, steeped in post-modernity, which rejects boundaries, draws in the marginalized, and is self-consciously skeptical, ironic and subversive. McLaren sees himself as part of an attempt to lay out a framework for Christian responses to these developments

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in North American society. Emergent is a church movement which defines itself as emerging rather than defined, a direction and a process, rather than a set of beliefs and practices with neat boundaries.

Although critical of modern premises and pigeon-holes, post-modernism does not try to dismantle or ignore the past. McLaren's shopping-list sub-title of who he is has solid historic references – including a Calvinist tag. Some of us might wish that he would remove that label, but his words on why he is a Calvinist are certainly interesting, and however much some may disagree with his “new kind of Christian,” his take on the challenges of the new culture is something from which to learn. CRC Home Missions has, on occasion, seemed to hide its Calvinist framework in reaching out to contemporary culture. It is not difficult to find a Church website in which the only way to know that the church is Christian Reformed lies in a link to the GEMS club. McLaren, on the other hand, assumes that the reformed tradition is lively and ought unashamedly to assert itself in contemporary culture.

In *A Generous Orthodoxy* McLaren word to Calvinists is:

*In terms of intellectual rigor, I believe that Reformed Christianity is the highest expression of modern Christianity, which is a sincere compliment – and a gentle warning, too. If we are moving beyond modernity in general, then the forms of Christianity that have most successfully adapted themselves to the assumptions and thought patterns of modernity are in the most trouble. For this reason, I suspect that Reformed Christianity is in for a major identity crisis in the next few decades, with some of its number entrenched in modernity, and with others – resourced by the robust faith and thought of their forebears – helping lead the way for life, thought, and ministry in the emerging culture. (188)*

McLaren's gloss suggests that in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the brilliant, young John Calvin saw the need for a new way to define Christianity as Protestants rejected the “huge and often corrupt medieval [Roman Catholic] establishment.” (188) In six short years, between the ages of 19 and 25, Calvin produced that alternate way of being Christian, one that rested on “a lean and pure intellectual system: a logically rigorous system of doctrine that would effectively reindoctrinate Catholics (and perhaps Lutherans?)” (188) According to McLaren, Calvin provided just what the Church needed at the dawn of the Modern age. Since then Calvinism has developed and matured as modernity itself developed, finding new forms adapted to the 17<sup>th</sup>, the 18<sup>th</sup>, the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. McLaren sees Calvinism as highly rational and foundational, concerned with order and authority -- a quintessentially modern movement, of, by, and for the powerful. One need

only look at the way the Calvinist system of church government shaped and paralleled the growth of modern liberal democracy to recognize some truth in McLaren's analysis of Calvinism.

His half-chapter on Calvinism goes on to challenge the reformed community to follow young Calvin's lead “in seeking to construct formulations of faith that are as fitting to our postmodern times as theirs were to their post-medieval times.” (189) In that context, he values the reformed motto *semper reformanda* (always reforming) and believes that both our message and our methods must continually be changing as culture changes. In other words, “new challenges and opportunities require Christian leaders to create new forms, new methods, new structures – and it requires them to find new content, new ideas, new truths, new meaning to bring to bear on the new challenges.”(192)

McLaren causes me to wonder whether our current reformed thinking is so melded to the mechanics and certainties of modern rationalism that we choke on postmodern perspectives. We can all name examples of reformed Christians who would gasp at any one of a range of postmodern assertions – postmoderns are antithetical to the Antithesis and their anarchic tendencies fly in the face of our affection for committees and presbyterial hierarchy. At the same time, some of the cutting edge philosophical work done within the reformed community anticipated and reinforced the early work of the postmodernists. Nicholas Wolterstorff's critique of Foundationalism, and the Christian high school classes on perspectivalism are two examples of ways in which reformed thinking is as profoundly uncomfortable with modernism as any postmodern guru.

For the most part, McLaren's quick postmodern revision of TULIP is trite and generic, and probably not worth bothering with. He turns the Dort acronym into Triune Love, Unselfish Election, Limitless Reconciliation, Inspiring Grace and Passionate, Persistent Saints. (195-97) The “U” – Unselfish Election – however, is an interesting and serious twist within the heart of traditional reformed thinking. McLaren, following the Missiologist and theologian Lesslie Newbigin, turns the idea of election upside down. He rejects the idea that God elects some persons for “exclusive privilege,” and writes “To be chosen means to be ‘blessed to be a blessing,’ to be healed to heal, to be chosen to serve, to be enriched to enrich, to be taught to teach. This reformation in the Reformed understanding of election would be truly revolutionary and, I think, liberating.” (196) What McLaren is suggesting is, to quote from a chapter title of *A New Kind of Christian*, “it's

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none of your business who goes to hell.” The doctrine of election should instead see the elect (whether Abraham, the people of Israel in the Old Testament, or those called by God in the New) as persons who have special responsibilities. This fits with McLaren’s (and Newbigin’s) assertion that God intends good for the whole world, that the Church is chosen to be the instrument of that blessing, and that the Church is composed of individual people who implement that blessing locally as well as corporately. Nothing in this is at odds with the traditional view of unconditional election, but it comes at the doctrine from a new angle, leading us to ask new questions, and avoiding some of the vexatious issues catechism classes have fruitlessly wrestled with for years.

*A Generous Orthodoxy* is an invitation to dialogue. McLaren invites conversation about the ideas he is exploring, but not debate. He has joined in the post-modern withdrawal from debate. In the postmodern view, debate is primarily a means to use rational argumentation to assert authority and maintain order. The post-moderns, and McLaren with them, wish to avoid an authoritarian positioning of ideas and are more interested in hearing stories and participating in dialogue.

There is much in *A Generous Orthodoxy* with which one can, and I think should, disagree. Sometimes McLaren’s observations are inaccurate, more often his conclusions are exploratory rather than prescriptive. He doesn’t have it all right. (The third time he suggested that there was still time to return the book to the bookseller to get a full refund, I was so peeved by the cutesiness that I was tempted to do so.) Nor is McLaren consistent; although he complains of the authoritative tone the moderns take, he often writes in a “churchy” and authoritative voice himself.

Moreover, McLaren also seems to buy into a neat, modern, progressive, linear view of history. For him (and for most postmoderns) postmodernism is the next stage in history, modernity is dead; long live post-modernity. This view does not, at bottom, allow for the emergence of multiple voices in history or in ministry. The marginalized remain, in many ways, marginalized. African, Asian or Latin American Christians seem to have little shaping role in McLaren’s views, though there is some serious dialogue with non-western faiths in his controversial “incarnational” chapter (though even here, McLaren seems to be conversing with western Muslims and Buddhists). Few women or Spanish speakers blog on Emergent websites.

But presumably McLaren would be happy to hear these reservations, and would expect to learn something from us as he listened to them. There is something inviting about an invitation to a conversation, rather than a challenge to debate. If post-modernity encourages Christians to temper an all-too-modern propensity to offer their faith as a debate, that in itself would be worth the price of the book. Besides, as all Calvinists should know, the doctrine of Total Depravity teaches us that we are all flawed, and that none of us should ever be entirely certain that we’re right.

*A Generous Orthodoxy* seems, to me, to be a terrific book for interdenominational dialogue, particularly for grad or faculty fellowship discussions. There is lots here to agree with, and lots to disagree with, which makes for lively discussions. Read generously, this book has the potential to build bridges in a divided University religious landscape through charitable Christian discussion, in which one body speaks with many voices, drawing in the marginalized, delighting in one another’s ideas and contributions, and perhaps, at the end of the day, coming to a clearer understanding of the Body of Christ in all its variety and richness, Christ its Head, and the faith we all share. I, for one, am glad to participate in that conversation.

*Neil Lettinga, along with his wife, Virginia Lettinga, are the Campus Chaplains at the U of Northern British Columbia, British Columbia, Canada*

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# Tsunami Common Prayer

Your praise, Great God of All, comes before all our misery  
else were we not gathered here to pray.

We struggle, Holy Present One, even to pray  
as one, to pronounce a Name as one people, even while compelled  
trembling in our fragility and frailty, forced unity before the world-shaking  
enormity of death, destruction, pain, loss of hope, a dirty death baptism,  
Washing  
Waved cruelly on and at our race.  
Earth, air, sky and sea are calm now, preening their  
beauty.  
We are still searching, yet daring, risking a common prayer, together.  
Spare us an explanation, God. For we are not ready.

Look upon us, Spirit of the Universe - we are one, here, together, not least in  
troubled spirit,  
angered, perplexed, numbed by overwhelming catastrophe.

Almighty, Powerful, Beneficent God

grant the living, us,  
hearts of shared and ongoing  
concern  
and compassion, the ability to bind wounds, heal diseases  
and repair bodies and minds - grant the little ones,  
the weak and the lonely, a restoration of hope.

Great nations forgiving debts to stricken nations  
Wealth wisely portioned, justice and righteousness well served  
Wars ended, peace sought,  
this we pray.

Your praise, Great God of All, comes before all our misery  
else were we not gathered here to pray.

Amen.

Graham E. Morbey  
January 25, 2005  
Wilfrid Laurier University  
Tamil Student's Association Tsunami Vigil

*Graham Morbey is the CRC Chaplain at Wilfrid Laurier University and U of Waterloo, Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario, Canada*

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# Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire

Book Review by Tom Oosterhuis

Walsh, Brian J. & Keesmaat, Sylvia C. *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004. 256 pp., including Bibliography and Indices

We're used to hearing Brian's name teamed up with Richard Middelton. This time he and Sylvia Keesmaat, his wife, have worked together to produce a book that will challenge us in our view of history, politics, and the scriptures. As campus ministers, we have all benefited from Brian's formal and informal input into our conferences as a colleague. Now we get the opportunity to experience Sylvia's expertise in Biblical Theology, applied in a very practical way to our own wrestling with the shape of our culture.

If you're looking for a typical verse by verse exposition of and commentary on Colossians, you'll be disappointed. This is a commentary, but one that deliberately looks for the message in context. Context refers both to the time in which it was written as well as the context in which we read this letter today. Even saying that does not do justice to what Brian and Sylvia are trying to do. They are trying to understand the letter to the Colossians as a writing that enters into our conversations as believers and as seekers of a way to understand the world in which we live.

The style of writing fits their purpose. They tell stories, have imaginary conversations, which have all the earmarks of being derived from actual conversations with student and others in their own ministry experience. They dig into the historical background and into the meaning of words, not so much to document text and context, as to crawl into the story as it must have come across to its first readers. Having become immersed into that story, they are able to retell the story in a new context. It becomes our story, allowing the apostle to speak to us also today with renewed clarity. Precisely in the retelling, we discover the faithfulness of God that could easily be covered up by an academic approach, or by a pietistic immediacy of interpretation.

Brian and Sylvia have given us a glimpse into what a post-modern commentary would look like. They have given us a kaleidoscope of approaches, consisting of dialogue, analysis of the time of the Pax Romana, analysis of our own time, reflection on the way the letter is written and discernment of themes.

While the style is unique, engaging and provocative, the book is not just an experiment in reading Colossians in dialogue with the past and present. The subtitle of this book "Subverting the Empire" represents deep convictions on their part, of the nature of the Gospel that is proclaimed in this letter. The Gospel is not a theological discussion with philosophies of the time, nor is it a prescription of how to get into heaven. The Gospel is the Good News that Jesus Christ is Lord. Over against both Caesar and our present rulers, this confession comes across with strong political implications.

"Jesus Christ as Lord", is a statement about God's redeeming us from the slavery of sin, and all the slaveries that flow out of that slavery. It is a statement about God's confronting the spirits of the age and idolatries, and about exposing false redemptions and hopes. It is a statement about how God rules and shapes life, in the midst of these idolatries which constantly tempt us away from being at home with God, and towards placing our hope in the philosophies and priorities of the world in which we live.

The Gospel confronts the "American" and the "Canadian" way of life as a way of life that is built on false loyalties and calls us into a relationship with God, in which God is the one who speaks, sets priorities, and shapes our actions. The God who addresses us and redeems us in Jesus Christ calls us away from the temptations to build our own securities, and to harness the power of God to protect our own vested interests.

The empire is the glorification of human strength and wisdom independent of God. In Babel, it is the storming of the gate of God in order to usurp God's authority and power to shape the world. Throughout history it has taken many forms, the most prominent of which in Israel's history are Egypt, Babylon, Syria and Rome. Our task in studying the scriptures is not

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limited to documenting Israel's slavery, but to learn to recognize our own slavery and God's promise of redemption in Israel's story, and in the story of the early Church.

It is possible that when you read this grappling with Colossians on the part of Brian and Sylvia, you will be offended, or provoked into a defensiveness. They want to speak with Biblical radicalness in exposing ways of life that divert us from living out of God's rule. One senses a polite restraint in their language, in order to give their readers an opportunity to be drawn gradually by God's grace into the place where we are confronted with the full impact of our subjection to the empire as it functions among us today. In the end, however, there is no escaping the charge that the "American", and by implication "Western", way of life is one that is being called into account before God.

One becomes convinced that our "Christian"

niceness and preoccupation with morality and sins as issues rather than sin as the all pervasive power of evil, can actually represent complicity with the enemy. Our temptation to define God's will and purposes and the Christian ethos in terms that resemble our North American lifestyle then comes close to blasphemy. The imposition of American definitions of freedom and democracy on the rest of the world is nothing short of full blown empire, where all the world looks like us in our boasting.

This book is not polite reading, even in its gentle approach to the next generation. It is a hard nosed call to Biblical obedience. Be prepared, therefore, not to like it very much. Listen carefully to its message, nevertheless.

*Tom Oosterhuis is the CRC Chaplain at U of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.*

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## Out-Witted Film Review by Peter Schuurman

**M**y spans last inch, my minutes latest point,  
And gluttonous death, will instantly unjoynt  
My body, and soule, and I shall sleepe a space...

"I always liked that poem," says Dr. Vivian Bearing, professor of English Literature specializing in John Donne, "in the abstract."

The made-for-HBO movie *Wit*, based on a play by Margaret Edson, stars Emma Thompson as the stern, erudite, world-class professor who is suddenly diagnosed with fourth stage ovarian cancer. The film chronicles the slow death of a specialist in the poetry of death and her journey from objectifying orientation, through a grueling disorientation, to a grace-receiving re-orientation.

"If I barfed my brains out," says the professor during one of her rounds of chemo, "it would be a great loss to the discipline." She was known as the toughest professor in the university, and "her class was like boot camp" according to one of her students. She was also one of the most competitive researchers in her field. "I am resolute in the extreme," she admits. "I am a force."

As the doctors and residents poke and prod her body, and a pale blue hospital gown strips her of her former prestige, she goes through a paradigm shift. She realizes that the dehumanizing way in which the doctors treat her—as a disease to be fought, as research to be documented—is precisely

the same way she treated her poetry and her students. "They always want to know more things," she remarks to herself, and then adds, "I always want to know more things. I am a scholar."

Cleverness loses its glitter as she loses her hair, begins to shake and get the chills, and is placed in isolation. "I thought being smart would take care of it," she croaks near the end. "But I have been found out. I'm scared... I want to hide, to curl up in a little ball... I just don't feel sure about myself anymore..."

At this moment of defenselessness, grace comes in the form of a caring nurse, a pop-suckle, and some silliness. "Now is not the time for verbal swordplay, scholarly analysis," she tell the audience. "Now is the time for simplicity, dare I say it, kindness."

This movie hits close to home, and prods more than one tear to the cheek. It is an excellent discussion starter—perhaps especially for graduate students—as it challenges the dehumanizing nature of "objective" research and scholarly cleverness, or wit. But it is also about suffering, healing, and dying, and prompts reflection on mortality in a deeply poetic way.

*Peter Schuurman is the Educational Mission Leader for CRC Home Missions.*

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# CRCMA Conference - May 12-14, 2005

Location: University of Toronto  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

## CAMPUS MINISTRY: A Plurality of Partners

### Schedule:

#### Thursday Evening - May 12

7:00 pm Arrival, registration  
8:00-10:00 pm Opening Worship, Stories, Prayers

#### Friday - May 13

8:00 am Breakfast  
9:00-9:15 am Worship  
9:15-9:45 am Peter Schuurman  
9:45-10:30 am Panel: Two Guests: Classis and Campus Committee  
Vision: Classis, Congregations and Campus Ministry complementarily engaged in campus ministry  
Mission: Develop shared understanding of needs, gifts to have each minister more effectively and complementarily.  
10:30 am Break  
10:45 am Plenary discussion with Guests, best practices and models.  
11:15 am Summation of what is and what is needed.  
11:25 am Closure  
12:00 - 2:00 pm Lunch, Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) talk by Nic Ansell  
2:30 - 4:30 pm CRCMA Business meeting  
6:45 pm Out on the Town [Chinese Restaurant]

#### Saturday - May 14

8:00 am Breakfast  
9:00-11:30 am Para-Church Partners  
11:30 am Closing Worship  
12:30 am Lunch together somewhere in The City

#### **Registration notes:**

Standard room rates (all incl. tax and full hot/cold breakfasts)  
Conference fee \$150.00/person  
Registrar: Geoff Wichert  
Geoff.wichert@utoronto.ca

"Good News"

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