

Academia Nuts

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

New Eyes: A Task for Campus Ministry

By James K. A. Smith

One of the most important things campus ministry could do is give students and faculty “new eyes” that make the familiar strange. As an example, I would like to invite you for a tour of an important religious site in our area. It is a kind of place that may be quite familiar to many of you, but my task today is to try and make this place strange. I invite you to see it with new eyes. This will require focused *attention* to detail; like a Tarkovsky film, imagine your attention focused by the slow, patient, observant gaze of the camera frame, focused on something familiar, but perhaps without “seeing” it. So join me at the site.

As we're still off at a distance, I want you to notice the sheer popularity of the site as indicated by the colorful sea of vehicles around it. The site is throbbing with pilgrims every day as thousands make the pilgrimage. In order to provide a hospitable environment the site provides an ocean of parking. But the monotony of black tarmac is covered by dots of color from cars and SUVs, row-by-row, patiently waiting as the pilgrims devote themselves to the rituals inside. Indeed, the

parking lot constitutes a kind of moat around the building since there are no sidewalks that lead to the site. Religious sites of this kind almost inevitably emerge on the suburban edges—areas for the automobile, suspicious of pedestrians. In fact, the sacred building provides a sanctuary even from this incessant culture of automobility, as some pilgrims make their way to this sanctuary just to walk.

We've now made our way into this glistening sea of black and color and found a haven for our vehicle. We begin to wend our way toward the building, which sprawls in both directions—a dazzling array of glass

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New Eyes (Continued)

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and concrete with recognizable ornamentation. Indeed, because this particular religious site is part of an international, yea ‘catholic,’ network of religious communities, the architecture of the building has a recognizable code that makes us feel at home in any city. The large glass atriums at the entrances are framed by banners and flags; familiar texts and symbols on the exterior walls help foreign faithful to easily identify what’s inside; and the building is anchored by larger sanctuaries akin to the vestibules of medieval cathedrals.

We are channeled through a colonnade of arches to the towering glass face. As we enter the space we are ushered into a narthex intended for orienting and channeling new seekers as well as providing a bit of a decompression space for the regular faithful to “enter in” to the spirit of the space. For the seeker, there is a large orienting map—a worship aid—to give the novice an orientation to the location of various spiritual offerings and direction into the labyrinth which channels the ritual observance of the pilgrims. The ‘regulars,’ the faithful, enter the space with a sense of achieved familiarity; they know the rhythms by heart because of habit-forming repetition.

The design of the interior is almost excessively inviting, sucking pilgrims into the interior spaces, with windows on the ceiling open to the sky but none on the walls open to the surrounding automotive moat. This conveys a sense of vertical or transcendent openness which at the same time shuts off the distractions of the horizontal, mundane world. This architecture conveys a sense of sanctuary, and escape. The inviting narthex channels the pilgrim into a labyrinth, evoking a wandering that seems to

escape from the goal-oriented ways we inhabit the “outside” world. The pilgrim is also invited to escape from the mundane counting of ‘clock-time’ and to inhabit a space almost timeless. With few windows and a curious baroque manipulation of light, it seems as if the sun stands still in here, and so we lose ourselves in the rituals for which we’ve come. However, while daily ‘clock-time’ is suspended, the worship space is very much governed by a kind of liturgical, festal calendar, variously draped in the colors and images of an unending litany of festivals. New ones are regularly added, since the establishment of each new festival translates into greater numbers of pilgrims joining the processions to engage in worship.

“Here is a religious proclamation that offers the imagination pictures and moving images.”

The layout of this temple has architectural echoes that harken back to medieval cathedrals—mammoth religious spaces that can absorb all kinds of different religious activities all at one time. One might say that this cathedral has a labyrinth for contemplation, alongside of which are innumerable chapels devoted to various saints. We’ll be struck by the rich iconography that lines the interior spaces. Unlike the flattened depictions of saints in stained glass windows, here we find three-dimensional icons adorned in garb that inspires our desire to be imitators of these exem-

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plars. These icons embody for us concrete images of “the good life.” Here is a religious proclamation that does not traffic in abstracted ideals or doctrines, but rather offers to the imagination pictures and moving images. While other religions are promising salvation through the thin, dry media of books and “messages,” this new global religion is offering embodied pictures of the redeemed which invite us to imagine ourselves in their shoes, to willingly submit to the disciplines that produce the saints evoked in the icons.

We need to appreciate the catholicity of this iconography: these same icons of the good life are found around the world. These symbols, colors and images associated with their religious life are recognized the world over. In fact, it is the circulation of these icons through various mediums outside the sanctuary that invite pilgrims here in the first place. This temple offers a visual mode of evangelism that *attracts* us. This is a gospel whose power is *beauty*, which speaks to our deepest desires, and compels us not with dire moralisms but rather with a winsome invitation to share in this good life. This evangelism is buoyed by a transnational network of evangelists, all speaking a kind of unified message that puts other, fractured ‘religions’ to shame. If unity is a testimony to a religion’s power, it will be hard to find a more powerful religion than this catholic faith.

As we pause to reflect on the icons on the outside of one of the chapels, we are invited to enter into the act of worship more properly, invited to taste and see. We are greeted by a wise acolyte, who offers to shepherd us through the experience, but also allows us to explore on our own terms. Sometimes we will enter cautiously, curiously, making our way through this chapel’s labyrinth, having a vague sense of need, and so open to surprise—to where the spirit leads us to an experience we couldn’t have anticipated. We are unsure,

but *expectant*, knowing that what we need must be here. And then we hit upon it, combing through the racks, we find that offering that fulfills us. At other times our worship is intentional, and resolute: we have come prepared, knowing exactly why we’re here, in search of exactly what we need. In either case, after time spent searching in what the faithful call “the racks,” with our newfound holy object in hand, we proceed to the altar, which is the consummation of worship. While worship assistants have helped us navigate our experience, behind the altar is the priest who presides over the consummating transaction. And this is a religion of transaction, of exchange and communion. We are invited here to give and take. We don’t leave this transformative experience with just good feelings or pious generalities, but rather with something concrete, newly minted relics,—which are the means to the good life embodied in the icons who invited us into this participatory moment. And so we leave our donation, but get in return something with solidity, wrapped in the colors of the saints and the season. Released by the priest with a benediction, we make our way out of the chapel in a kind of denouement. Perhaps we’ll enter another chapel in this timeless place. Who could resist the tangibles of the good life so abundantly offered?

Can we offer them an alternative vision that is just as powerful, but forms them as disciples who desire the kingdom? What would that take?

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is a Professor of Philosophy
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Faith & Sustainable Engineering

By Randy Gabrielse

“God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.”

After reading those last words of Genesis 1, Katherine almost jumped out of her seat as she exclaimed, “I never knew that Genesis says that!” This moment occurred in the first meeting of a small group of senior engineering students. Each of the students are committed Christians who are actively involved in evangelical campus fellowships and in the Iowa State University chapter of Engineers for a Sustainable World. Katherine was the president of a nationally known campus fellowship, and an outstanding student, whose parents participated in Geneva Fellowship in Iowa City. Michael, another of the students had told me previously, “I love the ideas and goals of sustainable engineering designs and helping people through them, but I struggle with whether it is worthwhile to ‘sustain’ lives and societies if the world is going to end in fire.” We spent spring term discussing one kind of answer to that question in the Bible and in *Redeeming Creation: The Biblical Basis for Environmental Stewardship*.

Today, that “aha’ moment” reminds me of what the group accomplished during the term. It was the beginning of these students’ adventure in breathing life into their commitments to Christ in their professions. They came weekly for this discussion, despite senior design projects, other small group commitments and “senioritis”. Sometimes they were thrilled to discover new ways to serve Christ in their personal and professional lives. At other times they struggled with questions of “What can I do?” and “What is Christ calling me to do?” My joy with them was in

seeing God equip these students with the gospel for God’s good Creation; the true gospel that would not only change them, but would help them to serve others in new ways; ways that brought integrity to the yearnings that they already felt.

We at Areopagus are praying that we will be able about this kind of work in the coming year. In our first two years, we have prayed about, surveyed, and learned much about the mission field that is Iowa State University and the state of Iowa. We concluded that the emphases on agriculture and engineering here, the roles of Christian faculty in a new class in “Sustainable Engineering for International Development,” in the nation’s first Graduate Program in Sustainable Agriculture, and in the Aldo Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture suggest that we focus our vision of a reformed world-view on “sustainable practices” in agriculture, engineering, and energy. We have three major goals in this emphasis. We seek to share the good news of a Christian worldview for environmental stewardship with those who come to environmental stewardship from other, usually other religious, perspectives. We also hope for more moments like Katherine’s as we share the good news that God loves all his good creation, and has good news for it, with fellow believers who have not been taught this part of the gospel. Finally, we look forward to equipping students and faculty in many professions to serve their neighbors, in Iowa and around the world, by helping them live sustainably in their small part of God’s good Creation.

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Practicing Resurrection

By Peter Schuurman

Excerpts from

“Practicing Resurrection” At Russet House Farm

August 14, 2006

Brian Walsh, one of our CRC campus ministers at the University of Toronto, lives at the Russet House Farm near Lindsay, Ontario, with his wife, children, and two other households. With a long string of sponsors (including six Christian colleges), this agrarian collective hosted a week of camping ending in a weekend conference celebrating the gift of sustainable living (August 7-13, 2006).

The theme of the conference was “Practicing Resurrection,” a reference to the final line of a poem about pursuing sustainable culture by Christian farmer-poet Wendell Berry. The poem is entitled, “Manifesto: Mad Farmer Liberation Front” and begins sarcastically by saying:

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,
vacation with pay. Want more
of everything ready-made. Be afraid
to know your neighbors and to die.

Then the poem suddenly turns around and becomes an eloquent call for a life that “doesn’t compute” but rather seeks to “invest in the millennium, plant sequoias.” If *stewardship* was the catch-phrase of a Christian conscience in years past, its more recent cousin *sustainability* is the theme that ties this community together.

....

Henry Bakker, a Dordt graduate and farmer gifted in the theatre arts, is the main farmer of the commune. Bakker says the goal of the farm is to apprentice people in “being creatures” because, in Norman Wirzba’s words, we have lost the art of being creatures. Says Wirzba:

*We cannot be authentic creatures so long as we despise
the limits and possibilities of creation, or deny or degrade
the biological, ecological, and social networks of relation-*

ship that permeate and bless our life together. What we need are to devise apprenticeships that lead us ever more deeply into the requirements of creaturely life, requirements of attention, patience, nurture, and protection. From these apprenticeships there will follow an honest humility and a grateful mind, a heart that celebrates the gifts of God that we are to each other. (This quote is from a presentation at Calvin College entitled “Agrarianism After Modernity” earlier this year).

....

I was only there two days, so my idyllic impressions omit much. The work is undoubtedly hard, the distances from friends and family are significant, and relationships on the farm must be tense at times. The brokenness and folly of sin are not confined to the structures of modern urban living. But that is where the double meaning of “practicing” is especially apt. We “practice” resurrection, meaning we rehearse it, repeat it, exercise it, hoping each time to reach a new level of sanctified living. Resurrection life is a Holy Spirit art, and we are eternally “practicing” the rich, new life in our own neighbourhoods, never “getting it right.”

...

Later in Berry’s poem he suggests a subversive, apocalyptic happiness, which comes easily in a place like the Russet House Farm woods.

Expect the end of the world. Laugh.
Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful
though you have considered all the facts.

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for the Christian Reformed Church in North America,
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Transforming Egg Drop Soup

By Tom Oosterhuis

I started making soup from packages, probably the unhealthiest way to make soup. One of those recipes, however, has stuck, although it has changed a bit over the years.

We've all made egg drop soup, I suspect. A package of Lipton's Chicken Noodle soup, brought to a boil, and then a beat up egg poured into the boiling soup. That's the way we made it at home.

Now if you're the experimenting kind, or rebellious (I've been called both, but I just hate being legalistic about instructions) and if you have a large crowd to feed, then you take, let's say four packages of Chicken Noodle Soup, add a package of Onion Soup, and then beat up a dozen eggs to pour in after the soup is boiling. People have actually called up long distance and asked for that recipe. Healthy or not, it tastes good.

At our student suppers, in an attempt to provide a nutritionally balanced diet, one of my nutrition students insisted that we regularly serve celery sticks and carrot sticks. Combine that wonderful habit with my thrifty nature, and we have another ingredient to add to our Egg Drop Soup. You never throw the trimmings away when you cut up celery sticks. They go into the soup, so that our unhealthy soup now has a touch of actual food in it.

Then, if you're modifying the soup anyway, why not put some actual onion in it. One large onion, cut up, tossed into the water while you're bringing it to a boil (I'm still talking about 4 litres of water in preparation for 4 packages of chicken noodle - you can still add the onion soup, if you like salt, but I tend to leave that out and sometimes add an extra onion). While you're add it, toss in a couple of cloves of minced garlic.

Since the soup mix is supposed to be chicken soup, I thought I'd actually add some chicken meat to it. You can do this with a few legs add to the water at the beginning. Then before serving the soup, take the legs out and trim the meat off the bones. A couple of pounds of chicken legs should provide some actual chicken taste, and a little bit of chicken too. If you don't want to bother with trimming bones, take two or three chicken breasts and cut them up into the water while it's coming to a boil.

Serve with fresh French Bread (you can now get the whole-wheat variety) or multi-grain bread. I took an old bread maker to school and sometimes I bake fresh whole wheat bread. Warm bread with cheddar cheese, goes well with the Egg Drop Soup. Add a few carrot sticks and celery sticks to the plate, some fresh fruit (I look for specials when I'm shopping, but Cantaloupe is always a favourite.). When I have a few overripe bananas I make banana chocolate chip bread for dessert - just use any banana bread recipe, substitute whole wheat flour, cut back on the sugar or use sugar substitute, and then use chocolate chips instead of nuts.

So your soup becomes integrated into a whole meal, and we have begun to reform and transform our eating habits. It is definitely a soup semper reformanda (loosely translated: always in need of being reformed).

Or you could try making spicy spaghetti with whole wheat noodles - now there's a meal that I love to cook, or split pea soup, or nasi goreng, or zucchini con queso, or..... Time to go - I'm hungry.

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at U of Alberta, Canada*

Beautiful People

By Michael Wagenman

Many times over the past year, I've been stopped in my tracks by gratitude. It happens innocently enough: I'm walking from one meeting to the next, maybe passing someone I've come to know, I'll glance up at an aesthetically pleasing building on campus and say in my heart of hearts, "I'm so happy to be here."

Being at Western, there are many reasons for this but one primary reason stands at the fore: Western is, admittedly, a very beautiful place. The buildings all reflect a refined Anglican sense of place, of stately rootedness in time and tradition. And even with the explosive growth of buildings on campus, there isn't (any longer, at least – we all had it rough in the '70's) the contemporary kitsch that so easily could disrupt the historic "look and feel" of the place.

But it's not just the architecture; it's that the people are beautiful as well. The Ivey MBA-guys with their spiky hair, stylish jeans and sandals, assorted functional and yet artistic backpacks and sunglasses, iPods and RAZR phones, heading off to rake in a ton of cash and live the "good life," happily ever after, world without end, Amen. And the women also reflect a middle-to-upper class sense of taste: highlighted blonde hair flipped back, curve-defining low-rise pants, coordinated top with low-slung neckline. I mean, folks around here don't call them "Western girls" for nothing (yes, it's derogatory). There is much beauty to behold all around Western.

And yet, I also think that's the place where my deep sadness erupts from as well. These "beautiful

people" walking around a beautiful place take beauty for granted. They assume they know what's beautiful and what's not. They've inherited a sense of entitlement as well. It's the "better-than-thou" attitude of bourgeois superiority that seems to flitter through the culture on campus. As Don Miller analyzes it, "They are an entirely beautiful people with a terrible problem...A child learns early there is a fashionable and an unfashionable in the world, an ugly and a pretty, a valued and an unvalued. Where this system comes from, God only knows, but it is rarely questioned" (*Searching for God Knows What*, pp. 92, 96).

“Where will they be challenged by a Beauty that will drive them to question the system?”

And then I wonder where, in their cavernous educational journey, will they be challenged by a deeper and fuller Beauty that will drive them to question the system? When will they stumble across a humble recognition of the world's utter poverty, whether it be economic, emotional, aesthetic, or even spiritual? Will entitlement ever translate into responsibility? How could class segregation morph into compassionate justice for others? And I even wonder, in my darkest nights of the soul, whether the Christians on campus will play a part in imagining and modeling a better way – or not.

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The Kingdom is Now!

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To live in the affluent 21st century, in the even more affluent West, and to be a Christian is a formidable set of moral-laden facts to be grappled with. It is no longer enough in the life of faith to merely have memorized answers to catechism questions (if it ever was enough). Having a head chock-full of deep doctrinal distinctions isn't going to get one very far these days in responding to the opportunity (and responsibility) presented by our generation.

The challenge of our day is not simply to *know* that the Kingdom has arrived in Christ but to *show* that the Kingdom of God has come. Being a ministry on a university campus means that our campus ministry demonstration must have academic articulation, yes. But, being a ministry to *persons* as whole beings means that our demonstration must be filled with actions and disciplines that ignite the imagination as well as inspire the heart and satisfy to the mind.

With Christian culture in North America significantly affected by conservative forms of evangelicalism (and fundamentalism before it), many believing students have unconsciously inherited an individualistic, dualistic, materialistic, atomistic, therapeutic view of humanity and Christian faith. This, in turn, has formed a myopic vision in many such that contemporary, clannish, and so-called "spiritual" concerns trump the larger challenges of poverty, injustice, and abuse that loom over us. The Bible's community- and Creation-stewardship ethic is almost forgotten while the practical concerns of the day (determined by the culture at large) are placed front and centre.

In order to help students discern the voice of God within the clamoring multiplicity of voices in

the dominant culture, this Fall at Western we're exploring the theme, *The Kingdom is Now!* In other words, the Bible's message regarding humanity's core calling is not locked in the past of "redemptive history"; nor is it relegated to some unknown date in the future. Rather, the main objective of God's people today is to take up their God-ordained role as redemptive partners in making the reality of the already-present (and still-to-come-more-fully) Kingdom of God more evident for everyone's benefit and healing. That's the story the Bible reveals to us: how each time and place is ripe for further in-breaking of the Spirit who makes all things new, if God's people would just lean into their vocation with some grit and gristle.

“Many students have inherited an individualistic, dualistic, materialistic, atomistic, therapeutic religion.”

On campus, we've decided to march in this direction through the telling of stories, of sharing our narratively-shaped lives with each other in community. For some, this will mean outlining the points of intersection between their scholarship and their faith. For others, it will mean being vulnerable with the calls to radical Christian activism we've heard either in the quiet solitude of our meditation or in the loud shouts of our action. And for still others, it will involve taking fellow students to places where they must step into the middle of – and reach out and actually touch – the ugliness of a fallen Creation.

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Beyond “Wonder Bra” & College Degrees

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In the back closet of my imagination, I sort of hope that students will forget about heaven (and even hell) for the time being – especially, the “heaven” or “hell” of childhood imaginings that cause inordinate and unnecessary fear to well up, causing us to shrink back due to an insurmountable anxiety that we may miss-step and accidentally offend God. I believe that, today, if God is offended, it’s more on account of people’s utter lack of faithfully motivated social action rather than the occasional miss-step along a path of radical discipleship. It seems that if we could just forget about our “pie in the sky when we die” pipe dreams, we might be able to help our neighbour up out of an ugly predicament to a place of redemptive beauty and shalom – a place of complete flourishing. Or, if that’s too triumphalistic to be achieved, to sit there with our neighbour in their sackcloth and ashes.

“Do we need to forget about ‘heaven’ for the time being in order to help our neighbour?”

Speaking of true beauty in this regard calls to mind Jonathan Edwards’ classic, *The Religious Affections*, in which Edwards makes a fascinating connection between holiness and beauty when discussing the Gospel’s or God’s “holy beauty.” In fact, Edwards suggests, God’s holiness *is* God’s beauty. As such, seeing that the Gospel is a message of redemption and that God is a God of redeeming grace, the conclusion seems to be that when God’s people become

redemptively active in the world, seeking to return things to their original state of creational beauty, that this is a Divine sort of holiness that would make God happy. Bono must have taken his cue from Edwards when rightly asserting that God’s grace “makes beauty out of ugly things” (*Grace* from the album *All that You Can’t Leave Behind*, 2000).

My prayer for this coming year of ministry at Western is that our community of faith would throw caution to the wind and begin to live the Kingdom now. I’m envisioning a ministry to Western’s campus that “strives to be a gathering of students seeking a faith that is holistic, communal, integrative, global, imaginative, winsome, incarnational, confident, just, redemptive, disciple-making, world-engaging, culture-transforming, and life-long learning.” I’m envisioning a Western made more deeply beautiful by the redeeming and reconciling grace of God that goes far beyond what a Wonder Bra, Bed Head hair wax, a prestigious degree, or a fancy new academic building can accomplish. I’m envisioning a Spirit who is still making *all* things new. And maybe, by God’s grace, everyone will find a blessing in it – that would be beautiful!

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CRCMA Academic Year Devotional

At the spring membership meeting we voted overwhelmingly to take on the task of producing a devotional as an association. Our aim is to have everyone in the association write 5 to 7 meditations for a specific week. Since we have more weeks than members we'll gladly welcome your work on more than one!

ARTWORK: Interspersed throughout the book, hopefully one piece per week, we would like to have a black and white piece from either a student, faculty, or CRCMA member, relating to the meditations. This can be a nice opportunity for students to add to their portfolio.

Audience:

Our immediate audience is students of all stripes, but it should be relevant for parents, our committees, and the general pew sitter. We plan this to be an "insider" text (ie. not an evangelistic or apologetic piece). In the "Pumped!" devotion the writers used bicycling life as an analogy for the Christian life, and we think we can do the same for being a student, a learner. This way it may be a text for every Christian.

Each day would be laid out with the following elements:

Title

Scripture

Meditation

Short Prayer (composed or extracted from historical source)

Quote for day (from book we would recommend, on/close to the theme of the day).

We would suggest 300 words max for the meditation and 400 words max for the whole day's piece.

Weekly themes

1. Orientation week (Virginia)
2. Establishing habits/ spiritual disciplines
3. Friendship 101- Community
4. Recreation
5. Academics- Faith and Learning (Neil Lettinga)
6. Canadian Thanksgiving/ service, justice & advocacy, giving of self (Grace)
7. Sexual Ethics
8. Institutional Religion- church/faith community
9. Diversity, gender, race, religion, tolerance (Chong)

10. Science and Faith (Remembrance Day)
11. Wisdom Literature- Proverbs (Joyce Suh)
12. Vocation/calling- finding a mentor, assessing gifts (Mike Wagenman)
13. Consumerism, American Thanksgiving, 'Buy Nothing Week'
14. Advent: Patience and waiting
15. Advent: Tests and testing (Virginia?)
16. Advent: Family Issues
17. Christmas, Celebration, space for God, depression....
18. New Years' Day, reflections, resolutions...

Semester two:

1. Role of the Bible in Life (two Books) Interpreting the Bible
2. Jesus as teacher (Tom Oosterhuis)
3. Worship and the Arts
4. Suffering and doubt
5. Getting Help- the Blues and the blahs
6. Commitment, St. Valentine's day, relationships and marriage
7. Beginning of Lent- Mardi Gras, Ash Wednesday... (Virginia?)
8. Lent: Poverty issues, personal, national, global
9. Lent: St. Patrick's Day, Drinking, getting drunk, and other addictions Lent: Creeds and confessions as our teachers
10. Lent: Spiritual Disciplines
11. Palm Sunday, Holy Week
12. Easter and Resurrection Living (Mike Wagenman)
13. Working and the "Professional life" (amateur: to do the calling out of love, professional: paid for what we do), faith and grace on the job....law and medicine..
14. Daniel and Empire, business and finance, (Brian Walsh's week?)
15. Hope in the face of change
16. Creation, Environment, Earth Day
17. Eternal students

Thanks

*Grace Miedema, CRC Chaplain
at Fanshawe College, London, Canada
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Another Conspiracy? McLaren's Code

By Peter Schuurman

Brian McLaren. *The Secret Message of Jesus: Uncovering the Truth that Could Change Everything*. W Publishing, 2006.

McLaren seems to be highlighting what has been called the “kingdom vision”—a vision of the Way that embraces life at its fullest, including the full range of arts and sciences and a deep concern for global justice. This is intended as a corrective for a Christian faith that focuses only on individual salvation and piety (“heaven when you die”) rather than the redemption of the whole cosmos and beyond.

It is a book that would serve well with theological neophytes who are skeptical of church and faith but open to peruse something that looks and sounds refreshing and exciting. It will also open up new worlds for those caught in fundamentalist circles, where morality is presupposed as the sole dimension of Christian faith (and for some, U.S. Republicanism). McLaren brings mystery, nerve, and an idealistic spirituality to what many perceive as the old, tired established religion.

“What if Jesus’ message reveals a secret plan?”

This is the secret message: “We are under a gentle, compassionate assault by a kingdom of peace and healing and forgiveness and life” (60). It is a scandalous message, because “the kingdom of God does fail. It is weak. It is crushed.” McLaren says that God’s kingdom is a vulnerable, sacrificing kingdom, which even when pressed, refuses to take on the methods of its oppressors. Its success comes through its failure, a message that is too subversive to be overt, too inefficient to be easily lived, and too poetic to be confined by prosaic manifestos. “Clarity is sometimes overrated,” he says, “intrigue is correspondingly undervalued.” (7)

In effect, this is the thrust of the book: “What if Jesus’ secret message reveals a secret plan? What if he

didn't come to start a new religion - but rather came to start a political, social, religious, artistic, economic, intellectual, and spiritual revolution that would give birth to a new world?” (4) This is a holistic kingdom of God vision that is infectious, imaginative, and upbeat.

I enjoy reading McLaren’s books, and I wish I could write as fresh and winsomely as he does. There is something both alluring and provocative in what comes from him and his friends in the Emerging Church movement. The one concern I have with this book follows the critique of Jamie Smith in his book *Whose Afraid of Postmodernism?* (Baker Academic, 2006) which is this: McLaren makes too radical a separation with the history of the church. For example, he says, “sadly, for centuries at a time in too many places to count, the Christian religion has downplayed, misconstrued, or forgotten the secret message of Jesus entirely.” (78) While one cannot argue that the church is perpetually caught in corruptive vices, it seems disingenuous to cast the whole church under such a shadow. A few pages later he suggests “most evangelicals haven’t the foggiest notion what the gospel really is.” (90) These seem to be clichés at best, and, along with the idea of a “secret message”, betray a tinge of the Gnosticism he sympathizes with at the beginning of the book (where he valorizes the sentiments of *The DaVinci Code* on xii).

Pull back with me a moment. I said just a “tinge.” N. T. Wright and Dallas Willard are the first two acknowledgements at the end of the book, so he obviously associates with mainstream conservative evangelicalism. But this is what I’m getting at: if the church past and present has no concept of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the incarnation of our Lord is severely lacking. It is as if the material world—and the institutional church through the ages in particular-- could not have breathed with the Spirit of God until the Emerging Church

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Da McLaren Code

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crowd made the good news more clear. The appendix “Why Didn’t We Get it Sooner?” suggests the gospel is a time-release capsule and we are just “getting it” now.

The end of Christendom does, however, signal a new moment in history, and McLaren is highlighting that by putting a different face—and language—on the church. McLaren charmingly makes his way through important issues like miracles, war, demons, the language of “kingdom”, and even heaven. He has some great analogies, like where he describes Jesus as the virtuoso musician:

Jesus was the master of making the music of life—not just with wood and string, tuners and frets, but with skin and bone, smile and laughter, shout and whisper, time and space, food and drink. He invited disciples to learn to make beautiful life-music in his secret, revolutionary kingdom-of-God way... (77)

Again, unfortunately, McLaren compares this with what he calls the busy, chatty, manic or monotone religious “bombast” of the established church. (79) We all push off from something when we preach, but it seems McLaren pushes off from the one holy, catholic church more often than the more appropriate counter-part to God’s kingdom, the Kingdom of Self, or the Kingdom of Satan, Death, Empire or even “sin.”

That said, the book is not intended for members of a traditional denomination like me. It is really intended for people who consider themselves “spiritual but not religious,” who, like him, find “much in the religious establishment that repels” them and who are looking for “something new.” (xv) McLaren is trying to reach the same people who are attracted to *The Da Vinci Code* and the gospel of Judas and the conspiracies of silence that supposedly surround them through the centuries. I suspect this more of a Boomer or Generation X crowd than a Millennial crowd, as the latter are, according to all the research, more optimistic about institutions. My personal inclination—which is a more Reformed inclination—is to more carefully and generously distinguish, as Jaroslav Pelikan said, between traditionalism, which is the dead faith of the living, and tradition, which is the living faith of the dead.

News Bytes

From Hernan Zapata-Thomack:

This year my Hispanic colleagues elected me President of the Hispanic Task Force in our CRC Association of Hispanic pastors. In our classis, Hackensack, we have increased in number as a minority pastoral body but unfortunately, we do not have access to decision making processes in classis Hackensack. Many controversial issues happened, then Hispanics spoke up! Specifically there were issues about lacking sensitivity to our community.

Then, our classis team invited me to preach about this sensitive topic at the All Nations Heritage services for classes Atlantic Northeast, Hackensack, and Hudson (around 30 churches). After that, the Director of Racial Reconciliation came to our area in order to inaugurate a Racial Reconciliation process around a table between pastors from the Hispanic Task Force and White-Dutch pastors from the Mid Atlantic Ministry team which is the body that runs our northeastern classes. The purpose was to discuss how to renew our classes so we will act with justice in our diversity.

For me to serve my Hispanic colleagues and be involved in our classis has been an exciting experience so that our people could change for better. Classis Hackensack also chose me as a delegate to participate at the 2006 synod, and the HTF asked me to attend our Renew Classis National Conference. I would like to contribute to these ecclesiastical bodies advocating for the development of minority leaders. I pray this will lead to racial justice and Christian diversity in our CRC.

From Grace Miedema:

Our family celebrated 25 years in the parsonage in September 2006. Dirk started in Dresden CRC, and I was the proverbial minister’s wife, even though I couldn’t play the organ, and didn’t type well enough to do the bulletin. Although all our parsonages have been in southwestern Ontario, mostly in rural or small industry towns, still it has been a rich experience, God has been good and we feel deeply blessed. We have been permitted to walk intimately with a host of sisters and brothers along the way.

Research Prayers at Waterloo

By Graham Morbey

Graham Morbey explains a fascinating way to integrate the passions, projects, and spiritual lives of faculty, students, and the campus ministry in Waterloo Ontario.

The research prayers project began in the summer term 2005 at the University of Waterloo. We invited six professors from Computing, Psychology (Wilfred Laurier University- also in Waterloo), Physics, Optometry, Electrical Engineering and Civil Engineering. On behalf of our small student group, I invited these professors to come and present their research. Each professor received a sheet explaining the concept of the prayers and what was expected of them. In this way, I hoped that professors and students would be brought into a new learning relationship. The students would see a different side of what professors were really passionate about, and professors would have an audience for their sometimes-lonely existence and be forced to explain their work at an undergraduate level. Professors and students would learn about caring for each other through the medium of prayer and God would be honoured in unexpected ways. Each professor that we asked to participate showed an immediate willingness. I found out that no one had ever spoken to them about praying for their research, let alone inviting them to present their research for prayer! Their reactions were surprise and amazement.

We followed a simple methodology. I contacted the professor. The professor came to present his or her research and discussed it with the group. During the following week I let my poetic juices flow and presented a completed prayer to my group. We discussed the prayer together, sometimes made a few slight changes, and I explained the metaphors, images, etc. to mostly science undergraduates. Then we prayed the prayer together. We then sent word of our prayers and a hard copy to the professor. At least two professors were moved to have their prayer framed and hung in their offices.

(The following three prayers in the next few pages are examples of the research prayers. Fonts and formatting has not been changed from its original—other than perhaps size.)

Graham Morbey is the CRC Chaplain at U of Waterloo, Canada

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Research Prayers at Waterloo

What is Mann, That You Delight in his Research?

*A Research Prayer for the Physics Chair
at the University of Waterloo*

Gracious God.

Great Creation-Designer God of the Universe,
Your works boggle, we strain at majesty, O God, not being or concept,
far beyond any knowledge and intelligence gifted to your people.
We adore you for the complexities you permit us to explore,
for the structure and direction, the celestial architecture,
foundations upon foundations, held by You,
Most Holy One, everlasting.

Math and Physics show forth your splendor, power and grace.
Numbers, concepts, theories, computations, codes and formulae, algorithms,
laws that elegantly parade the great stage of the universe, trees clapping,
stars
singing,
Theatre of Your glory.

Enlightenment in your Light, relativity refined, cosmic reaches measured,
probabilities probed, chaos cooled, speed squared,
puzzles and riddles solved, black holes beckoning,
against the backdrop of barred Mystery, of fine tuning,
of developments and processes,
of freedoms and limits.

We pray, O God, for Rob's researches into gravity, particle physics, the order of chaos
and composition of black holes, for new and better computational approximation tech-
niques that lead to human well-being.
Keep discoveries made from misuse,
from evil temptation.

We thank you for gifting Rob with the rational and logical powers fit for physics research
and the deep motivating faith that informs
his fundamental probings of Creation.

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Amen

Research Prayers at Waterloo

Lord of Rats and Rudy's Research,

Dear God,

*We praise your name for your Creation,
for the unexpected resources you supply
that give insight into how humans are put together and
that broaden our understanding of mood and motivation-
its biological, psychological and environmental conditions
and effects.*

*O Divine irony, that allows the rodent, denizen of garbage
dump and dark slimy passage, bearer of plague and death,
to be a harbinger of human health and healing, of human hope and
welling-being, animal model of human behaviour.*

*For just that work, O God, we direct this prayer.
For the blessed help that a despised and feared genus *rattus*
offers Rudy's research into human addictions, we give you thanks.*

*We pray for the discovery of the control
systems in rats that may give further insight into human depression,
and enable sufferers of addictions such as anorexia nervosa and alcoholism to suffer less and be
cured. We pray for continued and improved resources
to carry on such research.*

*Thank you for gifting Rudy to carry out research experiments
on rats and may such research bring honour and glory to your name.*

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Amen

Research Prayers at Waterloo

HIS EYE IS ON HER RESEARCH AND WE KNOW HE LOVES IT TOO
 A Research Prayer for Jennifer Leat, Associate Professor of
 Optometry, University of Waterloo

All knowing and All seeing God, we thank you
 for the care you take of
 your awesome creation,
 for noticing the tiny sparrow, and our individual hair count.
 For colours and shapes, for textures and surfaces.

From you, none can hide, for you are
EI R'oi, the God who sees.
 You who saw the afflictions of your people,
 you who have given sight to the blind,
 you in whose light we see light.

Visit the research on human eyes, lustrous orbs,
 reflecting pools of hope and joy,
 fear and despair, love,
 that have become dimmed and imperfect, warped
 by countless eons of human time, failures of choices,
 conditions, complex systems, syndromes deeply embedded,
 troubled lenses, sight switched off.

We pray, O Lord, that you bring to light still hidden facts
 of developing vision, in order to grasp
 better solutions to vision enhancement, readability using digital
 filtering, correction of age related eye problems.

We thank you for gifting Jennifer with a mind for seeing, a care for eyes that
 advances understanding and attends to the sight of many.
 May her work be continually blessed with new discovery and better funding, until that
 new Day when tears are wiped from all eyes and we all see no longer darkly.

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy spirit.

Amen