

RADIX

Spirituality
Philosophy
Religion

**WHAT'S LOVE GOT
TO DO WITH IT?**



FEBRUARY 2011

A PUBLICATION OF THE MCGILL CHAPLAINCY

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silence **always speaks**

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Editor's Message

Erin Schwabe-Fry

With Valentine's Day behind us and the occasional sunny day tantalizing us with thoughts of spring, our mid-winter Radix issue is full of bright submissions. Our theme – What's love got to do with it? – explores how love finds its way into our spiritual, philosophical, and interpersonal lives.

First, we have Zayaan's interview with Presbyterian chaplain Jill Foster about an upcoming interfaith dialogue series between McGill's Muslim and Christian communities. Zayaan's interview with Jill glows with hope for enduring friendship and solidarity between the diverse spiritual and cultural groups at McGill and beyond.

Serena Yung's poem follows as a riveting, honest, and soulful lyric about following your heart -- which, in this case, led her to choose her academic major and true love, Art.

Next, we have Christopher Dragan's inventive play that puts a modern twist on the old tale that asks: how will you treat the stranger at your doorstep?

Lastly, my article explores the new Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education at Stanford University, founded under the auspices of the Dalai Lama and his long-time English interpreter, Thupten Jinpa, an adjunct professor at McGill.

So, what's love got to do with it? In what ways does love influence our spiritual, philosophical, and interpersonal lives? Surely, love is all around, constantly shifting form, like the cloud on the cover of our magazine.

Take a look, and spread the love!

RADIX ONLINE

Check it out on our uber-cool blog:

mcgillradix.blogspot.com

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~

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Cover Design by: Zayaan Schuck

Living in peace: a muslim - christian dialogue

An Interview with
Chaplain JILL FOSTER
by ZAYAAN SCHUCK

In the midst of a noon-hour blizzard not unknown to Montreal in early February, I had a chance to sit down and talk with Jill Foster, McGill's Presbyterian Chaplain, and discuss an upcoming project of hers that I believed to be overwhelmingly relevant to the Radix interfaith mission. The project – an interfaith dialogue centered on McGill's Christian and Muslim community – was conceived after attending a OPIRG conference at the beginning of this month entitled "Who's Security? Our Security: Countering the National Security Agenda."

Emerging from the conference, itself focusing on the increasing securitization of Canada in response to a "Muslim threat," Jill vowed to apply what she had learnt about the increasing distrust of Islam in the West to a practical effort in McGill's Christian community oriented at supporting their brothers and sisters. This is where her project begins. Jill, citing both the influence of the conference and that of her anarchist sister – herself who is involved in a number of grass-roots solidarity movements, is organizing McGill's first Christian-Muslim dialogue of solidarity, an conversation that will be strengthened by the sharing of like-minded theological viewpoints.

With the working title "Muslim-Christian Conversations," this dialogue, tentatively set for the 10th, 17th and 24th of March and taking the form of a dinner and conversation between Muslim and Christian McGill students will be complete with the sharing of both Islamic and Christian scripture aimed at further endearing each community to each other and will initiate what Foster hopes will be a chain of interfaith solidarity dialogues on campus.



Prompted both by the content of OPIRG's conference and by the recent protests and unrest in the Middle East, Foster believes the time to act in solidarity is, more than ever before, now.

But what is the tangible goal of such an event? Well, in her own way, Jill is aiming to expand what she believes to be the oft-too-narrowed and personalized view of love espoused by Christians in North America, a view that she believes needs to be extended to other faith-based communities in times of victimization, in this case the Muslim com-

“When religion and politics come together, humanity has seen the gravest of atrocities but it has also witnessed the most flourishing and enduring of friendships and solidarities.”

-munity. Jesus, Jill says, teaches of the need to cross religious, ethnic and cultural lines and interface, love and respect every human as if they were one’s neighbours. Indeed, the famous Christian paradigm of “Loving thy neighbour as thyself” is exceedingly applicable in a university environment, Jill goes on to stress, since it is in this time of our lives that one’s field of view vis-à-vis love and compassion can become restricted to oneself as a kind of survival mechanism.

Aiming to enlarge love’s field of view in this context and to extend a hand in solidarity with what she believes to be an increasingly targeted population “not unlike communists in America’s McCarthy era or Japanese-Canadians during the Second World War”, Jill believes that through remembering Jesus’ teachings and emphasis on action McGill’s Christian community can actively support what she believes to be an increasingly marginalized Islamic community in Canada. When I asked Jill what the long term aims of such a dialogue (besides initiating a chain of other dialogues) would be, she responded that at the moment baby steps are in order, proposing that as a start Christians could begin work in solidarity with the McGill Muslim Student Association’s quest for a larger and more permanent prayer space.

Although in the early stages of preparations, the event will, by virtue of its blend of socio-political concerns with interfaith solidarity, combine what I believe to be two of the most fundamental and salient aspects of our society. When religion and politics come together, humanity has seen the gravest of atrocities but it has also witnessed the most flourishing and enduring of friendships and solidarities. Referencing the bold display of solidarity shown by Egyptian Muslims who earlier in January formed a human chain intended to shield Copts celebrating Christmas day from Islamist intimidation and violence, Foster believes that such actions of solidarity are not the exception to the rule, but rather are the rule.

Looking to the future, Jill envisions a campus where such an enduring friendship exists between Christians and Muslims, although one would be hard-pressed to find noticeable enmities between the two groups, and furthermore hopes that through faith-based action and solidarity, McGill’s Christian corpus can reinvigorate the oft-forgotten obligation of love.

Zayaan is a U3 Middle East Studies / Political Science student and Radix co-editor

Should you want to get involved with future Islamic-Christian interfaith events, or should you simply wish to receive more information of such initiatives on campus, you may reach Jill through the McGill Chaplaincy or by emailing her at jillf@magma.ca.

If I hadn't listened to my heart,
Devoted my entire life to you,
—and married you at long last,
Then I'd be condemned
To live a life of miserable polygamy,
—to be deemed an adulteress forever!

Therefore thank goodness I made the right choice,
Saved us both from a lifetime of unhappiness and crime.
—I've always belonged to you after all,
Destined to be your eternal mate,
Whether I like it or not.
And thus my heart knew it all along...
It was only through its wrenching pain,
its intensity,
screaming,

And curdling fire
That I had never experienced before,
Which finally made me realize I was in love with you.
Truly in love,
And in love with you only, you of all things,
and not any mortal males.

This constant strength of feeling from my blessed heart
Was really the one crucial sting
That drove me onwards through the thorny tests of faith
Despite all societal protests, a close friend,
And all the barrages of self-torturing doubt.
And I've finally found you
Right here, right now in our eternal triumph
and victory.

We've defeated at last
The thoughtless shackles
Of certain
Ignorant and close-minded people and social systems
That decree for no real reason
That we must marry within our species!
within our dimensions!



What stupidity is this?
What blind wire fences
To cut off a certain claw-full
of individuals
From ever finding their one true love?
Their one and only perfect partner
That matches them as naturally
And easily
As a dose of soft light air?

So you see,
It was my heart that was true all this time,
It never lies.
The heart doesn't discriminate.

That deep throbbing wisdom
Sees past all races, species, dimensions
—those are but liquid
To the all-penetrating force
Of true, elemental love.

Therefore,
Thank my heart, dear partner,
For calling me to you,
Prompting me,
Haunting me,
Depriving me of sleep
—and summoning me to hearken with all seriousness of
mind,
To open both my eyes, my real eyes
And awaken to the deep grand Truth
that is You!

I'm so glad we're together now.

My Art smiles too in joy
and pulls me into his breast
Reaffirming his elemental claim on me
—his prize and ultimate affection.



“Behold, I stand at the door and knock!”

A Scene by Christopher Dragan

First Tableau

Inside a basement apartment, Thomas and Didymus are playing cards and are seated to the left and to the right, respectively, of a living room table. There is the front door and bright light pouring in from a small rectangular window backstage. A knock is heard at the door.

*Di. Are we expecting anyone?
*Th. Not that I know. Did you invite someone?
Di. No. *The same knock is heard.* That’s odd, go see who it is.
Th. Why me?
Di. Because I did it last time. It’s always some crazy person trying to make you buy something or to talk to you for hours about something stupid and inconsequential to our lives.
Th. How do you know that?
He rises, walks to the window and looks outside.
Huh, you were right. Looks like he wants to
sell us something.
Talking to the man outside.
No thank you, we’re busy. Goodbye.
Silence. Thomas walks back to his seat at the table.
Di. Well, that settles that.
Th. Hm. Was it your turn or my turn?
Di. My turn. *He plays a card from his hand.*
Th. Hm.



Second Tableau

Same as before. The light from outside is darkened, suggesting late afternoon. Thomas and Didymus are at the height of their game.

Th. That was a very fine card you played just now, I could’ve won the game if you hadn’t done that.
Di. Is that so? I wasn’t planning anything by playing it. I didn’t have anything else to play. I guess it worked out quite well for me didn’t it?
Th. Hm.
The knock from before is heard.
Someone’s at the door.
Di. That’s odd, that’s the second time today. Thomas, could you go see who it is?
Th. I went last time. Why won’t you go?
Di. Just do me the favour once more. *The knock.* Please.



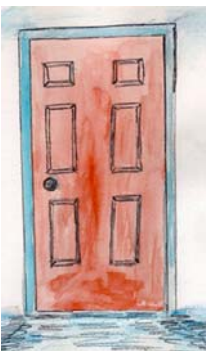
- Th. Alright, you owe me one this time.
He stands up and walks to the window as previously.
It's the same man from before! I guess he's done the tour of the neighbourhood. It's strange that he came back just for us, don't you think?
- Di. You know what I think about solicitors.
- Th. Right.
He sits down at the table. The knock is heard but they ignore it. Silence.
Do you think I should've let him in, or at least answered the door or done something. I mean, it seemed rude just to let him stand outside.
- Di. Well, I never told you not to answer the door.
- Th. *Perplexed.* Right, well, it's too late now I suppose.
Sits on his chair and looks into his hand.
What to do, what to do...
Places his bag on the table and opens it. Curtain falls.



Third Tableau

Same as before. It is pitch black outside, night. A single light bulb glows over the two players as they are entering the final rounds of their game and they are growing restless.

- Th. Damn it! When will this game end? Have we really been playing all day?
- Di. You know, you could always give up, let me win by default. Wouldn't mean anything to anyone.
- Th. Why don't you give up? Besides, I'm so close to winning. I'm just waiting for the right card to come... *From the window, the light from a lantern is seen swinging towards the door. It stops, then the knock is heard.*
- Di. Isn't that the guy from before? What the hell is he doing here so late? Let me get the door so that I can tell him to get lost. *He stands.*
- Th. No, no. I wanted to do it last time but I was too afraid, let me answer the door and see what he wants.
- Di. Hey, don't trouble yourself, it's not like you owe him anything. He didn't know it was you. Heck, it was me who ignored him too! So you don't need to worry about him.
- Th. This is something I want to do, so I'm doing it.
- Di. *Sitting down.* Suit yourself, but it's not like you'll find anything. *Thomas walks off, stage left, and the sound of a door opening is heard. Light pours down from left-stage. Indistinct chatter. Didymus reaches over the table to turn over Thomas' cards.*
Damn. He's closer to winning than I thought. *He turns them face-down. The light is turned off while we hear the door closing. Reenter Thomas with Sophomore, a young man in travellers' gear holding a large accordion bag (or a trick suitcase).*
- Th. Diddy, it turns out he's a games salesman. His name is Sophomore. He thinks we should try playing a different game. We've been playing cards all day and neither of us has been able to win.
- Di. *Sighs.* Fine. *He drops all his cards from his hands. Thomas and Didymus sit down at their chairs. Background dims but the light bulb above becomes brighter as Sophomore places his bag on the table and opens it. Curtain falls.*



The Compassionate Mind

By Erin Schwabe-Fry

“Human beings are social animals. Any social animal in order to survive depends on community,” said the Dalai Lama in a talk about compassion at Stanford University in October 2010.

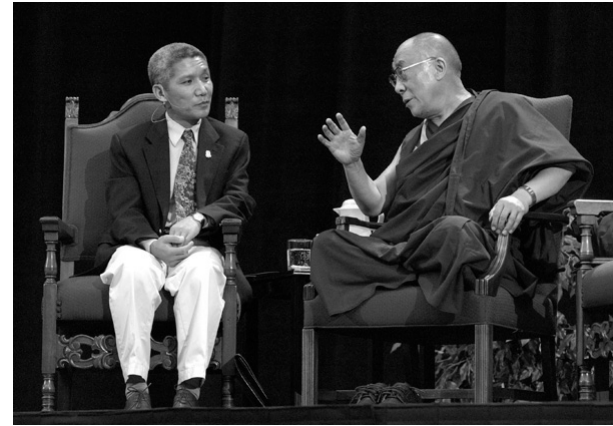
The Dalai Lama’s visit to California was largely motivated by a new compassion research initiative to which he donated \$150,000, his largest financial contribution to any organization. The Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education (CCARE) at Stanford University is bringing together neuroscientists, psychologists, and philosophers to explore the underpinnings of compassionate behavior.

The Dalai Lama’s interest in quantifiable research stems from his desire to make the message of compassion resonate across all backgrounds and creeds. “His Holiness asked for only two things: make sure the science is impeccable, and make sure all the work is universal and secular,” remarked Thupten Jinpa, the Dalai Lama’s long-time English interpreter and an adjunct professor of Religious Studies at McGill University.

Jinpa is also a principal visiting research scholar at CCARE, where he is able to utilize his expertise in both scholarly research and Buddhist meditation. “Western science and Buddhism both have meticulous understandings of the human mind, but so far Western investigations of the mind have focused largely on pathologies. There has been little focus on the more constructive and positive qualities of the human mind, and very little research into how people can be trained to cultivate those,” said Jinpa in an interview with Barry Boyce of the Shambhala Sun.

CCARE is reaching across many academic disciplines as it maps the framework of compassionate human behavior. Psychology professor Philip Zimbardo, a colleague of Stanley Millgram (of “Prison Experiment” fame), is conducting research through CCARE that investigates what causes people to act heroically in authoritarian settings or other adverse situations. In another project, CCARE scientists are providing communication training to doctors and testing whether it results in measurable increases in displayed empathy and favorable patient feedback. Other researchers are using fMRI images of neural responses in charity recipients to ascertain the types of charity that are most positively received.

(Continued on page 10)



The Dalai Lama (right) and his interpreter Thupten Jinpa (left) speaking about compassion at Stanford University.

Photo: Stanford Report

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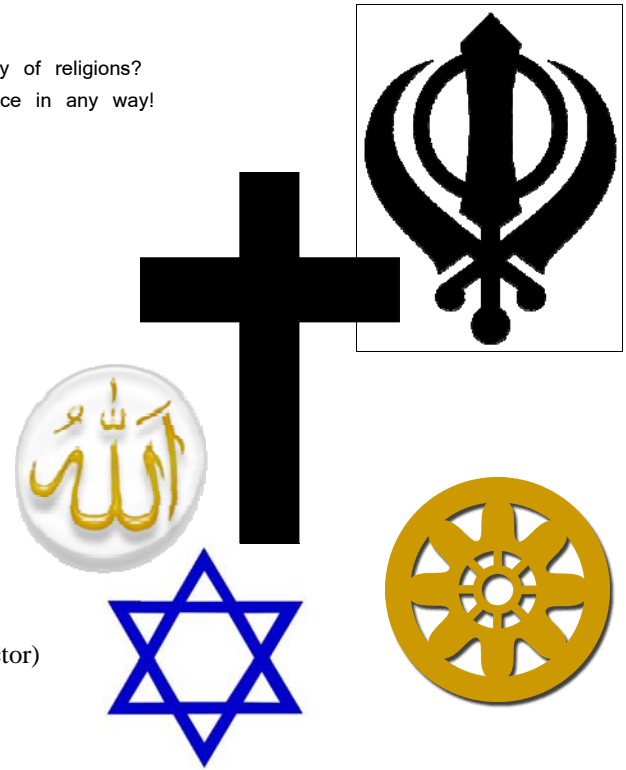
Sister Susanah Kelly, Newman Centre

Catholicism

Father Gregory Inunez, Newman Centre

Catholicism

Mr. Nathan Gibbard, Newman Centre (Director)



(Continued from Page 9)

CCARE's research will surely be groundbreaking, as it extends the limits of compassion knowledge through cutting-edge neuroscience technology. However, will CCARE's advancements in knowledge outpace the ethical quandaries its discoveries create? For instance, a project at CCARE is using a combination of optics and genetics, or optogenetics, to probe mammalian neural circuitry and decipher neural codes for particular behaviors. The project's scientists are using optogenetic tools to switch on particular neural networks in poorly socialized mice that they think will result in improved parenting habits. Like this project, much of the research at CCARE aims to understand the neurological and social framework for compassionate behavior. The ultimate goal of CCARE's research is to help cultivate compassionate behavior; yet, in less ethical hands, could knowledge such as neural behavioral codes and switches be wielded for underhanded purposes?

Regardless of new scientific knowledge about behavioral impulses, the causes of human social behavior remain complex, individualized, and difficult to predict on the large scale. Indeed, new developments in neuroscience technology are just beginning to measure the vastness of the human brain's complexity, as well as humans' capacity for compassion. CCARE is at the forefront of a burgeoning secular effort to understand more completely compassionate and altruistic instincts. Jinpa says that such research will result in "a more positive self-understanding about ourselves as a species", and ultimately, help transcend prejudices and promote a global sense of solidarity.

Erin is a U1 student in Music.

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