

## B.C.

# Faith, reason, and the university

By C.S. Morrissey  
Special to The B.C. Catholic

Faith Forward: Exploring Religion, Culture, and Conflict, an annual public symposium at Trinity Western University, this year took Politics and the Religious Imagination as its theme. The symposium, this year held March 12-15, has been awarded a five-year grant from CHNU TV to explore "inter-faith dialogue about the world's most pressing issues."

Father Raymond de Souza, a university chaplain and National Post columnist, lectured on Religion and Canadian Politics. Other lectures were by Richard Kearney, a professor of philosophy at Boston College; Simon Critchley, a professor of philosophy at the New School of Social Research, New York; and Paul Gottfried, a professor of humanities at Elizabethtown College, Pennsylvania (with a response by Grant Havers, a professor of philosophy at Trinity Western University).

Critchley argued, as an avowed

unbeliever and neo-anarchist, against otherworldly dogmas, but for "an ethics of infinite responsibility that challenges and overrides the vapid mantras of contemporary political moralism."

Kearney promoted a Christian ethic of dialogue with those who are different, something exemplified in all hospitality to strangers; but he blamed the West for any contemporary conflicts with Islam.

However, unlike anywhere else, "The West blames itself for everything," observed Gottfried in his lecture.

Gottfried lectured on the "always expanding" tendency to "self-incrimination" he sees as characteristically "thriving in secularized Protestant societies." "You should not make faces at history," he argued, quoting one of his old teachers.

He is a self-identified "paleo-conservative" who is critical of the Iraq war, which he alleges was instigated by "neocons," and a "Hobbesian" (the English political



Father Raymond de Souza spoke on Faith, Reason, and the University on the Wednesday, and on Religion and Canadian Politics on the Thursday.

philosopher "Thomas Hobbes has influenced me the most," he said.

"Christianity should stop surrendering to its critics, who want nothing but the extinction of Christianity," said Havers, speaking in agreement. Moreover, he argued, "Both Catholics and Protestants should avoid playing with the politics of social engineering."

Havers has argued with Gottfried on previous occasions about the details of which "conservatives" have departed from conservatism to embrace social engineering instead. At the symposium both saw such sorry trends happening in Canada.

All the keynote lecturers also shared the stage on Friday morn-

ing for an interfaith panel discussion that included a Jewish rabbi, a Muslim imam, and Abbot John Braganza, OSB, of Westminster Abbey in Mission.

It was Father de Souza who posed the most challenging remarks to the symposium. These came, not in his Thursday lecture, but in a half-hour talk on Faith, Reason, and the University given to a small crowd of select faculty and students March 12.

This brief talk then generated an hour and half of discussion that was an auspicious beginning to the whole symposium. Father de Souza argued that Pope Benedict XVI's Regensburg lecture of Sept. 12, 2006, was highly significant, because its outcome has produced "the only meaningful encounter" between Islam and Christianity in the modern world.

"Is God so majestic that He can command the irrational?" The answer to this question in the Christian tradition, said Father de Souza, as emphasized by See GOSPEL - Page 16

## Canada has unique religious political history: priest

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We make a big mistake when discussing faith and politics when we "argue Canadian politics in an American way," said Father Raymond de Souza.

"Our foundational political culture" in Canada, he said, is collaboration with religion. Indeed, Canada's history shows a fundamental acceptance of state cooperation with religion's contribution to society.

Father de Souza, a university chaplain and National Post columnist, gave a talk to over 60 participants on Religion and Canadian Politics at Trinity Western University March 13.

The problem, Father de Souza pointed out, is that Canadians are not even aware of their unique religious political history. In the Battle of Quebec at the Plains of Abraham in 1759, General James Wolfe conquered the French troops and won New France for

King George of England. "Now King George has a problem on his hands," said Father de Souza, because this new colony for England has a French Catholic population 10 to 15 times as great as the English.

Consequently, for purely pragmatic purposes, King George "grants in Quebec what isn't allowed in England," namely, the right to religion. Thus Canada gives birth to a unique political experiment, in which "an anti-Catholic state" (England) "can permit Catholic rights" (in Canada, which was formally ceded by France to the British in 1763).

Although these facts of Canadian history "are not very well known," said Father de Souza, they demonstrate how the practical arrangements in Canada permitted a "robust religious freedom."

He remarked that these arrangements caused Quebecers then to consider the American Revolution (1775-1783), fairly or not, to

be "anti-Catholic." The American revolutionaries, on the other hand, considered King George disgustingly corrupt because he permitted Catholicism in New France, but not in his own land, England.

The significance of this, said Father de Souza, is that we must realize "in Canada we don't have a political culture founded on the separation of church and state." Only very recently in Canadian history, he pointed out, has a "secular fundamentalism" asserted itself, trying to rule any religious contribution to public life "out of bounds."

Father de Souza blamed Pierre Trudeau for bringing "American constitutional thinking" to Canada, but even "in the age of the Charter" Canadians still have

religious liberty (freedom of conscience) listed first in the Charter. This is quite right, argued Father de Souza, since in fact religious freedom is "always the first freedom," because it recognizes the "anti-totalitarian point" that has been the greatest Christian influence on political thought.

In his wide-ranging lecture he paraphrased Aristotle's definition of politics: "the process by which a people together deliberate how they ought to order their common life" and gave credit to Quebec's Duplessis era for "massive investment" in universities and hospitals.

Father de Souza argued that Christian political thought is characterized by "an anti-totalitarian insistence," because it will only

"render unto Caesar" limited power for the state. For example, today the Holy See is engaged in delicate negotiations with the Chinese government because the Pope, as always in history, refuses to be subject to any state.

"The most important and enduring contribution to politics" of Christianity, concluded Father de Souza, is this "anti-totalitarian insistence," placing limits on the claims of politics, insisting its deliberations should be both rational and limited in their aspirations to legislating good order.

"It is nonsensical to separate morality and politics," he said, because, as Aristotle observed, politics by its very nature is deliberation "about how we should behave." □



## Let Us Act!

### Engaging the Culture is aim of pro-life conference

With the theme Engaging the Culture: setting the course for a brighter tomorrow, Pro Life B.C. and Comox Valley Pro Life Society will co-sponsor a provincial conference from April 24-26 at the Best Western Hotel in Courtenay, on Vancouver Island.

Bishop Richard Gagnon of Victoria is among the speakers who will look at ways to advocate life issues in the future.

Joining him will be Father Thomas J. Euteneuer, President of Human Life International, the world's largest pro-life organization, which oversees activities in 80 countries around the world, and Stephen Mosher, President of the Population Research Institute and an expert on population control measures.

Mosher will draw from his ex-

perience of living in rural China and witnessing population-control horrors.

Father Tadeusz Pacholczyk, the U.S. National Catholic Bioethics Centre's Director of Education, will update conference participants on the impact of stem-cell research and cloning for society. A well-known media figure, he has appeared on CNN International, ABC World News Tonight, and National Public Radio in the U.S.

Other speakers include Yvonne Douma, the Executive Director of Pro Life B.C.; Terry O'Neill, an award-winning journalist and commentator; and Natalie Hudson, Director of Education for Pro Life BC.

There will be a wine and cheese reception, a gourmet lunch, and a banquet dinner. A youth confer-

ence will take place on Friday evening from 6 to 10 p.m.

Registration is through [www.prolifebc.ca](http://www.prolifebc.ca). More information is available from Robin Fitzgerald, [rfitzgerald@live.ca](mailto:rfitzgerald@live.ca).

### Debates on money issues

Douglas Welbanks, a former Director of Debtor Assistance and Debt Collection in B.C., will host public debates on money issues and families and how the U.S. credit crunch may affect Canadian families at the following parishes. All are 10 a.m. to noon, and reservations are recommended:

- St. Joseph the Worker, Richmond, April 12, 604-277-8353.
- St. Monica's, Richmond, April 19, 604-278-0844.
- St. Mary's, Vancouver, April 26, 604-435-9611. □



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# Affirm the faith 'even to Muslims'

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thousands of converts who live their faith in secret for fear they will not be protected," Allam said.

"I publicly converted to say to these people: 'Come out of the catacombs, live your faith openly. Do not be afraid.'"

In a March 23 article in *Corriere della Sera*, the newspaper for which he writes, Allam said, "His Holiness has launched an explicit and revolutionary message to a Church that, up to now, has been too prudent in converting Muslims."

He said Catholics were "abstaining from proselytism in countries with a Muslim majority and being silent about the reality of converts in Christian countries out of fear, the fear of not being able to protect the converts in the face of their condemnations to death for apostasy and for fear of reprisals against Christians living in Islamic countries."

"Well, with his witness today, Benedict XVI tells us we need to conquer our fear and not be afraid to affirm the truth of Jesus even to Muslims," Allam wrote in *Cor-*

riere.

Allam told *Il Giornale* that although his mother was a devout Muslim she sent him to Catholic preschool, elementary, and high schools, but later regretted sending him to Catholic schools "because I never shared a certain zeal in practising Islam; I always had a lot of autonomy, and so I became aware that Catholicism corresponded perfectly to the values

that I held."

Allam also said his Easter baptism marked a total and definitive turning from "a past in which I imagined that there could be a moderate Islam."

He said Islamic "extremism feeds on a substantial ambiguity found in the Quran and in the concrete actions of Mohammed."

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council

for Interreligious Dialogue, told the Italian news agency ApCom March 23 that he did not know how Allam came to be among the people baptized by the Pope at the Easter Vigil "or who promoted it."

However, he said, freedom of conscience is a basic right and "to whomever knocks the door of the Church is always open." □



Dario Pignatelli / Reuters / CNS

Pope Benedict XVI baptizes Magdi Allam as he celebrates the Easter Vigil in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican March 22. Allam, 55, a Muslim-born convert and an Italian journalist, was among the five women and two men baptized by Pope Benedict during the Mass.

# Gospel takes reason to new heights

Continued from Page 4

Pope Benedict in his Regensburg lecture, is emphatically "no."

At Regensburg, Pope Benedict simply posed the same question to Islam, said Father de Souza, but he did not answer it on Islam's behalf. Islam must now answer it, either implicitly or explicitly, because "how it answers will shape the outcome of history," he noted.

Reading from a Haida myth as he sat next to the fireplace in the ACTS Seminaries Graduate Student Collegium, Father de Souza used the Bill Reid story, *The Raven Steals the Light*, to illustrate that "the world of faith can be an arbitrary and tyrannical world." In contrast, Pope Benedict has spent "the whole of his intellectual and theo-

logical career" showing how Christianity liberated the world from the tyranny of ancient religion and its many irrational fictions.

*"The university was born from the heart of the Church."*

"Man's natural religious imagination," said Father de Souza wryly about the Haida myth, "does not produce the Sermon on the Mount."

The Gospel thus helps human reason to new heights, and "the university was born from the heart of the Church," he said.

Reason purifies faith "of things that are contrary to reality," he said, and faith, in turn, "takes us

where reason cannot go." Hence metaphysics and theology are, correlatively, the crowning pursuits of the university.

Father de Souza asked if metaphysics was taught anywhere on the campus, and someone from the crowd with a Redeemer Pacific College sweat-jacket said, "Redeemer Pacific College!"

Giving Notre Dame University as an example, Father de Souza noted that the most interesting work on campus is often not being done in theology departments, but instead in philosophy departments. "Reason can't purify faith if universities aren't interested in studying the faith," he tartly observed of the proliferation of religious studies departments in universities and their condescending approach to Christianity.

*C.S. Morrissey is an assistant professor of Medieval Latin Philosophy at Redeemer Pacific College.* □



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