

April 2004

McGill Chaplaincy

Radix



Religion and Scholarship

Editor's Message

This is the final Radix issue for the 2003-2004 academic year (and the first issue of 2004-2005 if some straggling issues remain on the stands throughout the summer). That means some students reading this issue will be leaving their academic careers forever, and others will just be beginning. For that reason, we thought it fitting to devote this issue to the theme of "faith and academics."

It's a surprisingly hot topic. To take an example from within religious studies and archaeology, let's look at the famous "Dead Sea Scrolls" documents, written and collected by a pious sect of separatist Jews (about whom we know precious little), and accidentally found preserved in caves. Immediately, questions about religion and scholarship arose. Who would be selected to translate the documents? Ancient and fragmentary languages, in some cases without vowels or even spaces between the words, do not present an easy day's work for a translator and leave many possibilities open. The same fragment might be translated very differently depending on whether the scholar were Christian or Jewish. Then, future scholars and students using the biased translation would unwittingly produce even more bias. Every effort was made to divide the work among scholars of varying backgrounds and of the highest quality.

Interestingly, high quality in scholarship is often thought to imply the ability to extricate one's academic work from one's faith. However, I must say I find this misleading, even dangerous! Pretending to be valueless and objective has been shown by postmodern theorists to be nigh on impossible. It is easy to pinpoint bias if the person is visibly religious and interprets, say, an archaeological datum as "proof" for the historicity of the Bible when the datum really can't support such a finding. But what about hidden biases that do not come from organized religion, and yet still place an interpretive lens over our academic work? In a biology lab, the bias "there is no God" is as strong an interpretive stance as is the bias that God exists. Consistently honest scholarship would recognize the existence of *all* biases, and allow for *all* possibilities (including spiritual and metaphysical explanations.) It has been easy, since the Enlightenment, for reason and scientific observation to stand as the automatically accepted *status quo* in our schools. We often forget that those enlightenment scholars we quote to pooh-pooh this or that religious tenet were usually deeply religious themselves, and those things we hold up as modern and antithetical to faith actually have their origins in pious religious adherents. Take the university. Now seen as the bastion of rational thought and scientific inquiry (even in its humanities departments), we forget that we would be hard pressed to find a university in North America or Europe not begun by some church or another, from whom many still receive funding. Religious institutions have also been the patron (and religious convictions the inspiration) behind many artistic and philosophical masterpieces in both East and West.

It's interesting: Jesus is recorded as having quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 (considered to be one of the most important verses in Jewish scriptures). What Deuteronomy says is, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." What Jesus quoted, however, was "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your might" (Mark 12:30). If you didn't catch that, Jesus seems to have *added* "mind." Since it's highly unlikely that Jesus just sort of forgot the verse (since it's one that was already considered extremely important and was being worn by Jews on the arm and forehead in phylacteries at least as early as the post-exilic period), we can only assume the addition was quite deliberate.


I would like to challenge those religious adherents who mistrust academia as an implement of the devil (or at least of secularism), and prefer "heart knowledge" to "head knowledge" (a dichotomy I often heard in my youth) to take note of the fact that Jesus slipped "mind" into the mix as a way to love God. The pursuit of truth and intellectual excellence (not just of data that will reinforce existing dogma) is an act of worship. Conversely, I would like to challenge those secularists who believe themselves "above" religious belief to re-evaluate their interpretive lenses to see where "fact" can be replaced with "assumption" in their scholarship.

I would also like to wish everyone good luck on final exams. While the faithful may believe that miracles still happen, I've found that studying is the only sure way to get good marks! All the best,

~ Sara Parks Ricker, editor

Editorial Board 2003-2004: Sara Parks Ricker ~ editor and layout & Esha Bhandari ~ Hindu rep & Loren Carle ~ Protestant rep & Rachel Charlop-Powers ~ Jewish and Religious Studies rep & Laura Gallo ~ agnostic rep & Nina Kim ~ Catholic rep & Bruno Mastronardi ~ Pagan rep & Indi Samarajiva ~ cover design and Buddhist rep & Rabia Tahir ~ Muslim rep & YOU if you don't see your faith perspective represented!!!

About the cover: The most visually striking Dead Sea Scrolls fragments are Hebrew... but since many Orthodox Jews believe one shouldn't throw away anything with Torah written on it (and some naughty people throw away the Radix), I've removed the text of Genesis that used to be on our cover fragment. Instead, I wrote over the scroll with Aramaic. I think the word for that is a *palimpsest*. "From the Greek *palimpsestos* ("scraped again"), a palimpsest is reused writing support material from which the underlying text has been erased (by washing, in the case of papyrus, and by using scraping devices, in the case of parchment)." Or Photoshop. So, the scroll is from around 200 BCE, and the script is from around C itself. The hands of Adam and God are from the Sistine Chapel, which Michelangelo painted in 1475. The idea is that scholarship is how God speaks to us. The People of the Book had Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, and Mel Gibson to reveal the Word of God ...but somebody had to write it down. Even in Buddhism and Hinduism we make a big deal about the Tripitaka and the Vedas. Apparently, God can speak, but when it comes to writing, he's largely illiterate. It takes scholars to write down and remember.

~ Indi Samarajiva 

The acquisitive instinct, the possessive pursuit of the more, comes into being for various reasons: because it gives you pleasure, prestige, knowledge, you become an authority, and all the rest of

Religion and Scholarships

"You'll never get a scholarship over there, and if you do get admitted, you should consider yourself darn lucky!" - A passing comment from an aunt while I was busy applying to universities around the world, especially to the US, as she went through my application papers.

I was astounded, and a bit enraged. Was she telling me I wasn't good enough? I asked her why she had said that.


"Well, look at the form. It asks you what religion you follow. I'm sure they will use that as a category to give you admission and scholarships." Well, to cut a long story short, I am not in any university in the US but at McGill, almost at the end of a fruitful first year. While I am glad in more ways than one that I did not go the States to study, the fact that I (or, for that matter, any person) should be judged based on religion is infuriating. I mean, think about it: how do a person's religion and beliefs ever tell anyone what qualities and vices that person might possess?

We will all agree on the fact that there are many religions to follow in this world. While there are different holy books and praying methods, in one way every religion tells us the same thing - that there is the One who looks after us, who controls the world, and to Whom we must pray. Our religions do not make us the individuals that we are. Moreover, they do not dictate our innate talents and qualities. If a person is a gifted artist or sportsperson, what does faith have to do with any of it?

For institutions, especially educational ones, to use religion as a basis for admission and financial aid is, in my opinion, clearly unethical. If one religion is given preference over another when it comes to vying for a certain scholarship, it would be a great loss to society if the more gifted person loses out on the monetary grant only because he/she practices a religion that certain authorities do not prefer. To put it simply, to judge anyone - let alone his or her talents - on the basis of religion, is wrong.

While most institutions around the world have given up on this practice, there are still some who use religion as a category when admitting students and giving them monetary help. Other factors such as talent, good grades, achievement, school recommendations, and dissertations should play a much more crucial role.

Religion and scholarships just do not go hand in hand. And why should they? To make a decision that in so many ways shapes a person's future, based on religion, is plainly the most wrong-headed way to go about it.

~ Armeen Khan 

*Armeen is an Economics major in UI,
and comes to us from Bangladesh*

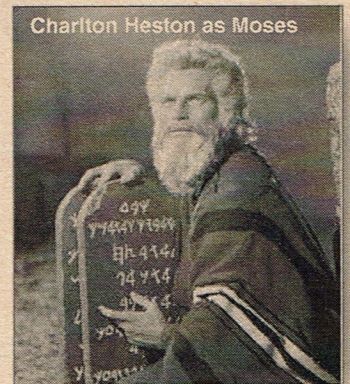
Religion and Scholarship

It is interesting how religion has contributed to scholarship. On one hand, religious authorities have burned books and destroyed scientists and philosophers who didn't conform to a certain doctrine; on the other, religious restrictions and conventions provoked great thinkers to overcome them. (After all, we tend to like all that is forbidden.) Scholars and religious authorities practice this love-hate relationship that allows both to be creative and revolutionary in their own special (sometimes very special) ways. Human curiosity has brought us to the scientific and philosophical discoveries (sometimes beneficial, sometimes destructive) that have shaped our society. Religion has always been a controlling tool, bringing censorship for those whose curiosity takes them too far.

But what about now? Religion is no longer an obstacle that progressive thinkers have to overcome in order to be heard. You can publish almost anything as long as it doesn't offend any influential groups. Religion went from being on the top of the pyramid of knowledge to being just another brick in it. We now have a subject, "Religious Studies," that is participated in by scholars and religious figures alike. We can scrutinize and question every little word, every little ritual. We can argue against and for religion as we argue for physics and anthropology. Religion became an integrated part of scholarship. It doesn't influence other subjects anymore; it is a subject in itself.

Religion as a form of organized censorship is long dead. We now have to face the new *entity* of religion. It is now part of all other social sciences like history and sociology; it is no longer the central element of reference, but it is an element of study.

~ Natalya Demberg 



The Sikh Faith and Academic Life

At many universities, the wave to achieve academic merit can often sweep students away. In many instances, advancement in today's modern world becomes a domineering focus in many aspects of life. Religion and faith seem to have little place in the academic struggle, as religious principles may seemingly hinder the attainment of one's goals. However, the creation of a medium between faith and academic pursuits may be more fulfilling in the long run.

Born and raised as a Sikh, my views on life have always been unique. Sikhism emerged out of the Bhakti movement in the fifteenth century by the first of the Sikh Gurus, Guru Nanak. In an Indian subcontinent with established religions such as Hinduism and Islam, Sikhism gained a unique practical view towards life. Sikhism wanted to distinguish itself from the other ritualistic religions of Guru Nanak's time. The Sikh religion advocates the oneness of God and God-realization in a householder's life. With constant remembrance of the Creator, one should live a life of humility, contentment, service and right conduct. The ultimate goal of Sikhism consists of overcoming a self-reliant, worldly approach, which results in an attachment to temporal values. (Additional information about Sikhism may be found on the following website: <http://www.allaboutsikhs.com>.)

Many of the principles of Sikhism are difficult to uphold in today's world, as my own striving to uphold the Sikh values has frustrated me many a time. With



the pursuit of academic goals, we often forget the tenets of our respective religions. However, religious faith can serve as an aid to achieve satisfying interactions in society. Sikhism believes in truthful living as one of the highest virtues. Truthfulness and kindness are two qualities that can greatly be applied in an academic environment. A more comprehensive approach to learning can help one perform better academically and at the same time, leave them more satisfied with the results of their academic endeavours.

One's outlook towards academics often spills into other spheres of life. To face the daily academic hurdles, reflecting on one's religious faith may be a comforting tool. For instance, many Sikhs find relaxation with the repetition of the phrase "Wahiguru Satnam," Wonderful Truth. The nature of God is identified with the Ultimate Reality. As well, visiting the simplistic Sikh Gurdwara, the House of Worship, can help a Sikh refocus on the purpose of his existence. The Sikh Gurdwaras are primarily congregational worship institutions where the Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh Scripture) is of primal importance. The Granth was given eternal Guruship by the 10th Sikh Guru and it is acknowledged as the source of spirituality for the Sikhs. In every religion, reflection on faith can be used to help achieve a better outlook towards academics, and ultimately, life.

~ Gurinder Samrai

U3 Science



For more information about Sikhism at McGill, contact Manjit Singh, our Sikh Chaplain, by email at lo.man@sympatico.ca or by phone at 697-3527.

Submission Guidelines:

We welcome student articles, art, literary or scholarly reviews, responses, photos, comics, and poetry. (Artwork must be accessible in black-and-white or grayscale.) Article length is usually about **500 words**. Submissions may be edited for length and style. Contributors retain copyright, but *Radix* retains the right to reprint submissions in our online archives. Email **radix@yours.com**

The *Radix* works out of McGill's chaplaincy, but is produced by and for students. If you would like to represent your faith perspective on our **editorial board for the 2004-2005 academic year**, please contact radix@yours.com.

We produce 5 issues per year, for which you would be responsible for soliciting submissions and distributing some copies of the newsletter around campus. Consider volunteering and gaining some great publication experience while interacting with students of various faiths! Not sure we'd want you because you don't represent a valid "faith perspective" *per se*? Try us. Even agnosticism takes faith!

We're proud to be printing on **recycled paper**.

Unless you have a *Radix* collection (which would be kind of neat), please double the recycling by handing this newsletter on to a friend.

The views expressed in the *Radix* are those of individual students, and are not (necessarily) shared by McGill Chaplaincy Services or its chaplains. **Do not panic.**

This is called "interfaith dialogue."

Graduating and still interested in receiving the *Radix*? Email us, and we may be able to work a deal!

In town over the summer? Like to make a positive difference in the McGill community? If you have an idea for a project that could be carried out over the summer, you may wish to apply for a chaplaincy internship. Open to both undergrads and graduate students. Maximum 75 - 100 hours. Ability to work independently and assemble/motivate volunteers a must. Call 398-4104 for details.

Twelve Princes

AND there at the edge of the clearing on the top of the hill I saw one stately figure, standing so still I could not tell whether or not he was really there. When I walked towards him, he turned and ran. Instantly I felt the irrepressible urge to catch up with him. As I climbed up, the horizon widened and I found myself facing a dark azure backdrop mottled with thick grey clouds. There I saw ten more princes, each in their noblest apparel, black against the murky expanses of the sky. How many of them were crowned, I cannot remember, but still the sight of them moved me almost to tears.

Yet the noblest of the court I did not see; I only heard him walk in the undergrowth, branches cracking under his cloven feet. Though the other eleven did run away from me, I doubt that this twelfth one was afraid. Indeed, should anyone ask, I would say that the one walking unseen was the chief of them all, and none other than Cernunos. Though at first I thought it was I who chased the deer, clearly it was them who had me circled – the mystery of it all was at the same time terrifying and exhilarating.

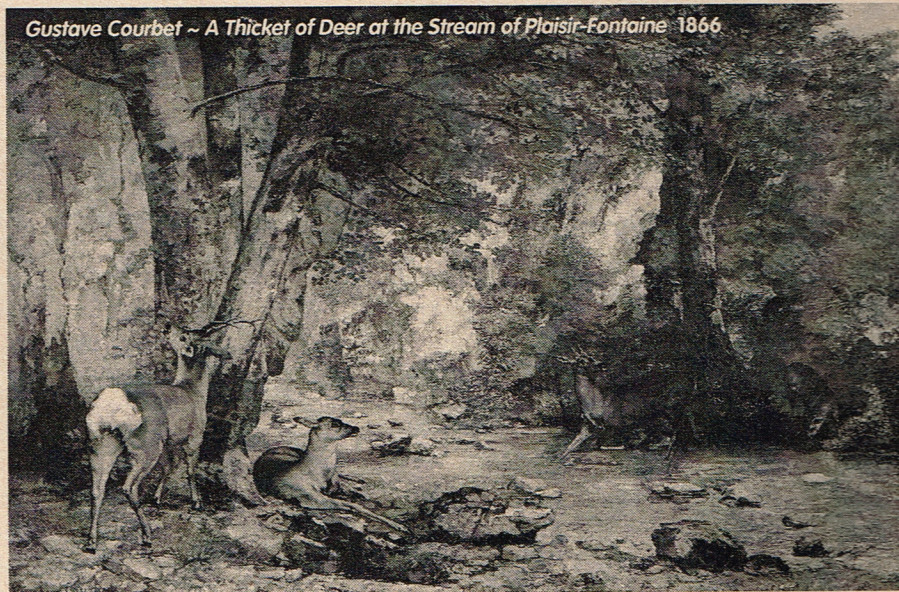
So swiftly did they flee, and so dim was the light, that I could not tell where they ran to. And now as I look around I still expect the shade of something great to step out of the darkness and see deep into me more than any mortal eyes could.

(At these times you feel the full weight of the sky press on you and thus you are made utterly and essentially insignificant; there is no greater comfort. Returning to the world appears like the most despicable and absurd of all possibilities. As the space of bliss slips away you feel the profound change, the fundamental peace within take hold of your spirit but still you yearn to remain in the Dreamtime. The craving for godliness is never satiated.)

~ "Ex Nihilo"



Gustave Courbet ~ A Thicket of Deer at the Stream of Plaisir-Fontaine 1866



ed's note: At first, this short work of fiction from our anonymous pagan student may seem like a non-answer to our question about the relationship between religion and academia. However, if we look closely, it is, in its way, a fairly straightforward and profound response.

Bahai Book Review

"The Secret of Divine Civilization"

My submission for this issue will focus on the glorious outcome of harmoniously combining SCHOLARSHIP and SPIRITUALITY, that is, the advancement of a true/enlightened civilization.

Abbas Effendi, better known to the world as Abdul Baha ("Servant of Glory"), is, in my humble opinion, the most important human who walked the planet in the 20th century. For support of this opinion, one is free to investigate His life. My submission to you in this article is a brief review of one of His contributions to scholarship and spirituality, His book The Secret of Divine Civilization.

Each of the previous Divine Authors of world religions (such as Krishna, Buddha, Moses, Christ, Muhammad and Baha'u'llah) have, in their own way, rolled up the old civilization into which they entered and raised up a new one in its place. The appearance of these Divine people has endowed creation with both a fresh capacity to *understand* knowledge and to *generate* knowledge. This is evident in that the rise of each new world religion meant a reordering of the most fundamental aspects of society, and the emergence of a new way of life based on a *new* set of assumptions and relationships, founded on new organizing principles. In fact, one way to organize the study of history is to examine the decline and rise of civilizations and/or world religions.

Even from a very cursory review of the processes of history, a distinctive pattern of human progress is discernible, and this is the pattern related to the generation of knowledge and the dissemination of it through the process of education and scholarship. Thus, learning has been the foundation of every civilization. This is a major theme of Abdul Baha in His treatise on civilization, The Secret of Divine Civilization.

In this work, Abdul Baha extols the potentialities of the human intellect and its many perfections. He attributes the progress of a particular civilization to its capacity to harness the powers of its intellect. And of course He rightly points out that the converse is true.

Further, Abdul Baha delineates various principles compulsory for *true* learning, where *true* learning is the foundation of a spiritual civilization. Here is a small sample, in point form:

A commitment to search for knowledge from whatever source it emanates – an invitation to relinquish prejudice in regards to the *source* of knowledge and to judge it based on its *effects*. This has profound implications for advancing civilization, not only in terms of allowing unfettered cross-cultural/religious influences but also cross-disciplinary collaboration as in the harmony of science and religion. (What a concept!)

The existence of certain fundamental traits of "the learned", that is to say, *all* of us, anyone who is involved in the learning process. Specifically, the learned should:

Be able to guard her/himself by acquiring spiritual and material perfection

By cultivating the mind

By being just and impartial

By rising with sincerity and purity to educate the masses

By fearing God

By loving God

Be able to defend her/his Faith, by raising the Word of God

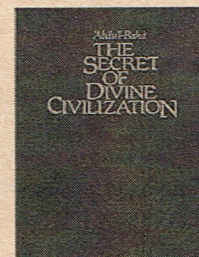
By being free of zealotry and fanaticism

Be able to oppose her/his passions (self-centered orientation)

Abdul Baha says: *"How wonderful are the implications of this deceptively easy, all inclusive phrase (to oppose one's passions)"*

Be obedient to the commandments of God

Abdul Baha states that the innermost meaning of civilization is summed up in the exhortations of religion to the soul, to the individual, and the call to rise up above one's baser instincts and to rise to one's noble capacities and possibilities.



And we read on...

~ Ali Farahani
World Citizen
Baha'i Rep



Abdul Baha: *The Secret of Divine Civilization*. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990, p.59

*** This article was inspired in large part by a talk given by Shahriar Razavi, entitled: *"Learning as the Foundation of Spiritual Civilization."*

Reader Response

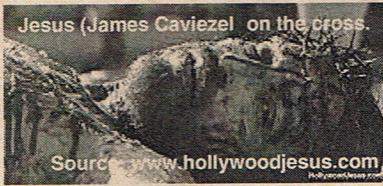
The author of the film review for "The Passion of the Christ" goes a little too far in implying that her opinion about the film is true for everyone.*

The author states that "in my opinion," the gore and blood "take away from the true meaning of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection: love and forgiveness." However, in the next sentence, she goes beyond stating her opinion: "Instead, this film leaves the audience disgusted at the physical abuse..."

Question: did the author interview each and every person in the "audience" to know this? How does the author know what each person's experience of the movie was?

Though I recognize that the author is expressing a dominant view of the film, I think such an overgeneralization of audience experience is in danger of marginalizing those who do not share this view, especially if such a statement is made by someone in an authoritative position (a knowledge-maker).

For my part, I deeply identified with the brutal suffering of a "good" person - as I have seen this in the pain and destructiveness of my dear troubled friends and family. I thought of my brothers and friends, one of whom killed himself - crucified HIMSELF - because of extreme mental and spiritual brutality he suffered (not even having the benefit of knowing he was God's true son.) The tears flowed down onto my shirt as I saw my "brother" there, the blood and gore symbolic of the brutality I could not see.




~ Bryan L. Parachoniak
MA student - Faculty of Education

*ed's note: see our March 2004 issue for two student film reviews of Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ." We always welcome student responses. Thanks, Bryan.

Extracurricular (Spiritual) Activities

The Art of Living Club has been established in order to enhance the quality of student life. Through the Art of Living Club, students learn practical and easy techniques that relieve stress and enable them to develop their full potential. Our activities include free weekly meetings with guided meditation, wisdom, and discussion. In addition, we also invite guest speakers and have yoga sessions. Such activities enable students to come together in a friendly and joyful environment where they may inspire one another with energy, enthusiasm, and creativity, thus bringing awareness and depth into their lives as students. At the same time, it motivates students to participate in, develop, and implement community-based service projects. We also have events together with the clubs at Concordia University and Ecole Polytechnique, such as film nights or "Sacred Jams" - evenings of music, dancing and fun. Email below for details on how to incorporate the "Art of Living" into your academic life at McGill.

~ Art of Living Club
aolmcgill@yahoo.com 

*"Of making
many books
there is no end, and
much study
is a
weariness of the
flesh."*

~ Ecclesiastes 12:13b



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and Chaplaincy Service
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students who are parents:
informal childcare, babysitting, tutoring
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Also monthly support group meetings
with activities for kids & social events.
Interested families please contact:
Phone: 514-398-4104
Email: simonetca@yahoo.com



Sikh Chaplaincy Open Meeting

Social get-togethers for Sikh students
Newman Centre, 3484 Peel



Contact Manjit Singh, Sikh Chaplain
at lo.man@sympatico.ca
697-3527

"Lunch and Learn"

Free bagels and discussion!

Monday 12:30: controversial issues with Rabbi Jackman
Thursday 1:30: weekly Torah Portion with Rabbi Plaskow



3460 Stanley Street (Hillel library)
Contact Rabbi Jackman for chat, questions,
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845-9171
email rabbi@hillel.ca

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hours per month! Great opportu-
nity to contribute to community
spirit ...

If you would like to become a Yellow
Door volunteer, call (514) 398-6243
or email:

elderlyproject@hotmail.com

The Muslim Students' Association offers:

- weekly study circles
- free Islamic educational materials
- services during Ramadan
- lectures/conferences
- prayer facilities (3460 McTavish, in the basement of Peterson Hall)
- library (Shatner building, room 430)



website: <http://ssmu.mcgill.ca/msa>

email: msamcgill@montrealmuslims.ca

phone: 398-3001 (ext.09849)

McGill Ecumenical Chaplaincy's

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3484 Peel St, 398-4106,

newmancentre@mcgill.ca

www.newmancentre.org

Roman Catholic Mass:

- Tuesday through Friday 4pm
- Saturday 5pm
- Sunday 11am
- (Saturday mass is followed by a commu-
nity supper: suggested donation \$3)

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WELCOME AT

MONTHLY STUDENT NIGHTS

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL
HELMUT AT MCGILL CHAPLAINCY:
398-4104

OR

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH:
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HELMUT.SAABAS@SYMPATICO.CA

YOUR AD HERE!

On behalf of Radix and McGill Chaplaincy services, we invite you
to submit your information and we will create a free advertise-
ment for you ... provided your event relates to campus spiritual-
ity, social justice, or another good cause.

McGILL PAGAN ASSOCIATION



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