

Director's Letter

A Valediction Forbidding Mourning*

Donald Grayston

If this, as we hope, is an annual bulletin, and if I survive any vicissitudes which may come to me between now and the solemn date (September 1, 2004) on which my retirement is already inscribed in the Great Book of Pensions, this will be the first of three general reflections through which I will be reaching out to you, our friends and associates at the University, in the city and beyond.

In so doing, the first thing I want to do is to salute Professor Jerry Zaslove, founding director of the Institute. I gave this reflection the title I did (from the poem by John Donne, which is about Donne and his wife—no connection to Jerry, but a great title!)—because this newsletter, although in some sense a valediction, a saying of farewell, does indeed forbid mourning and invites celebration because Jerry has left us so much to celebrate.

He has laboured for 18 years to build an Institute on what he has called a public-sphere and public-service critical model; and this model is the gift he now hands on to me and to all of us. Those of you—faculty, steering committee members, associates, event participants—who took part in such searching enterprises as the Legacy Project, The Spectacular State or the Joanne Brown Symposium on Violence and its Alternatives, to name only three, will recognize in these titles the vision which has consistently animated Jerry and his colleagues over these past years. Jerry, thank you, and all good things to you in—retirement? The language will need a new word!

I fully support this model for the work of the Institute, and I invite you as readers of this bulletin to get in touch with me if you have ideas of how it may be developed. In acting on this

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vision and model, we will continue to explore the demanding issue/complex of issues which we have been calling Violence and its Alternatives. The phrase suggests, first, that violence will be with us for the foreseeable future (earlier we used the phrase “Alternatives to Violence,” but dropped it because it suggested a too-immediate transcending of violence; this is a long haul we are all in for). Second, it suggests that there are alternatives available to us for the resolution of the disputes and struggles which keep so many people in our society from fullness of life. Of the other projects of the Institute already under way or envisaged you will read elsewhere in this bulletin.

It needs to be said, however, that the importance of this human vision is not acknowledged by all, notably at the governmental level. In an op ed piece in *The Globe and Mail* (August 30, 2001, A11), Thomas Axworthy delineates the shape of the federal government’s view of higher education as exemplified in the recent commitment of funding to 2000 new research chairs. These are being allocated according to how well universities have done in attracting federal research council grants, an approach which favours large universities with medical and engineering schools. One-third of these new chairs will go to the University of Toronto, UBC, and McGill; the next third to the seven schools next-ranked as recipients of research grants; and the last third to the remaining schools. The government’s formula also dictates that the natural sciences will receive 45% of the chairs, the health sciences 35%, and the social sciences and humanities only 20%. If, however, the chairs were to be allocated on the basis of existing full-time faculty in these three divisions, the percentage of chairs given to the social sciences and humanities would, according to Axworthy, more than double. This is unlikely to happen; but Axworthy’s bringing of the situation to our attention reminds us that we cannot take for granted understanding of and adequate support for the humanities in Canadian higher education; and our awareness of this reality will also colour how we see the work of the Institute as an organization concerned not only for its own projects,

but for the whole human enterprise in our University and our society.

To conclude, a word of personal introduction. I have been teaching Religious Studies at SFU since 1989, fulltime since 1993. The topics of my course offerings convey to a large extent my intellectual and research interests: world religions, Gandhi, the Holocaust, Thomas Merton. A new venture in 2002 will also be offered in the Graduate Liberal Studies program as well as the Humanities Department, a course on pilgrimage and anti-pilgrimage (by this latter term I mean our observed desire to visit such places as Hiroshima and Auschwitz, both of which I visited during my study leave which concluded at the end of August).

As an Anglican priest, I am a kind of throwback to an earlier time in England and elsewhere in which scholar-clerics comprised the largest proportion, in some cases the entirety, of the professoriate. That time is past; but in experiencing the generous acceptance of my two-hatted vocation by my colleagues, I am encouraged to believe that space exists in humanist discourse in both the university context and that of the wider society for engagement with perspectives from Religious Studies as such, as also from the living communities of religious faith and practice which in our multicultural and multifaith society are struggling to take part in discussions of public-sphere and public-service concern—the very focus of the Institute.

Vale then, to Jerry; *ave* to you our readers and supporters. I look forward to working with many of you in the ongoing work of an Institute with a distinguished past and a future both engaging and engaged.