

HAPPY HOLIDAY

Montrealers have much to be thankful about

Gratitude is not the most common of human emotions. We'd rather not speculate on which one is most common, but gratitude is fairly far down the list.

And when it comes to gratitude toward the Almighty, we suspect that for many Canadians in this secular age, "thank God" is more a trite phrase than an earnest prayer. Pollsters say a majority of Canadians do still believe in God, but this is by no means the Christian country it was in 1872, when Thanksgiving was first declared an official holiday. Today Canadians offer their thanks to many different understandings of God.

The Thanksgiving holiday comes earlier in the autumn here than in the United States because our harvest finishes earlier, and because this holiday has its roots in the soil, in the gathering in of crops before winter.

But in our era of plums from Chile and rice from Thailand, the emotional significance of the harvest is greatly reduced – and given the impact of global warming, our growing season is getting longer anyway.

So is Thanksgiving an anachronism? It should not be. Whatever your beliefs, and even if you haven't canned a single carrot, today you can nonetheless enjoy a legal holiday, a day off work and school for most of us, the last long weekend until Christmas, a coda to the symphony of summer holidays, a farewell to nice weather, a day of rest, a day of feasting. What's not to like?

Every day brings news of troubles far worse

than ours, which should make us feel lucky – and also makes some of us feel a little guilty – to live in a fine, rich, comfortable country.

Montreal in particular has had two shocking events in September, one at Dawson College and one in Laval, which remind us that human society will never be perfect and that human life is always fragile. But by the standards that apply around the globe, and that have applied through history, Montrealers and all Canadians are today self-evidently among the luckiest of human beings.

It doesn't always feel that way. We're always wanting something, and maybe after we get it we'll feel content and thus grateful, except that there's one more thing ...

It's not such a bad idea, then, to take a break from the getting and spending to spend one day counting your blessings, whether you believe they came from benign Providence, from your own hard work, or from sheer dumb luck. There are good things in your life, and they have come to you somehow. Indisputably we all owe a debt to those who came before us; our artifacts, our knowledge, our culture, we have inherited them all from generations now buried, whose industry and prudence and judgment and wisdom created what we call our birthright. We should be grateful to them.

We can be grateful, also, for our loved ones. For the people who are at work today, police and firefighters and hospital staff, not to mention waitresses and store clerks. We can be grateful for October weather. It's a long list when you start to think about it.

Enjoy your holiday. Count your blessings.

Good news from PQ isn't all bad

For federalists, the good news was also the bad news this week as Parti Québécois leader André Boisclair offered his latest pronouncement on Quebec's future. Invoking unspecified "political realities," the rookie leader backed away from the narrow road to sovereignty set out in the party program adopted last year.

The program lays out a precise and detailed march from an election victory to the glorious day of independence, by way of a string of measures: a draft transition document for Quebec, efforts toward a constitution, and publication of a financial framework for Year One, all leading to a referendum "as soon as possible."

Boisclair uttered no word of dissent to any of this during his march to the PQ leadership, nor since – until now. But this week he seemed to waver off all those interim steps. He promised, in fact, that he would not be "distracted by an exact and pointed interpretation" of the platform. What's really important are the par-

"The farther Boisclair moves from the hard-line program, the better his chances of winning the election."

ty's goals, and "I am the trustee, as head of the party, of these goals."

From the federalist perspective, Boisclair's not-so-subtle nuancing is both good news and bad. It's good because in our current political system, with the PQ as one of two main parties, it will inevitably come to power at least sometimes. The 2005 platform, if adhered to carefully, would mean that the next PQ administration would single-mindedly deploy the power and money of government to drag Quebecers like lemmings over a cliff into a constitutional and legal black hole. Anything that moves the PQ away from that plan is truly welcome.

The bad news is that many Quebecers think the same way. The farther Boisclair moves from the hard-line program, the better his chances of winning the election. When Quebecers

focus on sovereignty, they avoid it. But when they focus on the Liberal government's woes, they see the PQ as an alternative provincial government.

But once the PQ got elected, who can tell what would happen? The hard-liners, experienced hard-eyed true believers, would be well-placed to hijack the agenda from the young leader, invoking the 2005 program all the while.

Boisclair told reporters who pressed him about his independence sidestep that he was "astonished by the energy that you devote to details." Surely he has been in the game long enough to know that details matter.

Quebecers, whatever their views on it, do tend to devote a lot of attention to the sovereignty issue. Exactly how a Premier Boisclair and those around him would proceed to get Quebec out of Canada is no detail.

Cutting off money for terrorism

Terrorist groups are suspected of involvement in Canadian financial transactions totalling a staggering quarter-billion dollars last year. No wonder the federal government wants to tighten its controls.

The dollar figure comes from a little-known federal agency called the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre, or Fintrac. This six-year-old outfit presented its annual report last week, and the findings make chilling reading, even without any specifics about cases. Last year the agency told Canadian police about 33 cases of suspected terrorist money-moving totalling \$256 million. It also made 28 disclosures – involving 6,400 transactions in total – to nine foreign financial intelligence units.

The report even offers a "sanitized" sample money-laundering case, which gives a taste of the hard work required to unravel a scheme.

It's not easy. Criminals of all kinds, from plain old drug cartels right up to Al-Qa'ida, are ceaselessly inventive when it comes to finding ways to amass and move money – not to mention counterfeiting it. Governments try to keep up through the Egmont Group, a forum for co-operation among more than 100 financial-intelligence units like Fintrac.

"Better reporting can truly make Canadians safer. But the hard part is knowing where to draw the line."

The Conservative government was ready last week, following the Fintrac report, with legislation it says will fill in gaps in existing law, making it less difficult for Fintrac to do its work.

The bill will, among other measures, require banks and other financial institutions to monitor and report more transactions. It will also bring closer scrutiny to unregulated money-transfer companies, and allow Fintrac to pass more information to the police. And there's the beginning of an approach to dealing with issues of lawyer-client privilege.

That last point, if not the ones before it, should remind all Canadians that there are issues here beyond financial flows. Do we want an agency that can poke around in our financial transactions? Fintrac can use the information it collects for limited purposes only, and professes to take personal privacy very seriously. We have heard of no claims of improper use of Fintrac information. But does it make sense for the government that betrayed Maher Arar to be trusted with ever more information about Canadians' lives?

Last time Ottawa proposed to require lawyers to speak up about their clients' doings, lawyers' groups pushed back hard, and rightly so. This time we look forward to responses from them, and from financial institutions, which will find themselves, under this bill, passing more information to government about their customers.

That \$256-million figure might make some Canadians wonder if there's even any point to trying to stop such flows; more than enough money to finance sinister schemes will surely slip through the cracks no matter what we do. Are we being asked to sacrifice privacy in exchange for an illusion of security?

The answer, we think, is that better reporting can truly make Canadians safer. But the hard part is knowing where to draw the line.

Money laundering and terrorism are bad, but that does not make this bill automatically good. We look forward to full public debate on these measures before they become law.

Fintrac annual report: www.fintrac.gc.ca

FOUNDED JUNE 3, 1778 BY FLEURY MESPLET

The Gazette

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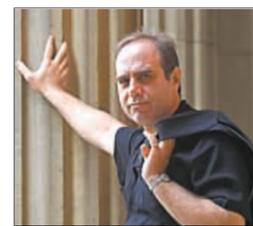
LETTERS

Ville Émard – a great place to grow up

Re: "Playwright's heart still in the 'hood'" (Gazette, Sept. 30). Amid the chaos of today it was nice to read something that brought back good memories. I'm 58 and like playwright Vittorio Rossi, I was born and raised in Ville Émard. In the 1950s and '60s it was a great neighbourhood to grow up in – French, English, black, Italian, Polish, and we all got along fine.

I've lived in Brossard for the past 29 years, but I still got to Dilallo's for the best hamburgers in town. Good luck with your play Mr. Rossi, and thanks for keeping the Ville on the map.

Raymond A. Moore
Brossard



Playwright Vittorio Rossi brings back good memories.

Religion needs protection, but ...

I encourage the federal government to present this "defence of religion act." No one should be forced to do anything he or she considers sacrilegious because they're scared they will get dragged into court for violating the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

However, I urge them to be cautious: How many times has religion been an excuse for intolerance? Jews were said to be Christ-killers, pagans were devil-worshippers and even Osama bin Laden claims religion as an excuse for his actions.

There is a thin, blurry line dividing religious beliefs and intolerance. Let us be very careful in defining it.

Jonathan Abecassis
Montreal

Where have the fathers gone?

Re: "We should heed violence warning signs" (Editorial, Sept. 20).

The Kimveer Gill tragedy reminds us that many violent offenders are young men who have been raised without a father, sometimes from birth.

A father's presence is crucial during adolescence, when boys are apt to get into trouble without the watchful eye, guidance and loving support of their fathers. Where was the senior Gill while his son was retreating into the androgynous Goth cyberculture or playing violent macho video games?

According to reports by the south Asian online station Radio Humsafar, Gurinder Gill was a professor in Toronto.

Outsiders cannot know the details of that family's emotional life, but perhaps it is not really so shocking that this Vanier College dropout unleashed his anger at an academic establishment, or that the shy boy who was too timid even to tell a girl that he liked her, appropriated the most negative masculine

symbols – i.e., guns – to prove that he was a man?

There are 50 years of social research showing that fatherless youths are more likely than others to become juvenile delinquents, commit crimes as adults, drop out of school, fail at work and in relationships, develop substance-abuse problems and eating disorders, and have unplanned pregnancies.

Recent research by such neuro-psychiatrists as Allan Schore of the University of California at Los Angeles link missing or impaired paternal-infant attachment and risk-taking behaviour in later years, especially among boys. Gangs and cults fill a void in the lives of fatherless children, giving them a false sense of belonging, power and protection.

Father absenteeism is the elephant in the living room, yet too many parents, educators, opinion-makers and leaders refuse to see it.

Deborah Rankin
LaSalle

People Olympics

Re: "Let all boys and girls strive to be the best" (Editorial, Oct. 5).

Three cheers for the ruling allowing girls to play hockey with boys. Now let's carry it to its logical conclusion: no more exclusively men's or women's Olympics – just one big happy people Olympics.

To do otherwise is to perpetuate the sexism that has run through Western society for centuries.

Richard Samuelson
Montreal

Charge for wine bottles

Far too many wine bottles and plastic mineral-water bottles needlessly end up clogging landfills in Quebec. Quebec needs to quickly follow Calgary's lead and introduce refundable deposits.

A 50- or 20-cent deposit would improve the environment consid-

erably. The convenience of retailers must not be allowed to outweigh environmental concerns. People are far more likely to recycle when there's a financial incentive to do so.

Manish Patwari
LaSalle

We must face the truth

Concerning the letters to The Gazette relating to the article on "Veterans threaten museum boycott" (Sept. 28), I am saddened that after more than 60 years people still have trouble acknowledging the suffering of all nations involved in the war.

The blanket justification of all military actions by the Allies is wrong. How can we learn from the past if we are afraid of the truth?

Stephanie Sanders
St. Lambert

Uh oh

Re: "Pope set to say no to limbo" (Gazette, Oct. 5).

Pluto is no longer a planet. Limbo is losing its status as a borderline spiritual state. Bingo is slowly dying because of anti-smoking laws. This is a sad year for words that end in "o." If you are named Margo, Ernesto or even Zorro, please be extra careful.

Ron Huza
Montreal

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