



More News



Day 2 of TMI's Conference "Democracy in Crisis" in collaboration with Concordia University

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TMI Volunteer Profile: Jim Cullen

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Appealing to Our Community for Support

Do you love TMI's approach to engaging discussion? Does being part of this community of learners add meaning to your life? Do you support TMI's special events, such as our October 2024 conference on Democracy in Crisis? Please support informed, inclusive dialogue by [donating on our website today](#). We can't do it without your support! With the postal strike, you may not receive our Annual Appeal message in a timely fashion, so we're including it here. Full message on page 2.

Celebrating Anne Fitzpatrick

At this year's Annual General Meeting, the TMI community celebrated Anne Fitzpatrick on the occasion of her retirement from the Board after 45 years of service. Full article on page 6.

The Thomas More Institute and Concordia University co-sponsor "Democracy in Crisis," a Two-Day Conference

One week before the pivotal US election, on October 29 and 30, the Thomas More Institute (TMI) and Concordia University's Department of Theological Studies held a two-day conference entitled "Democracy in Crisis." Full article on pages 7-8.

December
Edition
2024

Upcoming Events

Feast of Lights
December 6th, 2024
6:00-8:00 PM

Winter Courses Start
Week of January
13th, 2025

**TMI on the Road:
Literature Discussion
at Westmount Library**
February 6th, 2025

*...and more
to come!*

For more
details
on these events,
see p. 10

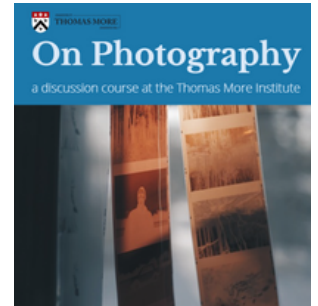
thomasmore.qc.ca
3405 Atwater Avenue
Montreal, QC H3H 1Y2
(514) 935-9585

Winter Courses

TMI's upcoming courses offer something for everyone. Here are just a few courses you may be interested in!

On Photography

In a world where we're bombarded daily by photographic images, one might well ask: "what makes a 'good' photo?" Moreover, why has photography, originally treated as a tool for artists who paint and draw, become and remained a major force in its own right? Participants will explore these and other related themes; and will be invited to bring to class photographs that they find meaningful and that reflect the themes explored in the course.



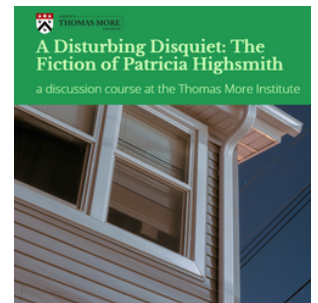
Italian Renaissance Arts of the Quattrocento

What drove the innovation in artistic creativity in the Italian courts, city-states, and republics of the 15th century? Was it the spread of humanistic culture, the invention of perspective, the role and influence of patrons and their motivations? This course will examine these and other influences in order to gain greater insight into the flowering of Renaissance art.



A Disturbing Disquiet: The Fiction of Patricia Highsmith

Come explore the underbelly of the human psyche through the writing of Patricia Highsmith. Dubbed the "poet of apprehension" by novelist Graham Greene, Highsmith creates characters wrestling with the evil impulses that lurk just below the surface of the ordinary, exposing her readers to an uneasiness that escalates inexorably until it becomes truly disturbing.



Imagining Medea: From Myth to Modernity

Medea is a figure from Classical mythology who resists easy classification. She is portrayed variously as a resourceful helper-maiden, essential to the hero's quest; a skilled and powerful enchantress; and a scorned wife who kills her own children. We will examine various re-imaginings of the character and story of Medea to explore the role and significance of mythic characters in the cultural consciousness.



These are just some of the courses being offered at TMI, so be sure to view the full Winter and Spring programming at thomasmore.qc.ca.

November 15, 2024

EVERY GIFT COUNTS!

Dear member of the TMI community,

Today, as our lives seem increasingly impacted by a polarized media environment and an online world that traps us in a fast-paced and over-stimulating present moment, the Thomas More Institute (TMI) offers us the opportunity to join together in conversation, allowing us to slow down, to listen to and learn from others, and in turn to share our own reflections.

At TMI, each term we facilitate meaningful discussion and shared inquiry in new, creative courses about topics that matter – both timely topics that reflect emerging and pressing concerns of our current situation or timeless issues pertaining to the human condition and self-understanding.

I contribute financially to TMI because every class I take encourages me to question the way I think about things and to reflect upon other, potentially richer, ideas and ways of looking at the world. It broadens my perspective and brings me together with all of you, to be part of an open and supportive community of fellow learners.

Government funding and course fees cover less than two-thirds of the cost of TMI's operations, and we rely on donations to ensure we have the financial resources to cover ongoing operating expenses. **We ask you to please consider donating to TMI's Annual Appeal today to help sustain this precious community where the values of life-long curiosity, imaginative exploration of ideas, and learning with and from others continue to thrive.**

We can't do it without you. Thank you for your support and for being part of our community devoted to curiosity and shared inclusive dialogue!

Wishing you and yours all the best this holiday season,



Carol Fiedler,
Chair of the Board

ANNUAL APPEAL 2024/25

Support TMI in 2024/25:

We are a welcoming community and a place where friendships develop as ideas are exchanged.

What TMI offers:

- Over 30 newly designed discussion courses each year.
- Courses in music and art
- Writing workshops
- Walking tours and cultural outings in our wonderful city
- A Seniors Outreach Program
 - 13 centres
 - Discussion with a group
 - Stimulating readings
- Conferences and other academic events

Your donation makes all this possible.

Thank you!



YES, I want to support lifelong learning and enriching discussions!

HOW TO DONATE THIS YEAR DURING THE POSTAL STRIKE:

- **Cheque:** payable to the Thomas More Institute
- **Credit card:** You can make a donation by phoning TMI at **514-935-9585** with a credit card number.
- **ONLINE:** Visit our website at thomasmore.qc.ca and click on the **DONATE** button at the top of our homepage. You will be taken to the Canada Helps website which will process your donation.
- **E-TRANSFER:** Send your transfer to psaxton@thomasmore.qc.ca. Include your name, phone number, mailing address and email address in the message field in order to receive your tax donation receipt.

Please let us know if you would like your gift to remain anonymous.

TMI Volunteer Profile With Jim Cullen

by Dominic Varvaro, November 2024

We're surrounded by a collection of sculptures and paintings "conceived in the young minds of Quebec's artist community," he tells me. The stacked bookshelves on an adjacent wall—replete with Plato, Ovid and Homer—hold the tomes that "founding members had in hand" when first building the Institute's charter. The nearby wall hosting a list of baccalaureates, starting in 1948, boasts the brain trust that has graced the Institute's halls and enriched its collective consciousness. He points to these artifacts with awe and pride. I can't imagine a more appropriate locale to interview Jim Cullen, past president of TMI and long-time volunteer.



Jim Cullen

Cullen was born in the seaside and coal-mining community of Stellarton, Nova Scotia. His banking father was transferred, with his family, to Montreal in the mid-1950s. Cullen went from an intimate Atlantic Canada community of 5000 to bustling urban NDG, cycling to school, playing hockey in the park, and eventually embracing the influence of the Jesuit Fathers of Loyola High School and College.

He confides that the transfer was difficult for his mother, being so far from family, but the glint I see in his eyes as he recounts the adventures of his youth tells me the transfer was a happy experience for him.

When I ask about the path that led him to the Chicago Divinity School, following the B.A. in Theology he earned through Université de Montréal, he talks of Reverend Elmer O'Brien, a Jesuit who chaired the "newly developed field" of theology studies at Loyola College. Cullen was inspired by how the Reverend "created engagement" when he first heard him speak in a Loyola College auditorium, and by the Reverend's "deep appreciation of theology." It was a turning point for Cullen who, until then, had been considering a career in journalism.

His journey of "growth" continued at University of Chicago's Divinity School in 1966 when he moved to the Baptist Graduate Student Centre. It's where he taught, attended graduate school, and formed lifelong friendships.

In 1968, back in Montreal, Jim married his fiancée, Maureen. He tells of how they were swept up in the 1968 Democratic Conference protests and of how they "endured...the tremendous turmoil" that then Chicago Mayor Daly's police crackdown had on university protesters. He was also witness to the cultural stress that a military draft for an unpopular war in Vietnam had on America's psyche and its "large impact on young people, especially speaking out" in protests and tectonic change of cultural mores.

TMI Volunteer Profile (continued)

In the 1970s, in the midst of the province's language law debates, Cullen returned to Quebec as a religion teacher at Bishop Whelan High School where he saw how enrolment was affected by "stricter language laws [which] changed the composition of the school." During this time, he completed an M.A. in History and Philosophy of Religion from Concordia.

1980 saw Cullen move to Quebec's Ministère de l'Éducation. The dossier of responsibilities he managed during his 25-year career was extensive and included elementary and secondary Catholic education, securing Canada-wide funding for minority language education, supporting Services à la communauté anglophone, and representing the province within the Canada-wide Council of Ministers of Education. Most notable, however, was the period of transition where the "English speaking community took greater charge of the education of their children," as reflected in his hands-on work with Gretta Chambers on the Advisory Board following Pauline Marois' reform to secularize public schools and create linguistic school boards.

He doesn't argue when I convey my impression that the Institute is a magnet for critical thinking. As president, a position he held from 2006 to 2010, Cullen supported the way the Institute operated. TMI Director Daniel Schouela echoed the Institute's appreciation for Cullen's "wealth of diverse experiences" and for how Cullen "managed our relationships with the Ministry and with Bishop's [University] with great care and skill, and spearheaded important modifications to TMI's bylaws."

I ask him about the governance that evolved under his watch. He praises the groundwork that was laid by his predecessors and also the "beguiling and enchanting" influences of past directors Charlotte Tansey and Martin O'Hara. In the same breath, he recognizes the dedication of the volunteers, many of them women, who "worked during the day and then returned [to TMI] in the evenings" to bring to life the "bold experiment" that is the Institute. Cullen goes on to explain his contention that "the Institute has two roles in the development of adult education," one of delivering adult education content and the other of conducting adult education research.

As we wrap up, he mentions a 1980 interview that O'Hara conducted with artist, teacher, and TMI graduate Louis Belzile. Cullen maintains that "TMI places art next to text as an interpretive place for students." It was Belzile's position, regarding public school art classes and what he described as [The Privileged Moment](https://mje.mcgill.ca/article/view/7343) (https://mje.mcgill.ca/article/view/7343), that art is a vital component of early learning pedagogy and that educational institutions must enable and encourage students to exceed pedagogic expectations. Not surprisingly, Cullen contends that the concept applies equally to adult education.

Dominic Varvaro is a writer, photographer, and TMI student. His foodie creations can be found at [@thesauceison](#). You can read more of his writings in [Voices: A TMI Writers' Journal](#).

Celebrating Anne Fitzpatrick

Anne Fitzpatrick is Feted at the Annual General Meeting of the Thomas More Institute

At this year's Annual General Meeting, the TMI community celebrated Anne Fitzpatrick on the occasion of her retirement from the Board after 45 years of service.

Anne's long-time friend and TMI colleague, Diane Moreau, travelled from Spain to attend the festivities and deliver TMI's tribute to Anne. In her speech, Diane wondered how one could "adequately respond to the challenge of finding the right words to honour Anne, to thank her for all the long years of service she has selflessly given to the Institute, to describe her exquisite qualities of friendship, kindness, and trust, her empathy in the care and concern of others, and her discretion and diplomacy in the most trying of institutional circumstances, always seeking the best solution without anger or a rush to judgment."



Anne Fitzpatrick

Anne first joined the board in 1969. She served as recording secretary and then as Chair of the board from 1999 to 2009. She was a member of the Nominating and Presidential Search Committees over the years, as well as a member of the Curriculum Committee, with which she is still involved. During her tenure as Chair, she undertook the monumental task of rewriting the Institute's by-laws, finding an accomplished lawyer who worked with her pro bono and working with President Jim Cullen (who is profiled in this issue) and others to create a document that would solidify the Institute.

Anne has also been a creative course designer and talented discussion leader, having designed such wonderful courses as "What Did Jane Really Know?" "Siblings: Burdened or Blessed?" "The Pivot of 50," and "Three Score and Ten Plus: Readings of Lives at Seventy," to name just a few. In recent years, she has co-led a number of rich courses designed by her colleague and friend Michael Tritt, such as: "Dark Necessity: The Short Fiction of Hawthorne, Poe, and Melville," and "'I, Too, Am America': The Literature of the Harlem Renaissance." Michael wrote about Anne, "She is sensitive, compassionate, humble, energetic, smart as a whip, a good friend, and a resource to many at TMI—and elsewhere. I know that my life has been enriched by my friendship with her." So many of us who have been fortunate to work with Anne or be with her in a class, would say the same.

Thank you, Anne!

Past Events

The Thomas More Institute and Concordia University co-sponsor “Democracy in Crisis,” a Two-Day Conference



Carol Fiedler leads a discussion on Day 1
of “Democracy in Crisis” at TMI

One week before the pivotal US election, on October 29 and 30, the Thomas More Institute (TMI) and Concordia University’s Department of Theological Studies held a two-day conference entitled “Democracy in Crisis.”

The first day, Carol Fiedler, TMI’s Chair and a leader in the current course “Democracy at Risk?” ran a discussion at TMI on the effect the rise of disinformation on social media has had on democratic governance. A full classroom of eager participants discussed readings from Renée DiResta’s 2024 book, *Invisible Rulers: The People Who Turn Lies into Reality* and Max Fisher’s 2022 book, *The Chaos Machine: The Inside Story of How Social Media Rewired Our Minds and Our World*. Turning first to DiResta’s work, the group discussed her concept of bespoke realities, whereby social media and the internet allow individuals to choose the ‘truth’ they want to believe by seeking out the information that matches their worldview. Instead of traditional media sources serving as gatekeepers and fact-checkers, the wild-west of social media allows unfiltered posts to create worlds of “alternative facts” and encourages individuals or groups to create bespoke or curated realities.

Turning to Fisher’s work, the group looked at examples of the damage done to multicultural, democratic societies when citizens live in their preferred echo chambers of rage on Facebook or YouTube. One excerpt looked at how Facebook turned a German town against the migrants it had previously been generously hosting, leading to real world violence. Another selection looked at the rise of the far-right politician Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency of Brazil, through his posting of sensational and mendacious videos on YouTube. How can democracy defend itself against attacks on the truth, the group wondered. Does democracy die not in darkness, but rather in too much light, that is from screens filled with too much unfiltered information?

Past Events

The next day, the conference moved to Concordia, with many who took part in the discussion the day before convening in a conference room on the 9th floor of the John Molson School of Business. There, five Concordia students presented papers on a range of pertinent topics: “Rebuilding Communities During Democratic Governance at Times of Crisis” (Gabriel Casola), “Democracy in Crisis: Virtual Activism, Media Manipulation and the Rise of Dictatorship” (Neda Nikbakht), “Reassessing Christian Nationalism” (Zachary Bourgeois), “The Society of the Selfie” (Teri Di Gennaro), and “Neoliberalism and Democracy” (Jason Piché).

The highlight of the second day was TMI’s Manager of Academic Affairs and Operations Joseph Vietri’s interview with Professor André Gagné of Concordia’s Department of Theological Studies on his recent book, *American Evangelicals for Trump: Dominion, Spiritual Warfare, and the End Times*. Vietri and Gagné discussed the attraction of Donald Trump for American Evangelicals and particularly for the New Apostolic Reformation movement. Among the fascinating parts of their conversation was a discussion of the churches that support Trump. They are quite different from the so-called moral majority that was led by the politically conservative religious leaders of the 1980s. Instead of traditional churches run by church elders, these churches are independent, run by leaders who see themselves as chosen by God, as modern-day apostles and prophets. They run their churches as though they are CEOs, Gagné explained, building their movements through franchises. These churches, he noted, are the fastest growing segment of Christianity world-wide.

Why, one might ask, does such a fervent religious movement support so unholy a man as Donald Trump? Gagné explained that these Evangelicals see Donald Trump as a vehicle of God, one who like Cyrus in the ancient world, will prepare the way for His people. Trump’s willingness to take on the liberal elites and the so-called woke media make them see in him a warrior for their cause. They believe Trump will fight a holy war for them, making way for the second coming of Christ. The discussion was fascinating and capped off an exhilarating, if somewhat sobering, discussion of the current crisis of democracy.



TMI co-hosts a series of panels in collaboration with Concordia University for Day 2 of “Democracy in Crisis”.

Office News

Welcome to our new Manager of Development Marleigh Greaney



The Thomas More Institute is thrilled to welcome Marleigh Greaney as our new Manager of Development. Marleigh will be TMI's first manager devoted entirely to fundraising and grant writing. As TMI moves forward in the 21st century we recognize that we need to become more effective in our efforts to secure the finances of this unique organization where people come together in a learning community to read, reflect, and discuss the issues that affect us all.

Marleigh has worked for over 20 years in the field of education and brings to TMI valuable experience in grant writing and fundraising. The daughter of a longtime TMI volunteer and board member, Frank Greaney, Marleigh is well versed in the history of the Thomas More Institute. She believes deeply in its mission of providing adults with accessible opportunities for lifelong learning and is highly motivated to share the excellent work of the Institute with prospective donors and the wider community.

In Memoriam

Carol Tansey
1929-2024

We were saddened to hear of the death of Carol Tansey, on October 21, 2024. Carol, sister of Charlotte Tansey, a founder and long-time president of the Thomas More Institute volunteered for many years in the office at TMI. She was well known for her love of cooking, relentless pursuit of justice, and dedication to causes close to her heart. Read her obituary [here](#).



Upcoming Events

Feast of Lights

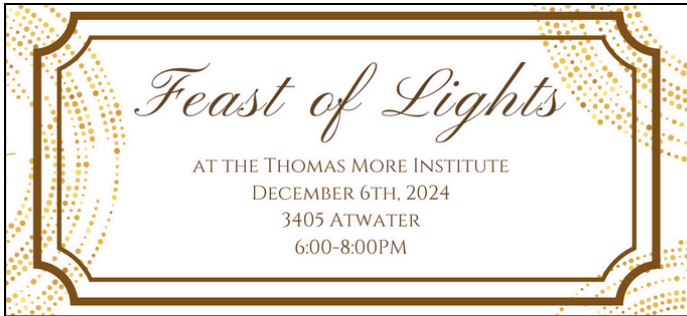
December 6th, 2024 | 6:00 - 8:00 PM

Our annual end-of-year celebration for the TMI community will be held on Friday, December 6th, 2024. Join us for food and drinks! The event will take place on the second floor party room, with access via our regular entrance and an elevator. Please RSVP [here](#).

Winter Courses Start

Week of January 13th, 2025

The Winter term begins on Monday January 13th. Registrants will receive an email reminding them of the exact start date of their course.



TMI on the Road: Literature Discussion at Westmount Library

February 6th, 2025 | 2:00 PM

New to the TMI community? Join us at the Westmount Library for a taste of what our courses are like! In this discussion on a short literary work, participants will read a selected piece before the event, and experience TMI's method of collaborative learning through questioning and sharing different perspectives.



See You in the Winter of 2025!