

radix

McGill's Student Spirituality Magazine



Spring
2015

radicalism

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artwork to share?
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Front Cover photo from the
Chihuly Exhibit, taken at
Musee des Beaux Arts de
Montreal

This photo by
Edward Ross at
Norwich Cathedral

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RADIX magazine is produced by students for
students with support of the
McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life

editorial

Fiona Williams

Dear Radix Readers,

As members of the McGill community, we are extremely fortunate to be part of an environment that facilitates open discussion and communication. It is a privilege to have the ability and resources to voice our concerns, whatever they may be.

With the theme of this issue we hope to challenge the negational understanding of the term “radicalism.” As the term is often used to describe and support a pre-existing ideological stance, such “radical feminism” or “political radicalism,” one must bear in mind that ultimately, radicalism is an attempt to alter social norms and change established value systems in a fundamental way.

Thus, the radical need not be detrimental.

We hope that the following pages of poems, columns, and pictures encourage you to examine the significance of the social and political frameworks of our society. We invite you to question, to comment, and to criticize these frameworks in a productive way, in an effort to not only better understand each other, but also oneself.

Thank you.

*Fiona Williams is co-editor of Radix magazine
She is majoring in English Literature with a double minor in
Political Science and World Religions*

radicalism defined

by Wing Yu Alice Chan

Radicalism Defined

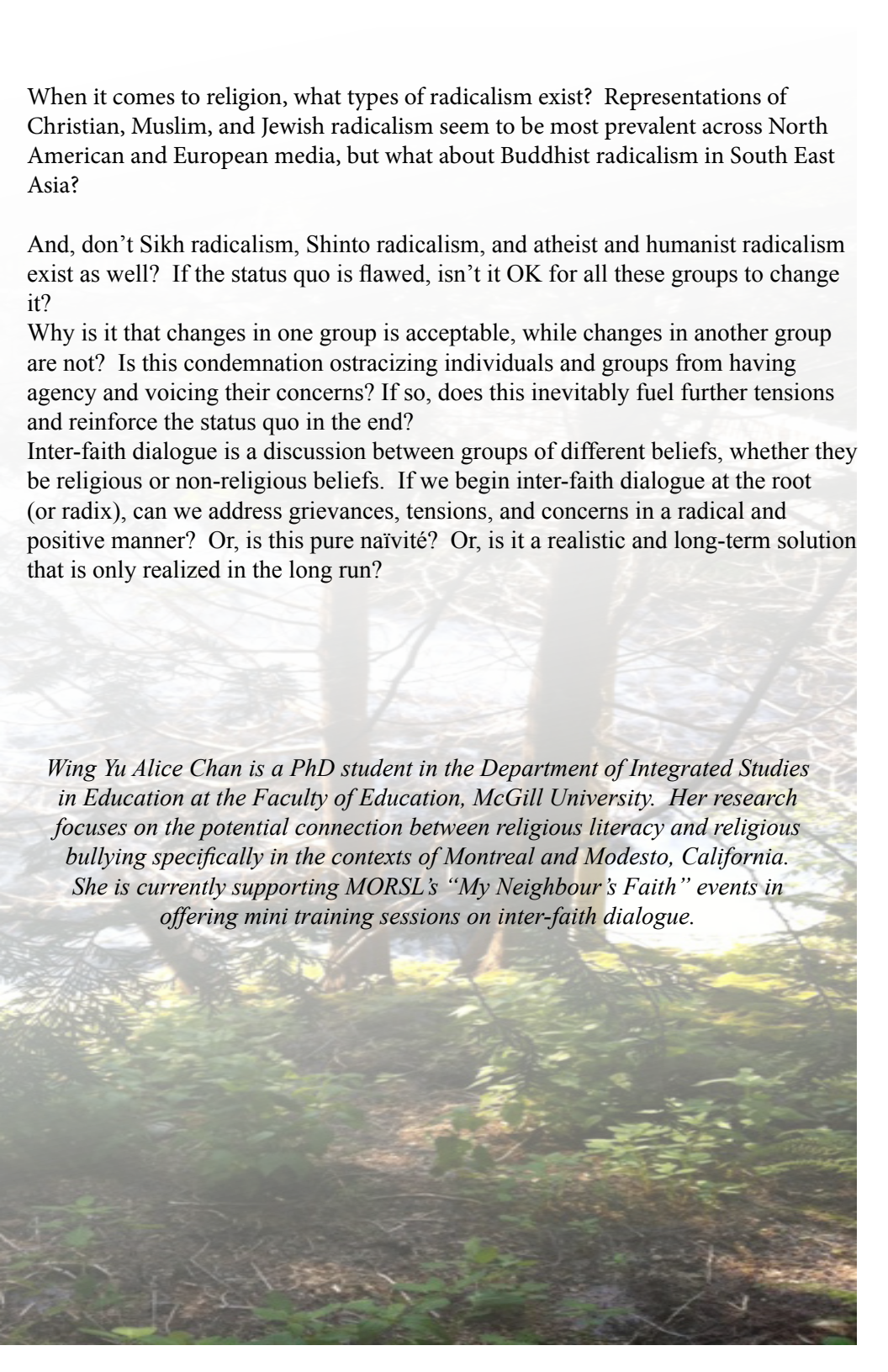
radicalism, n.

Etymology: < RADICAL adj. + -ISM suffix. Compare earlier RADICALITY n.

1. Politically or socially radical attitudes, principles, or practice; (in early use with capital initial) spec. those characteristic of Radicals in the 18th and 19th centuries. philosophical radicalism: see PHILOSOPHICAL adj. and n. Special uses.
2. The action or process of getting to the root of something; thoroughness of method. *Obs.*
3. *Linguistics.* The subject or study of radical words or letters, esp. in Hebrew. *Obs. rare.*

(Oxford English Dictionary, 2015)

Media consistently portrays it as a bad thing. However, another easily accessible source, i.e. the handy-dandy Wikipedia, says the following: “The term political radicalism (or simply, in political science, radicalism) denotes political principles focused on altering social structures through revolutionary means and changing value systems in fundamental ways. Derived from the Latin *radix* (root), the denotation of radical has changed since its eighteenth-century coinage to comprehend the entire political spectrum—yet retains the “change at the root” connotation fundamental to revolutionary societal change (1). From this premise, how can radicalism be necessarily a bad thing? If social structures are problematic, shouldn’t they be changed? The OED and Wikipedia’s descriptions conjure images of the French revolution and the dismantling of ruthless oligarchs in my mind. If radicalism stems from fundamental beliefs such as the equality of all, how can radicalism be a bad thing? If radicalism should be avoided, should we then deny emancipation for a few, or even democracy?



When it comes to religion, what types of radicalism exist? Representations of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish radicalism seem to be most prevalent across North American and European media, but what about Buddhist radicalism in South East Asia?

And, don't Sikh radicalism, Shinto radicalism, and atheist and humanist radicalism exist as well? If the status quo is flawed, isn't it OK for all these groups to change it?

Why is it that changes in one group is acceptable, while changes in another group are not? Is this condemnation ostracizing individuals and groups from having agency and voicing their concerns? If so, does this inevitably fuel further tensions and reinforce the status quo in the end?

Inter-faith dialogue is a discussion between groups of different beliefs, whether they be religious or non-religious beliefs. If we begin inter-faith dialogue at the root (or radix), can we address grievances, tensions, and concerns in a radical and positive manner? Or, is this pure naïveté? Or, is it a realistic and long-term solution that is only realized in the long run?

Wing Yu Alice Chan is a PhD student in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at the Faculty of Education, McGill University. Her research focuses on the potential connection between religious literacy and religious bullying specifically in the contexts of Montreal and Modesto, California. She is currently supporting MORSL's "My Neighbour's Faith" events in offering mini training sessions on inter-faith dialogue.

destruction

by Edward Ross

What does it mean
to be devoted to faith?
To give yourself fully,
to the being you grace.

Does that faith mean
that your morals be shot?
That you kill and maim,
so your motives are begot?

Is it the endless murder,
that was caused by strife?
Maybe it's the genocide,
to make a 'purer life'?

What about our culture;
one you crush bit by bit,
burning countless books,
and artifacts you see unfit.

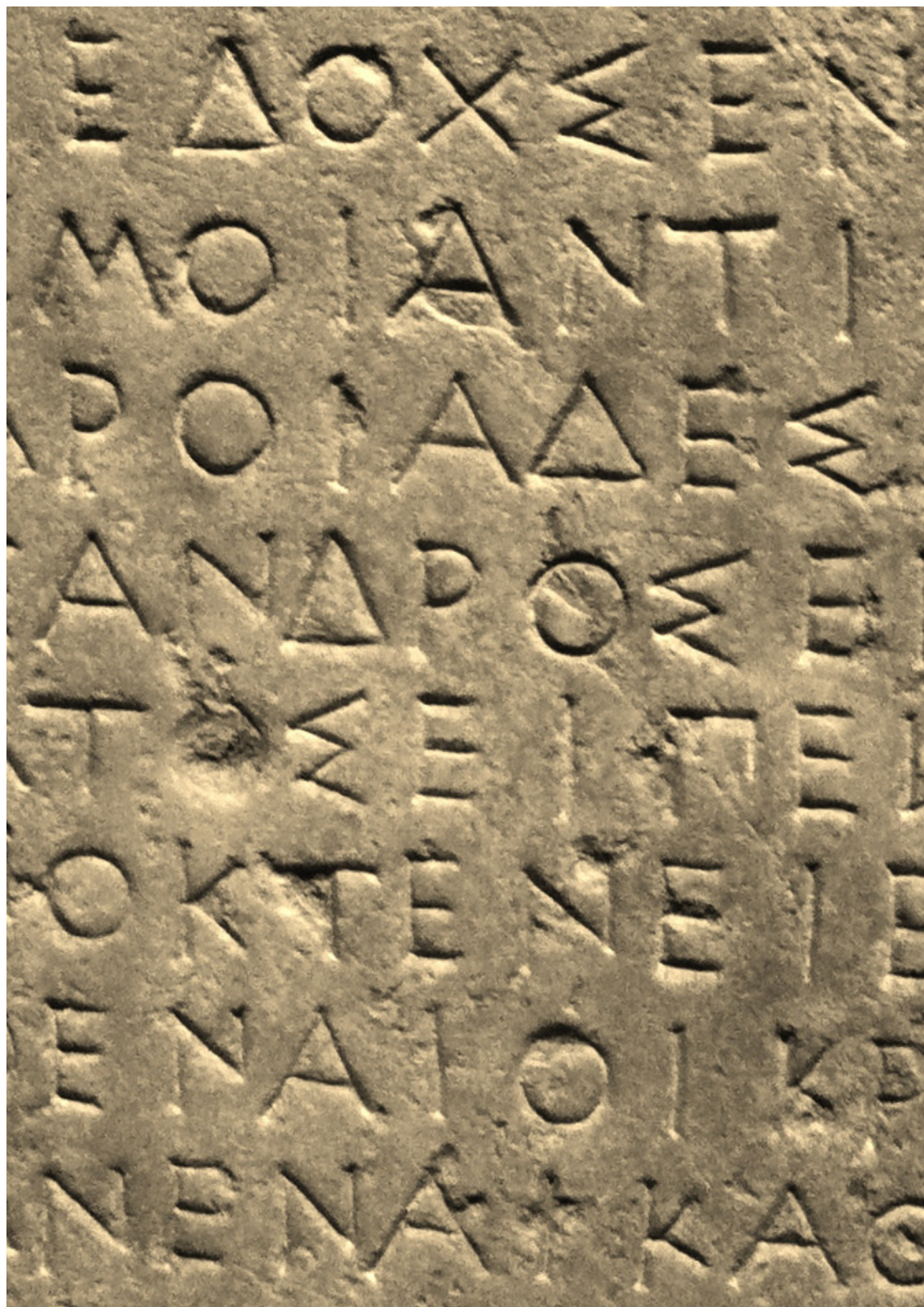
By purging our history
and leaving your own,
you're creating a world
where we are alone.

Obliterating mistakes,
and blinding the people at
last.

You take away our future,
when you destroy the past.

But how can you do this
with no sense of remorse?
You say it is for your deity,
but it has another source.

No, I am not scared
of the one you proclaim.
But rather the things
you do in their name.



Edward Ross is a UI Religious Studies and Classics student from Cornwall, Ontario.

interfaith at mcgill

by Kripa Koshy

February 6th saw McGill host its annual Interfaith Day. The all-day event was established from the desire of myriad student faith-based groups to present their diverse religious backgrounds to the McGill community. Participants witnessed the sampling of different traditional practices from devotional meditations to community prayers.

Events spanned the day beginning with Zen meditations hosted by the McGill Office for Religious and Spiritual Life in the Birks Chapel which were followed by kirtan meditations led by the McGill Sikh Students' Association in the Newman Centre.

As it does every Friday afternoon through the academic year, the SSMU ballroom hosted the weekly, Jumu'ah prayers organized by the on-campus Muslim Students' Association. The morning events were then followed by a group discussion with the presence of prominent religious leaders, each representing the diverse faith backgrounds explored during the day-long program. The evening's events included a Catholic mass in the Newman Centre and finally a Shabbat service with a dinner at Ghetto Shul.

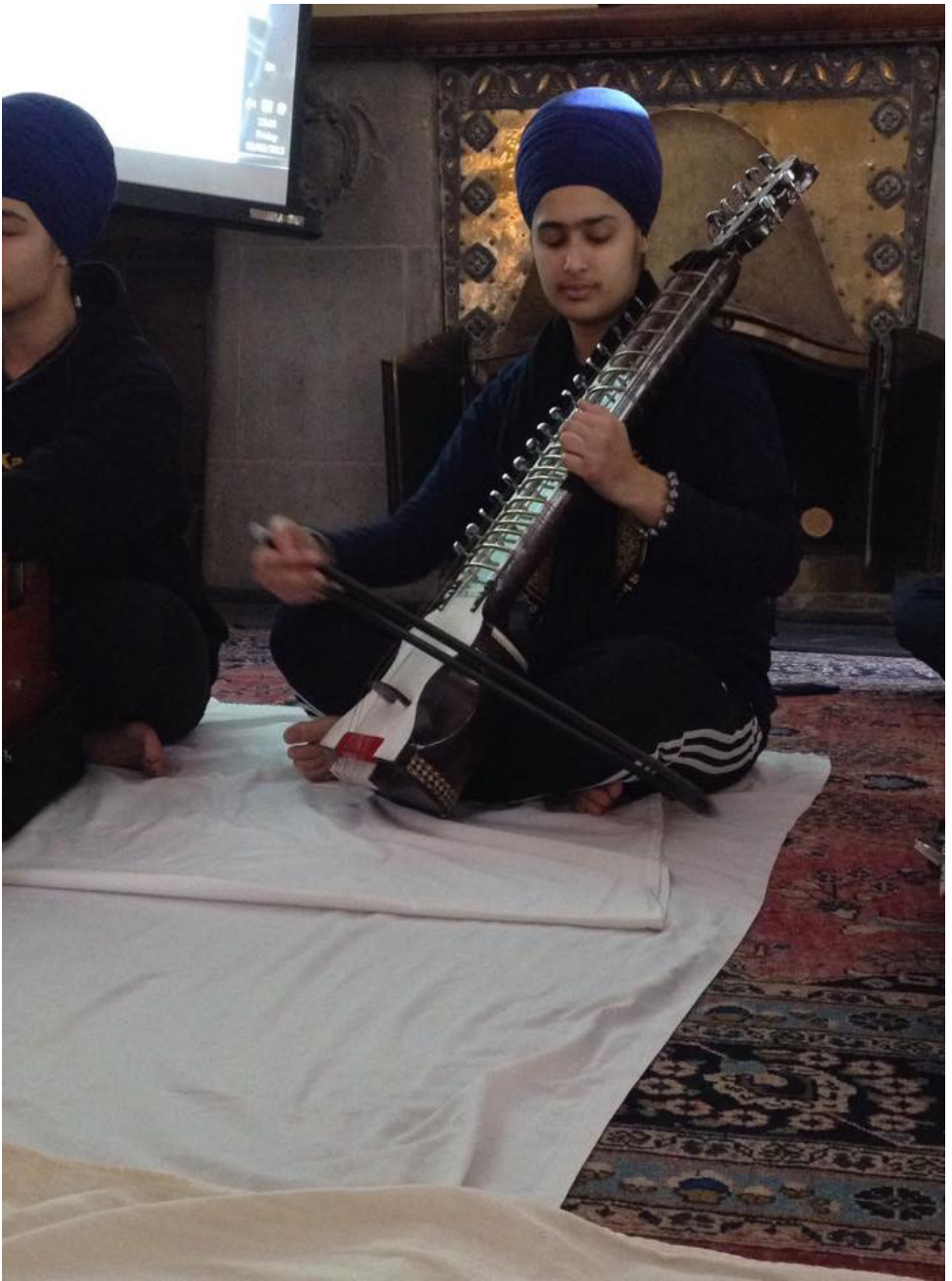
I attended three of the six gatherings and began with a kirtan hosted by McGill's Sikh Students' Association. The kirtan was the first of two events hosted by the Newman Catholic Centre. The venue for the kirtan was the first of many examples of accommodation, acceptance, and respect that were evident between various faith-groups through the day. Making my way up the stairs in the Newman Centre and passing many motifs identifying the Christian affiliations of the building, I was eventually greeted by a small room whose carpeted floors were now covered with white sheets. Welcomed warmly by students from the Sikh Students Association, I was handed a small square of purple cloth and was instructed on how to cover my head prior to the start of the service, an act symbolic of the reverence and respect expected for the kirtan.

As I sat cross-legged on the floor, I listened attentively as the foundational faith tenets of Sikhism were explained to guests in attendance. With the introduction over, sounds of the tabla and the harmonium slowly filled the room and the dulcet tones of singers joined in to create a harmonious blend of soothing melodies. The English translations of the hymns projected on a screen behind the musicians allowed for participants to better understand the statements of praise and devotion being vocalized.

The air was charged with a heavy sense of peace and appreciation as we concluded with a collective prayer. I felt a sense of wonder and quiet gratitude settle on me realizing I was privy to a tradition and culture that thousands professed and practiced as their own every day. A strong sense of these communal bonds was evident in the collective singing of hymns and recitation of prayer.

Following Jumu'ah prayers, the McGill Interfaith Student Council's Group discussion, *Actively Live Out Your Faiths* brought together religious leaders from different faith backgrounds in yet another SSMU meeting room. Students in attendance hailed from equally diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. Once again the panel discussion was organized in a manner that extolled virtues of unity, equality, brotherhood and sisterhood of a community of diverse individuals. With the Imam on my left and a Muslim woman to the right, we discussed the pragmatic elements involved in balancing one's identity as a student with one's religion. Through our personal experiences, interpretations, and stories we understood the faith of another in a manner that no book could teach. That afternoon, I saw the beauty of the Sabbath as shared by a Jewish Rabbi (and an Imam!) and was reminded of the power of faith by a married Muslim woman.

The group discussion expressed a profoundly different understanding of the term radicalism for me. It presented a radically different expression of religious interaction where, as a Christian student, I heard the opinions of religious leaders from Muslim and Jewish faith traditions share their approaches and understandings of balancing the myriad identities and priorities that are often challenging to navigate. I had the pleasure and privilege to sit amidst people who boldly proclaimed a different sort of radicalism - radical peace, radical respect, and radical kinship in a world where religious radicalism evokes a completely different image.



Kripa Koshy is a U3 student working toward a major in International Development Studies and a minor in Religion and Globalization at McGill. She often finds herself thinking a great deal about cultural and religious identity and is thankful for any opportunity she has to articulate her thoughts on the matter. She loves jazz and coffee and is happiest when singing.



living in a mirrored bubble

by Kenzie Roop

The photo to the left was taken in Manila, Philippines where the Christmas season starts in October and ends in February.

A young boy shields himself from the harsh light in its centre.

He looks forward to Christmas crafts and candies,
when the world of shadowed steps is veiled in trusted trinkets and
plastic parties.

Bright and inescapably blinding, a child seeks comfort in what he
can feel.



Kenzie Roop is a UI McGill student in International Development.

a tuesday night

by Andrea Nechita

Feeling especially philosophical one night,
I pondered over the meanings of life.

Finding no answers,
I slumped down on the floor.

“Menope!” I begged,
“Tell me all you know!”

Hah, but what would she know?!
What could she know of this world,
of the world that is beyond her own?

And yet I feel she must know something.
I see it in her eyes,
I’ve seen it in other eyes too.

Again, I ask “Please explain to me this thing called life.”
Enthusiastic chatter fills the air between us,
It’s full of explanations.
I know it is, I can feel it!

But things get lost in translation.
And sadly I am no specialist,
in the dialects of guinea pigs.

*Andrea Nechita is a graduate student at McGill currently finishing
her second Master’s in Library and Information Studies.*

damian the lost avenger

by Maihemuti Dilimulati

Poetry based on the Extreme Dialogue's interview of Damian Clairmont's mother Christianne Boudreau. Canadian citizen Damian Clairmont joined ISIL in 2012 and he was killed in the battle in January 2014.

He was a typical Western guy
Just like those young men in hoodies
In any big or small cities,
And full of identity crises...

He was gone
To fight
Not to study
He knew he was doing something extreme
So he just duped his family.
When he first became pious
And asked his mother for a coffee
He filled her heart with full of ecstasy
And delight and appreciation
She thought she got him back
After a long and painful alienation...

Yet, on the other side of life
He was giving 'tons of warning signs'
Signs of becoming zealous and bold
Heartbreakingly remembers the mother now
How she missed them all
As she didn't know how to know...

Education! She calls out!
That's what she didn't hold
How she regrets that she failed
To spot those very signs
That he had been exuding...

Now in agony
So vividly
She recollects them in detail
'Academics, universities and counsellors and psychologists...
They don't see it;
They are so far stuck in the black and whites of the textbooks,
They miss it; they miss the real human sides...'

She is crying
She 'couldn't picture him holding a gun
Killing anything or anyone'...

Now he is finally done
With his eternal vengeance
His death was not utterly unexpected
As he was determined to be dead
For his newly found significance.
He is gone
Leaving so many questions behind
Yes, these are for us
To seriously ponder
As the flow is growing
We cannot waste any more time...

*Maihemuti Dilimulati is a PhD student from DISE Faculty of
Education.*

why the turn to the religious?

by John Saigle

Why the turn to the religious? Why now, with all we know?

Anyone on the street can give you one thousand problems with religion: scandal in the Catholic church; fundamentalists of all stripes committing atrocities near and far; a long history of the suppression of the rights of peoples of all colours, genders, and (especially) creeds; a flagrant disregard for the discoveries of empirical science... the list is seemingly endless. Faith has become something of a dirty word, an embarrassing symptom of regress.

And it's true that in many cases religion is precisely this, a symptom of decline and decay. Most religions are rooted in some kind of a psychological disturbance: an aversion to fear, pain, suffering, discord, and meaninglessness. Any message of salvation presupposes doom. Any promise of another life or another world is a condemnation of this life and this world. Isn't the healthier, the wiser choice that of learning to be happy with what we have, of "counting our blessings"?

The frequent problem with trying to love life is that it is frequently unlovable. Without the coquettish veil of a religious perspective, we see the ugly face of life. Without the promise of goodness and justice in the world, we are left with an existence that is, at best, indifferent to us as well as our goals -- it is even indifferent to our love. We cannot love what is indifferent.

This ancient problem has in just over half a century been magnified to the point of monstrosity. Since the catastrophes of the World Wars, we have been subject to many further global catastrophes across every domain of human activity, from science to philosophy to economy to culture and everything in between.

Quantum mechanics has ravaged our understanding of physics. Our smallest unit of existence becomes ever smaller, from atoms to electrons to quarks. The quantum experiments leave us with nothing but confusion: we have observable, repeatable trials which show quantum entities violating the fundamental laws which we now take for granted. Even Einstein's special relativity is irreconcilable with these experiments. Scientists only know the HOWs, not the WHYs, of these experiments: their explanations range from multiple universes, to things in the future causing things in the past, to nature purposefully hiding information from the scientist, to the nearly-incomprehensible string theory. Science may have reached its limits, as reason did long ago with Kant. Science! Our most trusted and most recent advisor of meaning has been reduced to poetry and fictions.

The discovery of DNA, the sequencing of the human genome, the up-and-coming fields of epigenetics and genomics have shattered long-standing beliefs humanity has had of itself. We can now read and write the code of life -- not perfectly mind you, but these areas of research are moving quickly, perhaps far more quickly than ethics and certainly more quickly than the laws and policies which are vital in curtailing the inevitable grooming of humanity that will follow these developments.

And finally we come to the ecological crisis, the reality of which is so painful and destructive to the consciousness that even today we speak of it only in neutered euphemisms: we speak of 'climate change' and of 'global warming' while staring down the apocalypse of apocalypses. The facts of the ecological crisis are out there now; I will not repeat them here, for they have been repeated since the 70s and without real impact on any level of importance. All science tells us is that we are beyond the point of chatter about prevention, of 'how to stop this from happening' -- it is happening now, it is here; the crisis has already claimed its first deaths (up to 300 000 per year, as of 2009). All we can do now is damage control.

And among all this, too, we find ourselves with bloody hands over the corpse of God, here understood as a metaphor for a sense of absolute meaning -- an answer to the questions, 'how should I live? Why should it be that I live?' The ostensible collapse of ideology in the 20th century has left us adrift in the world. Late capitalism has chewed up and spit out everything sacred and everything profane: culture is now something of a grey ball of cud, every innovation and insight merely an inchoate commodity. In the Information Age we find our large world growing smaller, we cannot help but bump into competing perspectives on life and on truth, as it becomes ever more clear that many of these are in direct opposition, yet all yearn for total domination.

We are left with two paths: that of eternal war and revolution, where one way may emerge at the expense of all others, or that of peaceful co-existence of multiple standpoints -- if we know anything from history, it is that the latter course will require something altogether different from humanity as it has shown itself.

Every age considers itself in ruin; every age seems to face the threat of extinction in the face of changing norms -- we may simply be the first to have evidence for it. Forget doomsday prophecies and horror movies, this is the only thing you need if you crave a sense of dread.

Is it any wonder then that there may be a turn to the religious? It is our most enduring form of creation, the most universal element of humanity -- there has never been a people without their Gods. This should tell us that people need their Gods as a personification of their sense of meaning and purpose. Even the atheist is really no such thing: he will inevitably find something to occupy the God-shaped hole, but can never fill it.

Perhaps we may be able to learn from the mistakes of the past. Perhaps we do not need faith, but we need something like it. Religion and faith have always been a communal effort at absorbing the evils of the community into ritual, like sucking the venom from a snake bite. In a venomous time, one that is wholly defined by its utter lack of definition, in a world where the only legitimate purpose is contrived purposelessness, we need the religious more than ever.



classifieds

Radix is looking for Volunteers.

Like what you see?

Believe in student creativity, and inter-faith collaboration?

Help us do it better! We can always use help in marketing, web-development, research, distribution, writing, layout, and much more! Email us to join the community. radix@mail.mcgill.ca

The McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life (MORSL)

MORSL, a proud member of McGill Student Services, is located in the Brown Building, suite 2100. Please feel free to stop by our Meditation/Prayer Room any weekday from 10:00am to 4:00pm! You'll find a full-spectrum light therapy lamp, CD's for guided relaxation, a serene space with floor pillows and meditation stools, and some suggestions on how to meditate in different traditions. Take time for some serenity and zenity! Stay connected with MORSL on Twitter [@SpiritualMcGill](https://twitter.com/SpiritualMcGill) or like us on Facebook: fb.com/morsl

Weekly Zen meditation

Every Friday morning at 8:15am, McGill Zen Buddhist chaplain, Myokyo Zengetsu, offers guided Zen practice in the Birks chapel (3520 University Street, 2nd floor). Must arrive early or on time in order to join!

Newman Centre

Newman Catholic Centre, 3484 Peel Street, is a home away from home for Catholic Students. Visit www.newmancentre.org to find out more about this centre for Catholic spiritual, social, and intellectual life on campus!

The Rabbit Hole Café

Food for Thought's vegan collective, The Rabbit Hole, cooks up vegan lunches every Friday at 1:00 p.m. Drop by, pay a toonie, enjoy the company and eat up! All proceeds go towards maintaining this Yellow Door program (3625 Aylmer) along with their Food For Thought student food bank, sponsored by the McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life.

The Radical Christian Students' Association

Thursdays at 6pm in the Presbyterian College second-floor lounge (corner of University and Milton). Exploring, living, and testifying to the justice mission of Jesus Christ. Enjoy a free vegan meal and spiritual conversation, then move into Bible Study or a presentation, followed by music and prayer. Rad Christians support each other's social justice work. Check out facebook.com/radicalchristiansmcgill or e-mail radchristiansmcgill@gmail.com

McGill Student Parents' Network

The MSPN provides a support network for McGill students who are parents. We have grown! No longer based in the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life, we are now housed with PGSS. We still offer regular "Study Saturdays" at Thomson House, where parents can study while the kids enjoy free programming, and more. Interested families can contact the MSPN at mcgillspn@gmail.com.

Russian Orthodox and Ukrainian Orthodox Christian Students

Join our weekly student meeting, Orthodox Christian Fellowship! We also have monastery visits, picnics, and movie nights. Contact McGill's Orthodox chaplain, Father Ihor for details: ikutash@gmail.com.

The Muslim Students Association of McGill

MSA aims to provide spiritual, social, and educational services. We offer weekly study circles, free Islamic educational materials, Ramadan services, lectures/conferences, and a wonderful library called House of Wisdom. We also have many community events to serve others (eg. Project Downtown), as well as exciting social events (eg. ski trips, cultural dinner nights, MSA Frosh, and so much more!) Come drop by and say hi to us in our office (Shatner building, room B09.)

Mondays at MORSL

New this year! The Office of Religious and Spiritual Life hosts "Mondays at MORSL" – a variety of free Monday-night events, including art therapy, yoga, zen meditation, Quaker meditation, Om meditation, talks on World Religions, Orthodox icon-writing workshop, movie nights, and more! Like us on facebook at fb.com/morsl to find out more or email morsl@mcgill.ca.

Drop-in Friday Yoga:

End your school week with a relaxing drop-in Ashtanga yoga class in the Brown Building (suite 5001) at 4:30 on Fridays. A suggested donation of \$5 to the instructor is appreciated. Mats and tea provided. Bring your own mug!

classifieds

The Jewish community at McGill

Visit www.hillel.ca and www.chabad-mcgill.com for information on shabbat meals, holiday celebrations, educational programming, and fun social activities!

My Neighbour's Faith Series

This series of monthly visits to Montreal's places of worship joins forces with Concordia's "Sacred Sites Visits" to provide a guided experience with various world religions being practiced in Montreal, and a free meal! Visits include a Sikh Gurdwara with Punjabi meal, a Baha'i temple, a candle-light Christmas Carol service, and more! Email morsl@mcgill.ca to join the mailing list or visit <http://www.mcgill.ca/morsl/what-we-offer/my-neighbours-faith>

Winter Coats Needed!

Donations of clean winter coats in good condition are desperately needed for the Winter Coat Project. Smaller donations can be dropped off at MORSL (Brown Suite 2100) Mon-Fri 10am-4pm and large bags of donations can be dropped off at the Newman Centre, 3484 Peel Street, 10:00am - 2:00pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. Please mark all bags clearly as "Winter Coat Project" and drop them in the Newman lobby via the lower entrance.



RADIX

McGill's Student Spirituality Magazine

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Call for submissions!

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theme: changing tides

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Stories Poetry Photos

Opinions Reflections

Art

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Deadline: April 17th

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radix@mail.mcgill.ca

