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# Introduction

This has been, one can say without fear of exaggeration, an eventful year for the city of Montréal, the Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill University, and ARC. The Ice Storm of January, with all its tragedy and cost, raised our collective awareness of the awesome power of nature, and of the ultimate frailty of human engineering and technology in the face of natural disaster. It also, however, left us with lasting impressions of the sense of community and togetherness that can manifest in times of crisis (and, one hopes, in times of stability).

On a less monumental but still significant note, 1998 marks a half-century of dedication to the study of religion in the Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill. We have seen the transformation of this faculty from a focus on Christian studies to its present shape as a premiere North American institution for the study of world religions.

Over the years, ARC has reflected the changing face of McGill's Faculty of Religious Studies, as well as the transformation of the academic study of religion. This has meant not only an inclusion of the world religions, but also a recognition of the need for a broader, interdisciplinary approach to the study of religion. From its humble genesis as a McGill newsletter/magazine, to its present incarnation as a dependable forum for scholarly discussion, attracting scholars from Canada as well as the international community, ARC has held fast to its mission statement, while remaining open, as one past editor felicitously remarked, to the "propitious accidents of history."

This year ARC makes what we hope will be a propitious leap, merging with the journal *Religious Traditions*, founded by Arvind Sharma (McGill), then at the University of Queensland, and the late Ian Kesarcodi-Watson of La Trobe University. In the mid-1970s, in an effort to provide an Australasian forum for those interested in the burgeoning study of religion, Sharma and Kesarcodi-Watson collaborated in establishing *Religious Traditions*. Within a few years after Kesarcodi-Watson's death, Sharma moved to Canada and the journal moved with him, while retaining its connection with Sydney facilitated by endowments from the university's Department of Religious Studies and the Charles Strong Memorial Trust (here gratefully acknowledged).

For the past several years the editors of both *Religious Traditions* and *ARC* have entertained the possibility of a merger, given that the two journals had come to resemble one another in both scope and role. The current issue represents their merger. On behalf of the editorial board, then, I wish to extend a warm welcome to the subscribers of *Religious Traditions* and to *ARC*'s new editorial team of advisors and consultants, among whose company in the past were notable scholars such as Mircea Eliade, J.M. Kitagawa, B.K. Matilal, Frederick J. Streng, A.K. Ramanujan, and W.J. Jobling.

In his 1998 Birks Lectures, "Abraham Among Jews, Christian, and Muslims" (featured here in article form), Jon Levenson of Harvard Divinity School expands on the recent scholarly concern with the ties and divisions between the three Abrahamic faiths. Levenson seeks to uncover the truth behind the conventional understandings of Judaism and Christianity in particular, and offers a reappraisal, based on exegetical analysis, of the simplistic categorizations which often set these two faiths in opposition. Such a reappraisal, as Professor Levenson remarks, can be "a source of great and not unwelcome surprise."

In "The Doctrine of the Ascension in Irenaeus and Origen," Douglas Farrow, a recent addition to McGill's Faculty of Religious Studies, invokes the shades of these two church fathers in order to remark upon an important issue which has never been resolved: the issue of the ascension of Jesus Christ and whether it means, for Christians, a freedom *from* the human or *for* the human. Barbara Galli, recently appointed Chair of Judaic Studies at the University of Alabama, looks deeply into the concept of love in the work of Franz Rosenzweig, and provides *ARC* with a truly Rosenzweigian piece in "A Loving Body in Time and Space." James Lochtefeld turns his attention to sixteenth-century India, in a thorough and critical analysis of the many faces of the Hindu poet-saint Ravidās. Back in the present, Shane Cudney reflects upon the relevance and limits of postmodern philosophers like Derrida to contemporary Christians, while S. A. Nigosian rounds out this year's articles with an analysis of the "sense of status" of the three Abrahamic faiths, providing a complement to Levenson's Birks Lectures.

The present issue of *ARC* unveils a new section, "Addresses," in which public lectures on religious issues of relevance to the scholarly and non-academic communities will find a home. Here the reader will find a lecture delivered by Gerald Vandezande, the National Public Affairs Director of the Toronto-based Citizens for Public Justice, to the Premier of British Columbia and leaders of Canadian business and faith communities. Last, Professor David Novak, in an article based



on his Inaugural Lecture for the Shiff Chair of Jewish Studies at the University of Toronto, addresses an issue that has become something of an annual theme in *ARC*, namely, the place of the study of religion (here, the Jewish ethical tradition in particular) in the modern university.

A diverse selection of book reviews has been collated by Heather Sansom, which we hope provides the reader with a sense of the range and depth of the contemporary study of religion. Finally, *ARC* continues a tradition of including the abstracts of dissertations from the faculty's recently successful doctorandi.

It has truly been, as I said in the opening, an eventful year. There are a number of people to thank for the production of this issue in often chaotic times, in particular Samieun Khan, Marina Costain, and Rose Lenkov, for their help with administrative and production detail, Douglas Farrow and Nathalie Polzer, for their advice on editorial minutiae, as well as the members of the *ARC* editorial committee, particularly Jim Kanaris, *ARC*-guru, for his advice on diverse matters, Heather Sansom, for her diligence as Book Review Editor, and Kim Smiley, for her editing talents and support.

J. Mark Shields

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