

# Editorial Address

**A**rc has much to celebrate this 2022–2023 academic year. This year marks, not only our migration to an open-access digital platform, but also fifty years of *Arc* and seventy-five years of the School of Religious Studies (SRS), formerly the Faculty of Religious Studies. The confluence of this move and these momentous anniversaries could not have been more fortuitous: as these anniversaries called us to reflect upon our history, the digitization of our archives provided us with the perfect opportunity to dig into this history in earnest.

Institutional history can be a fickle and slippery thing, especially when you are dealing with a publication that dealt exclusively in paper for the first thirty or so years of its existence. Paper fades, gets moved, lost, filed and forgotten about, and – almost inevitably – meets its end in the recycling bin. Moreover, while the history of bigger institutions – such as the SRS – tends to get recorded,<sup>1</sup> to be more immediately understood as having posterior significance, this is not always so with smaller institutions, which often, as in the case of *Arc*, don't understand themselves to have earned the status of “institution” to begin with. But with fifty years under its belt, *Arc* is indeed best referred to as an institution, indeed deserving of a bit of historical reflection.

In this address we would like to share some of this history, and, in commemoration of the happy confluence of anniversaries noted above, will follow this introduction with a Director's Address

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1. See H. Keith Markell, *The Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University: 1948–1978* (Montreal: Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill university, 1978), [https://www.mcgill.ca/religiousstudies/files/religiousstudies/markell\\_history\\_of\\_frs.pdf](https://www.mcgill.ca/religiousstudies/files/religiousstudies/markell_history_of_frs.pdf).

celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the SRS.<sup>2</sup>

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*Arc* – then stylized ARC<sup>3</sup> – was established in 1973 by founding editors Robert C. Culley (1932–2013), Joseph C. McLelland (1925–2016), Peter Richardson (1935–), and Art van Seters (1934–2011). It was denominational (Presbyterian), aimed at a ministerial audience, and sought to provide “stimulus” to the “average working minister.”<sup>4</sup> It had three sections – biblical (edited by Richardson), pastoral (van Seters), and theological (McLelland) – and, rather ambitiously, sought to publish quarterly, a practice maintained for three years (1973–1976) before moving to a biannual publication in 1977 and an annual publication in 1990. (Lest the reader think we’ve been getting lazy over the years, it should be noted that while the issues published quarterly ran between 12–20 pages per number, from 1990 onwards they have averaged between 150–200 pages, with the *Festschrift* for Frederick Wisse clocking in at an impressive 540 pages!).

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2. The historical retrospective that follows would not have been possible without the help of Arvind Sharma. Professor Sharma has been a part of *Arc*’s history since his first visiting professorship at McGill during the 1983–1984 academic year (he officially joined the Faculty in 1987), as a contributor, editorial committee member, and the driving force behind *Arc*’s merger with *Religious Traditions*, the journal he co-founded with Ian Kesarcodi-Watson in 1978. Professor Sharma was kind enough to provide us with a brief history of the major developments *Arc* has undergone during its fifty-year history, which we have further researched through our archives and fleshed out here.

3. *Arc* was stylized as either ARC or ARC from 1973 until 2009. In 2010, rather inexplicably, it began to be stylized as *Arc*, a stylization that has since been retained. For the sake of consistency, we have opted to refer to *Arc* throughout using the present style, save quotations.

4. Part of that stimulus, as readers who explore our archives will see, was comical, with the first three volumes of *Arc* containing highly entertaining parody pieces.

While the first five years of *Arc* largely kept to the orientation initiated by its founding editors, by 1978 we can begin to see the tides of change. As McLelland, by then Faculty Dean, writes in his introduction to vol. 6, no. 1 – an issue dedicated to celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of the Faculty – “our Faculty has come of age.” What he is referring to is a rather momentous shift in the Faculty’s history: the shift from Divinity to Religious Studies. “In 1978 [...] we have a phenomenon undreamt of in 1948 [...]: the academic study of religion as a subject intended for others than ordinands.” In subsequent volumes we see this shift reflected in *Arc*, which slowly began to move away from its explicitly Christian roots to become a forum for discussions reflecting the traditional and methodological diversity of the modern discipline of Religious Studies. Christian theological and biblical perspectives were now published alongside works on ancient *sutras* and sociological commentary.

Throughout the course of the 1980s, *Arc*’s output was prolific: in addition to keeping with its biannual publication schedule, *Arc* also published four “supplements,” edited volumes comprised of conference papers presented at various McGill symposia.<sup>5</sup> In 1990 *Arc* took on its first title change, officially becoming “ARC: The Journal of the Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University.” This title remained until McGill’s Faculty of Religious Studies became its School of Religious Studies in 2016, at which point “ARC: The Journal of the Faculty of Religious Studies” became “*Arc*: The

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5. They are as follows: *Encounters with Luther: Papers from the 1983 McGill Luther Symposium* (1984); *Huldrych Zwingli, 1484–1531: A Legacy of Radical Reform: Papers from the 1984 International Zwingli Symposium, McGill University* (1985); *In Honour of John Calvin, 1509–1564: Papers from the 1986 International Calvin Symposium, McGill University* (1987); *Truth and Tolerance: Papers from the 1989 International Symposium on Truth and Tolerance, McGill University* (1990). All were edited by Edward J. Furcha (1935–1997), former Professor of Ecclesiastical history at McGill.

Journal of the School of Religious Studies.”<sup>6</sup> 1990 was also the year, we are told in the front matter of all volumes published since 1990, that *Arc* was restructured into a formal scholarly journal.

Despite our best efforts, we remain somewhat in the dark about what exactly this means. While it is clear that early volumes of *Arc* were not peer-reviewed, throughout the 1980s *Arc* became less ministerial and more scholarly, and thus began to publish pieces that read as sound scholarship – were none of these articles peer reviewed? Or was it simply that the peer review occurred in a more informal manner than desired for a publication wishing to become indexed in academic data bases? Unfortunately, we have not been able to answer these questions with any certainty. However, we hope that the ambiguity surrounding the peer review status of our pre-1990 volumes won’t stop readers from combing through these archives and enjoying them as much as we have.

Also of note is *Arc*’s 1998 merger with *Religious Traditions: A Journal of the Study of Religion* (ISSN 0156-1650), founded in 1978 by Arvind Sharma, then at the University of Queensland, and the late Ian Kesarcodi-Watson (1938–1984) of La Trobe University. Information on the details of this merger is sparse, but through it *Arc* gained *Religious Traditions*’ subscribers and a new team of editorial advisors and consultants.

The final shift that must be noted in this abridged history is the most current: our migration to an open-access digital platform. When we took over *Arc* in 2019, its proud legacy threatened to be forgotten. The world had become fully digital, but *Arc* was still decidedly analogue, producing paper volumes that got shipped to a

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6. Readers with a keen eye might note that our 2015 volume bears the name “*Arc: The Journal of the School of Religious Studies*” – while we would like to attribute this to the prescience of *Arc*’s then-current editors, alas we cannot. That volume was simply a few months behind schedule, only going to print in the Spring of 2016 after the change had been announced.

dwindling number of print subscribers. *Arc*'s only online presence was mediated by a paywall, and, in an age where "online visibility" rules, authors began to hesitate to submit to a venue where their published article wouldn't come up in a Google search.

Although the situation seemed to be looking rather grim, a glimmer of hope emerged on the horizon. We learned that the McGill University Library, in an effort to support open access publishing, had launched an initiative to host an open access journal platform. Under this initiative members of the McGill community could, with the assistance of a team of dedicated librarians, either create a new open access journal or migrate a pre-existing journal to the new open access platform.

The decision was easy. Not only would the migration to open-access solve *Arc*'s online visibility problems and open up new funding opportunities, in a context where granting agencies are increasingly specifying (and for good reason) that funded research must be published in open-access venues, it was clear that these venues represent the future of academic publishing. We are happy to report that *Arc* is now fully open-access, fully digital, and almost fully archived – while our full peer reviewed catalogue (1990–2022) is now accessible online, our historical archives and supplements will follow in the 2023–2024 academic year.

For those more interested in historical marginalia, a burning question still remains: Wherefore *Arc*? Why this particular moniker? In 2000, then-editor James Mark Shields writes "the name *ARC* has been a matter of some disputation for almost a decade now: wither its origins? Should it be retained? And, most pressingly, *what does it mean?* The short answer to the last question is simple: no one knows. The original intention behind the naming process is lost in the mists of time (it was, after, all the 1970s)." Going on to speculate, he writes

It could have been short for the suitably spiritual, yet non-exclusivist ‘arc of the heavens,’ [...] some have whimsically suggested a link to the Maid of Orléans (and thus a covert Catholic undercurrent to our work), others an analogy with the all-encompassing boat of Noah [...].

Our resident philosophers raise the potential link to the so-called ‘hermeneutical arc’ which informs much contemporary interpretation, while more pragmatic (and prosaic) types insist that it simply means ‘Annual Religious Criticism.’ Personally, I feel the best answer may still be the first: no one knows.

Shields’ bold proclamation – “no one knows” – was clearly viewed as a challenge by his successor Philip L. Tite, who, by the next volume, had made the pilgrimage to the McLennan Library to search deep in the stacks for the holy grail that promised answers: *Arc* vol. 1, no. 1.<sup>7</sup>

According to the founding editors, the moniker “Arc” was chosen for its rich polyvalence. It recalls “the biblical idea of *covenant*, a partnership involving two parties in mutual interaction.” “That two-way encounter,” they continue, “created a space in between [an Arc], cleared for action and pregnant with possibilities.” Arc also calls to mind the *parabola*: “when Jesus taught in parables he was using a familiar device, throwing one thing alongside another (para-ballo) so that a comparison and contrast could generate a new idea, an insight or revelation.” Finally, they note a “more modern”

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7. We would be remiss not to note that Shields can hardly be blamed for not knowing the volume was catalogued. We ourselves had a hard time tracking it down, despite our access to a much-more modern interface for searching the library catalogue. For some reason, a simple search for “ARC: The Journal of the Faculty of the Religious Studies” or “Arc: The Journal of the School of Religious Studies” yields nothing. One must enter in the print ISSN to locate the archived volumes, even those created before an ISSN was assigned.

sense of the term *Arc*: “the electrical spark that jumps from pole to pole because of the field of force we call energy.”

Reflecting on these comments, Tite writes “although the journal has moved away from its strictly Christian theological, indeed primarily confessional, roots to a more inclusive, academic study of various religious traditions, our founders’ dream of creating an intellectual *ARC* is still very much the distinctive nature of our journal. *ARC* strives to generate a ‘field of energy’ where a space is truly created for insightful research, pedagogical reflection, and engaged dialogue.” We believe these words still ring true in 2022.

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In the 1978 issue quoted from above, McLelland writes that anniversaries provide a good time to let “Janus be our Guide” and “ponder past and future.” “Looking both ways,” he writes, “is hard on the neck but good for the soul.” The theme for this fiftieth anniversary volume – “Looking Backward, Looking Forward” – follows McLelland’s Janusian impulse and offers a selection of articles that reflect on past conversations, present interventions, and the generative possibilities of both for the future. Opening the issue is Sydney Sheedy’s piece, which brings together ethnography and queer historiography to explore how the occult has come to be imagined as a kind of kin hermeneutic to queer politics. Next is Jonah Gelfand’s fascinating account of how liberal neo-Hasidic movements in America have managed to position themselves within a Hasidic lineage while simultaneously rejecting traditional Hasidic leadership models. Ndiaga Diop, writing in French, explores the notion of pluralism provided by the West African Sufi mystic Tierno Bokar. The following piece, co-authored by art education scholars Laurel Campbell, Jane E. Dalton, and Seymour Simmons III, argues for the future dividends of addressing spirituality in art education. The

penultimate article, authored by Mark Glouberman, offers a compelling, albeit rather subversive, argument: the biblical creation of the earth and humanity should not be understood through the category of exceptionalism, nor should the election of Israel as God's chosen people above all other nations. Closing the volume is Douglas Farrow's incisive piece, which illustrates how Agamben's work can be critically appropriated to advance our understanding of Pauline texts, Christian eschatology, and political theology more broadly.

In parting, we would like to express our many thanks to a number of people: our School Director, Garth Green, whose support for *Arc* during his tenure has been palpable, the members of our editorial committee, particularly Dan Cere, who helped us with the administrative navigation required for our digital migration, as well as Jennifer Lynn Innes, who, as the manager of the McGill Library's open access journal publishing program, has proved to be an invaluable resource as we learned how to navigate our new digital platform. Jessica Lang, who helped us modernize our author agreement and answer any and all copyright questions, must also be mentioned, as must Daniel Fishley, our book review editor. In parting there is one final person, who, although long since passed, also deserves our eternal thanks: Jean Philippe McLennan III (dates unknown), *Arc*'s first patron, without whom, we are often reminded in early issues, *Arc* might not be here today.

In honour of our first and most venerable patron, we have, below, decided to reprint the letter he wrote in *Arc*'s very first issue. The publication of this letter was one of the main conditions of his support, and reading it was one of the highlights of our archival explorations. We hope present readers enjoy it as much as we have.

Thank you for your continued support and interest in *Arc*,

– Elyse MacLeod & Amanda Rosini

## A Letter from A Patron and Sponsor<sup>8</sup>

My dear editors, friends, and readers of *Arc*:

Without doubt you are asking yourselves a question. Why should I, Jean Philip McLennan III, a francophone and a catholic (small “c”), undertake to support this modest publishing venture which is being edited by four members of some tiny and obscure religious group about which I know little, understand less, and (to be very frank) care nothing? That, my good friends, is a question which often returns to haunt me late at night when sleep is denied me due to a recurring gastric disorder too delicate to be described in these pages. (Too much good food, my friends—one pays a price).

But to return to the question. How came my support? Well, these four gentlemen, your editors (journalists *manqué* so to speak) arrived on my doorstep late one evening to seek help. I was their last hope. They had approached every Presbyterian businessman of some importance (and a few of no importance) in Greater Montreal in search of a pitifully small amount of capital needed to launch their venture. They had been turned down flat by every last person they approached and in many cases actually driven out with words found only in modern novels and student newspapers. They had come to me because of my rather tenuous connection with this particular religious group to which they adhere. My great-grandfather was a Scottish Presbyterian, alas long dead but still on the role of a small Presbyterian Church in the Townships as a member in good standing. (I still receive regularly copies of some journal called the *Presbyterian Record* addressed to him which incidentally I find extremely useful for stuffing cracks in the wall of my summer home).

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8. “A Letter from A Patron and Sponsor” *Arc* 1, no. 1 (1973): 9–10.

Well, what was I to do? Could I say no to these four haggard creatures standing on my doorstep? I am a kind man, generous to a fault, like my fathers before me. Anyway, this is not the first time our family has been afflicted by grasping Presbyterians eager to exploit even the slightest connection to further their cause. My dear Father allowed himself to be talked into a generous donation to something called *Presbyterian Comment* which I still receive but decline to describe the use to which I put it. And so I offered my four editors a gift of some shares in my munitions and small arms factory. They began to look ill and politely refused the gift. I perceived that I may have offended some deeply entrenched scruple. Perhaps they were worried about the use to which my guns and explosives were put? I hastened to explain that I sold to all parties, right or left, Maoist guerilla or fascist colonel. No discrimination was practised. But our four gentlemen still declined the gift.

There was one other possibility. I own another company, the English Ladies Genuine Whalebone Corset Company Ltd., and I offered them a gift of a few shares in this company if they can produce one hundred subscriptions. However, to be frank, this is not as generous as it may sound. The demand for genuine whalebone corsets has not been great in recent years. Nevertheless, the odd order from portly clergymen is just enough to keep the business from bankruptcy. I hasten to explain that these clergymen purchase our corsets to wear under their cassocks. It keeps the tummy in and brings to an end rude remarks from little boys about imminent blessed events and so on. All in all there should be enough return from the shares in my corset factory to float the Arc (if I may be permitted to put it this way—my irrepresible sense of humour).

But I must confess another reason for my generosity in supporting Arc. My dear mother, Jeanne, is directly descended from that brave young heroine burnt at the stake by the English, Jeanne d’Arc. Indeed, my dear mother still hides the matches when English

friends come to our home. And so, when I saw the title of this little venture, “*Arc*,” it was like a sign. Could it be that in some mysterious way these four anglophone gentlemen, perhaps even unconsciously, are seeking to do penance and make amends for the past? Could it be that they are resuming in some way the mission of that French girl long ago, picking up the torch so to speak? We can hope so. Perhaps they too hear voices. Let us hope that they find some measure of success for then my dear mother will no longer feel compelled to hide the matches when English visit.

Most respectfully,  
Jean Philippe McLennan, III<sup>9</sup>

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9. As noted above, early volumes of *Arc* took pleasure in including fun parody articles, some attributed to fictional persons. We haven’t been able to determine with any certainty whether Jean Philippe McLennan III falls into this category, and thus choose to believe that he was a real person and sponsor, one who, as a “catholic (small ‘c’)” and francophone, delighted in the opportunity to undertake some English protestant lampooning. We will let readers form their own opinions.