

As the co-head of Athena's Circle, the Pagan students' organization on campus, I've been very conscious of the religious climate on campus, especially over this past semester. Our group has almost tripled in size from last year, and apparently so have some sentiments against it—there were several posters inviting the community to our meetings that were torn down, and a few of our members have been approached by members of other religious groups and targeted as needing to “change.” While as a whole the Bryn Mawr community has been hugely welcoming and hasn't made a big deal of our presence, I wanted to take this time to publicly dispel some myths about who the members of Athena's Circle are and what we do.

First of all, we aren't a coven. Most of us don't identify as Wiccan. Many of us identify as eclectic (basically, we incorporate parts of established traditions or paths we find meaningful to create a unique, individual path). Some of us have more specific paths, some are still seeking; some of us are Jews, some of us are Christians, and some of us are transitioning from one faith to another or trying to find a happy middle ground between two faiths. Some of us are accepted within our families and communities, and some of us aren't. I would almost hesitate to call us a religious group; we're more of a spiritual discussion group which focuses on Pagan paths. We're also, in great part, a “good energy” support group for one another; an alternate family in which we all participate in rituals to empower us during times of celebration or need.

We don't practice Satanism, we don't howl at the moon, and we don't “curse” people. Pentacles aren't a sign of the Devil; they symbolize the elements of earth, air, fire, water, and the Divine/spirit. Most Pagans believe in the Wiccan rule of three: whatever you do comes back to you threefold, and therefore it's to your advantage to only perform positive acts. Some of us pray, some of us meditate, some of us believe in a God or a Goddess, or several Gods and Goddesses. Some of us don't believe in a higher power. Our rituals are created by us, for us; we don't have a set “religious service” and we don't always have a ritual during our weekly meeting. Our rituals include dancing, sharing our emotions—whether joy or

I'm a deeply religious agnostic Unitarian Universalist, believing in the interconnected web of all existence and the equality of all people. My faith shapes every part of my life as it directs me to find my own path, seek justice, and keep my mind and heart open. On a rational level I may not always believe that the world can get better, but on a spiritual level I keep that hope eternally aflame.

Spirituality and religion have enormous power both for individuals and for the shaping of the world we share. Not merely accepting but embracing the diversity of life, people and ideas that form our world is both increasingly important and increasingly difficult. Religion can be one path to that openness, and it is a path that I hope to continue to follow.

—caitlin cotter '08

If I may be frank for a moment, I'd like to say that I have issues with religion. I have issues with the fact that when my best friend came out to me that he was bisexual, he confessed that he had spent years hating himself for his “immoral” thoughts that would never be accepted by his Catholic family. I have issues with the reality that our President uses God's name to justify fighting a crusade against the Islamic world while

grief—, and channeling positive energy both to our group and to the campus as a whole.

We are probably less understood than many religious groups simply because so few people even know what Paganism, Wicca, Shamanism, and all of those “minority” faiths entail, but we're here, and despite the undercurrent of animosity that some of us have encountered, we aren't planning on going anywhere. :) We would all like to extend an invitation to the community to open a dialogue with us: come to one of our meetings, get to know a Pagan in your class, or just write an e-mail to one of us (our information is on the Student Organizations website). We welcome everyone and anyone who genuinely wants to know more; we don't believe in evangelism, so don't worry, we won't try to turn you into a witch.

Bright blessings for Fall Break and all the upcoming holidays!

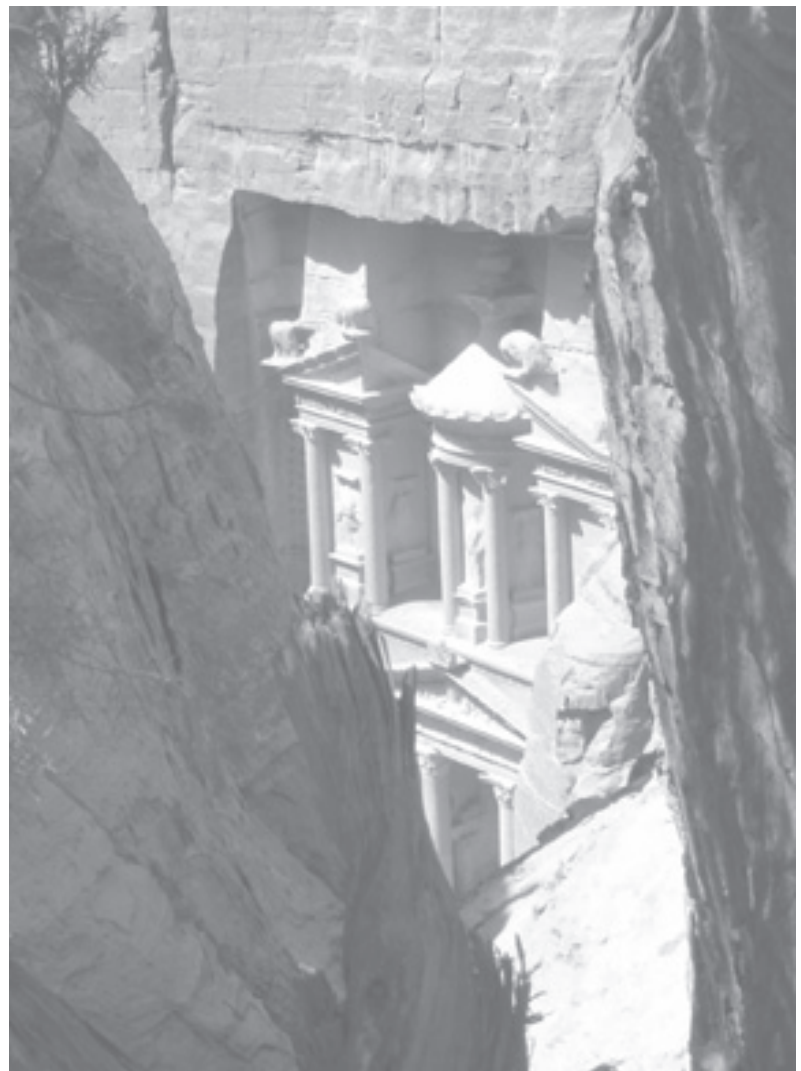
—magda michalak '06

simultaneously Al Qaeda uses Allah's name to justify waging a jihad against the Western world. I have issues with people who decide it's acceptable to stop thinking for themselves, and instead blindly follow anything and everything a religion tells them, regardless of science, logic, or rationality. I have issues with those who exploit religion for their own agenda, who use obscure references in Holy Scriptures in order

to validate hurting or discriminating against others. But as I think about all of this honestly, I realize that I don't have issues with religion because I deeply respect and admire the overriding, beautiful messages of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Quakerism, and many others that emphasize love above all else in this world. I guess what I really have issues with is people.

—aly honsa '09

s p i r i t



I'm Unitarian Universalist. I wish there were a Unitarian group on campus, but the one we had (bUUs) had to close because my friend and I were too busy with our other clubs to run it. I suspect there are more Unitarian students at Bryn Mawr hiding behind their studies; maybe it's true that college is the time to put religion aside. I wish I didn't have to put it aside, but I don't have time to run another club and go into Philadelphia every Sunday! For now my reflections on my religion stay in my own head. Instead of celebrating it through services, I celebrate on it when I interact with others. I guess that's another way of being Unitarian.

—lucy edwards '08