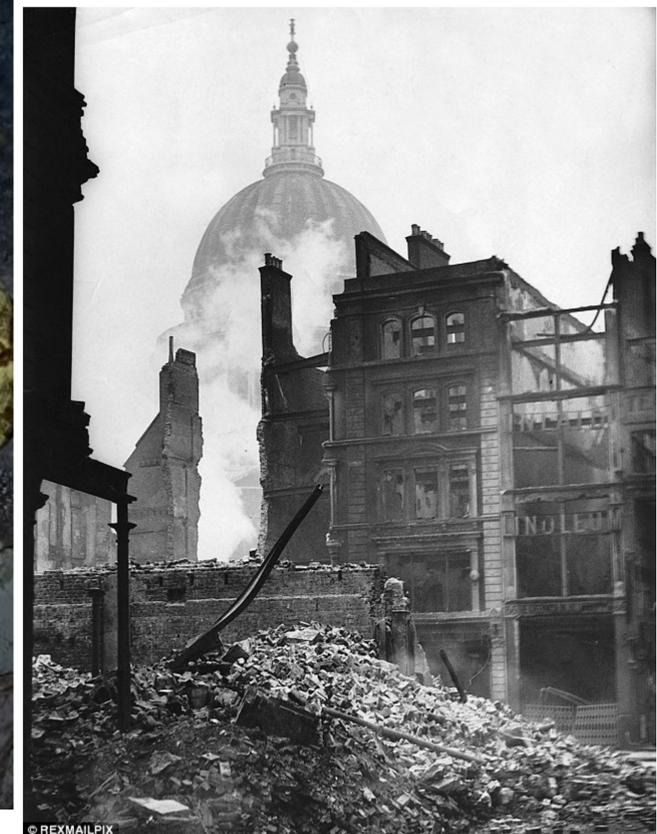
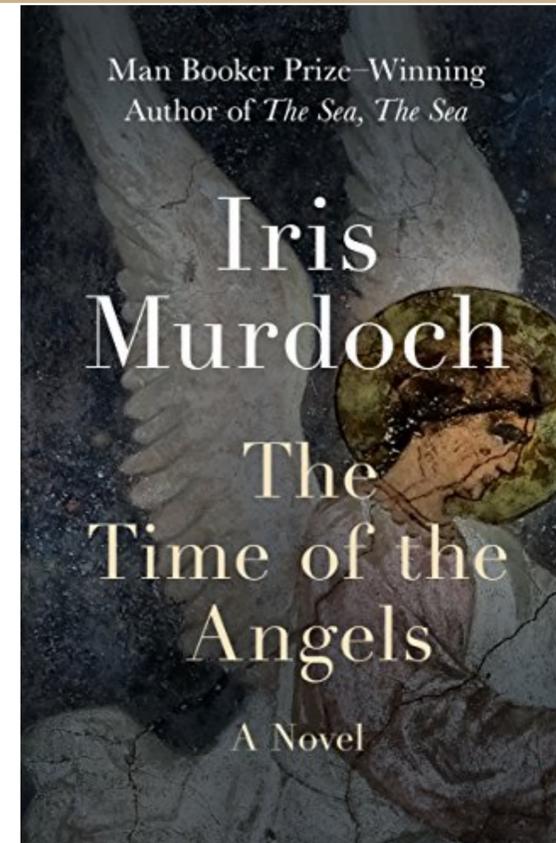


Faith and Secular Morality in Iris Murdoch's *The Time of the Angels* (1966)

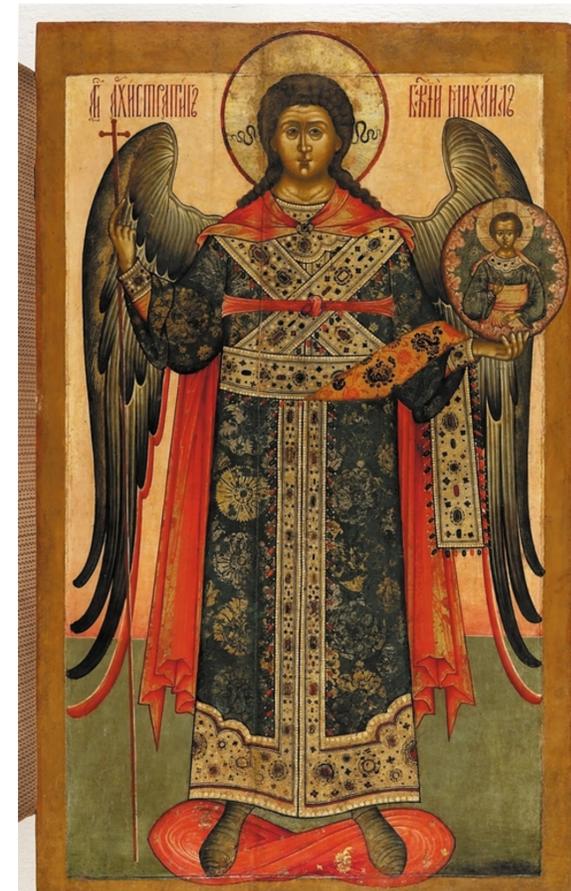
Farisa Khalid, Ph.D. student, English Department

Abstract: “Can there be a good religious way of life without supernatural beliefs?” Iris Murdoch poses this question to her readers in her philosophic treatise, *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970). Can individuals be moral citizens without relying on the idea of God? Is mysticism a necessary prerequisite for the cultivation of moral imperatives? Murdoch's theories into the nature of morality and rationality were fitting for her historical moment: postwar Britain haunted by the trauma of the Blitz and experiencing the Cold War threat of nuclear proliferation. In her tenth novel, *The Time of the Angels* (1966), Murdoch explores the idea of institutionalized religion within a quasi-dystopian world. Carel Fisher, the rector of a bombed-out Christopher Wren-designed church in London, suffers from spiritual doubts. Through the spiritual and emotional dilemmas of Carel Fisher and his younger brother Marcus, a philosopher who is writing a book on humanistic atheism, Murdoch examines the nature of postwar disillusionment with organized religion. A significant character in the novel is Eugene Peshkov, a Russian refugee who is Carel's handyman. Much of the action of the novel centers around Eugene Peshkov's family heirloom, a Russian icon. Murdoch's use of nineteenth-century novelistic traditions, her re-appropriation of gothic tropes, and her interweaving of Russian characters and themes within the novel enable her to compare cultural attitudes towards art and literature within a Cold War setting. In this paper, I hope to explore how Iris Murdoch contends with ontological and ethical themes within the capacious art form of the novel.

*Paper to be presented at the Northeast Modern Language Association Conference on April 13, 2018



Ruins of a smoldering building outside of St. Paul's cathedral in London, 1940 (Photo: *The Daily Mail*)



Left: Archangel Michael, eighteenth century, tempera on wood panel, Yaroslavl Art Museum



Right: Iris Murdoch, photographed sometime in the mid-1960s