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From the Editorial Desk

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Introduction

For this inaugural issue of the *International Journal of Religion* the editorial team sought to gather an array of papers that demonstrate substantive engagement with the questions of religious dissent as a political endeavor within and beyond religious frameworks. We solicited essays that would probe the following areas of study: historical and contemporary elasticities of religious traditions; internal tensions regarding the boundaries of acceptable belief and practice; the management and ethical treatment of dissent within particular religious traditions; whether religious faiths prescribe clear ways to manage dissent; religious reactions to dissent from feminist and queer activists; and reflections on the broader consequences of dissent in the political sphere. The papers assembled in this first issue have exceeded our expectations.

Although often understood as a compartmentalized element of one's personal cultural assemblage, religion is immanently a political enterprise. Power, exercised over and by persons, lies at the core of religious concerns. Dissent is a response to power and to the structural apparatuses that substantiate that which passes as the *status quo* in political and religious arenas. Acting in particular times and places, the bodies of religious practitioners are thus sites of political and religious negotiation. Inasmuch, dissent is not simply a rejection of normativity, but rather a strategic set of subversive responses to entrenched ways of being or knowing. In the forms of thought and action, dissenters can simultaneously utilise and undermine the hierarchies promoting particular ontologies and epistemologies. Investigating the confluence of agency, power, and identity leads the discussion into the realms of ethics, where we inquire what humans can or ought to do with their bodies as instruments of dissent.

Within religions, we observe acts that contest belief and praxis. Internal debates regarding access to superhuman power(s), structures of leadership and power, as well as over different registers of religiosity create flashpoints. In such contexts, dissent is a means of initiating and negotiating conflict. In considering the increasing global reach of religious institutions, we also note that local and international systems of influence can be proactively and reactively constructed to inspire or maintain cultural and political homogeneity; leading to new forms of dissent. Beyond the realms of internal debate, we observe the extension and negotiation of religious identities in other parts of the public sphere, through activism, electoral processes, and even violent contestation.

From the fundamental need to answer questions of who gets to identify actors as dissidents—and what kinds of baggage such a label might carry—to discussion of the internal and external dimensions of dissent, the papers of this issue showcase the embodied intersectionality of dissent across different

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scales of analysis. The authors represent a range of methodological approaches, including historical reflection, ethnographic analysis, international relations, political analysis, gender studies, and textual studies. Together, they attend to the dynamics of dissent in kaleidoscopic form, with essays that serendipitously overlap and illuminate one another.

The issue begins with Ronald Hatzenbuehler's essay, which takes up the topics of religious ethics and political choice. Hatzenbuehler investigates historical voting patterns as a form of dissent among lay adherents in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. His analysis captures an historical moment while also providing a cipher to interpret present-day political decision-making among LDS voters. Hendrik Johannemann continues the conversation with his examination of gender, sexuality, and internal religious dissent among South Korean Protestants. Johannemann identifies patterns of enemy-creation among anti- and pro-LGBT religious activists, demonstrating the power of "internal enemy" constructs in interreligious discussions of sexual identity and ethics. Luca Ozanno and Fabio Bolzoni's paper investigates dissent at the junctures of right-wing populism and LGBTQ+ rights in France and Italy. Their inquiry leads them to ask how discussions of religious dissent factor into the appropriation of religion by political parties.

T. Sultan Tepe's contribution to the issue elucidates the power of influence that political systems—namely, the U.S. court system—wield over public perceptions of religion. In her case study of the Nation of Islam, Tepe reveals how the intersection of race, religion, and politics inform notions of religious authenticity and reactions to particular religious identities in the public square. She also demonstrates how compensatory responses to these external pressures drive internal religious change. In her exploration of the boundaries of Islamic identity and practice in the Maldives, La Toya Waha centers her inquiry on tensions between historically normative religious forms and state-sponsored religious influences within and beyond the borders of the nation state. Waha's exploration of political Islam in the Maldives wrestles with questions of compatibility between democratic and Islamic ways of life. In line with Waha's investigation, Ahmet Kuru revisits the topic of freedom of religious dissent in Muslim majority countries. His paper offers a fresh interpretation in a long-standing discussion regarding the religion-state nexus in both Islam and Christianity and challenges entrenched assumptions of an essential connection between Islam and the State.

Nil Mutluer's analysis of ethnographic data gathered from a number of Muslim German Turkish communities illuminates processes of identity negotiation, religio-political alliances, and dissent among transnational communities. Her methodology centers reflexivity and feminist-critical discourse analysis, according to which Mutluer tracks shifts in perceptions and enactments of religious dissent at various scales of social engagement. Questions of internal tension and external influence are also taken up by Jed Forman, who offers a diachronic exploration of Buddhist spiritual epistemologies and dissenting opinions regarding access to religious knowledge. Continuing in a related epistemological vein, Nerida Bullock surveys the overlapping landscapes of emic/etic and authorised/ unauthorised religious narratives related to practices and prohibitions of polygamy within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The issue concludes with Hayim Katsman's essay, which presents diachronic processes of religious change in the State of Israel while discussing the contours of religious dissent in contexts of Israeli internal migration. In doing so, he offers insight on the ways modern-Orthodox communities settling in the northern Negev are reformulating understandings of rabbinic authority.



It is with a spirit of gratitude for each author's contribution that we present their work to readers. Our hope is that this robust conversation on dissent will be the first of many as IJOR looks to the future.

On behalf of the IJOR Editorial Board,

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Assistant Editor