

FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Axel M. Oaks Takacs

I craft this editorial introduction just under a week before my spring semester begins. Many of our readers may likewise be recovering from their winter breaks and gearing up for the semester. Reading through this issue has allowed my mind and body to focus on the details of editorial work, giving me a respite from other academic tasks before returning to them refreshed and renewed. Our editorial team already has two other issues lined up for 2025, evidence that the *Journal of Interreligious Studies* is functioning as a dynamic space to share research and pedagogies related to interreligious/interfaith studies and its adjacent disciplines.

Issue 44 is rolling submissions issue comprising five peer-reviewed articles, six book reviews, and one book review essay.

In “Practices, Beliefs, and Identities: Muslim Immigrants’ Acculturation in the Southeastern United States,” Kylee Smith and David J. Marshall explore the experiences of Muslim immigrants in the culturally Christian and politically secular southeastern United States, focusing on how interreligious and intercultural encounters shape their religious practices, beliefs, and identities. Their study highlights a dual reality where positive interactions based on shared values coexist with Islamophobic discrimination, prompting many Muslim immigrants to engage in self-reflection and deepen their faith. The mosque emerges as a vital hub for worship, community, and intercultural exchange, fostering a stronger emphasis on religious identity amidst these encounters.

Halil Avci’s article, “Christian-Muslim Relations after the ‘A Common Word’ Initiative of 2007: Towards a Muslim Self-Understanding in Relation to Christianity,” examines how Islamic theology navigates interreligious dialogue with Christianity. Using the 2007 “A Common Word Between Us and You” initiative as a case study, the paper highlights the importance of reciprocal and dynamic engagement in addressing religious diversity. Avci emphasizes the need for a dialogical framework that balances interreligious and intra-religious considerations.

Najib George Awad's article, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus' within the Framework of Interreligious Relations in the Middle East," examines how 20th-century Arab Christian and Muslim authors engaged with the historical Jesus through the lens of historical criticism. Despite resistance to this scholarly method within institutional Christian and Muslim theology, Awad analyzes four key discourses—two Christian and two Muslim—that reflect a contextual and non-Western approach to understanding Jesus. This study offers a comparative and interreligious framework for understanding how Arab Middle Eastern scholars reinterpreted Jesus (ʿĪsā al-Masīḥ) for contemporary audiences using innovative and controversial methods.

In "The Logic of Religion? A Critique of Hans Küng's Philosophy of the Dialogue of Religions," Daniel Pratt Morris-Chapman challenges Hans Küng's framework for understanding the essence of the Abrahamic faiths. The author proposes an alternative method rooted in the Aristotelian principle of "epistemic fit," which uncovers the intrinsic logic of religious traditions to highlight parallels between them. This approach is contrasted with Küng's global ethic framework, offering a fresh perspective on interreligious dialogue through an inductive examination of religious systems.

Finally, Madelyn Starr's article, "Material Memories: Narratives of the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict," is timely and significant, given the ongoing violence in Gaza, Palestine, and Israel. Starr explores how historical memory and material culture shape the everyday experiences of structural violence and resistance in Israel/Palestine. Based on extensive interviews and participant observation, the study examines how Israelis and Palestinians use objects and images as "material memories" to reconstruct the past and navigate mutual distrust and tension. These memories both reinforce cycles of violence and serve as tools for resistance against violence, occupation, and dehumanization.

These five articles are followed by six book reviews:

- *Religious Diversity in Contemporary Shi'i Thought: The Views of Ayatollah Abdullah Jawadi-Amoli and Professor Mahmoud Ayoub*, by Saeid Sobhani, reviewed by R. David Coolidge
- *Decolonizing Palestine: The Land, the People, the Bible*, by Mitri Raheb, reviewed by David J. (Sandy) Marshall
- *Christian Perspectives on Transforming Interreligious Encounter: Essays in Honor of Leo D. Lefebure*, edited by Peter C. Phan and Anh Q. Tran, reviewed by Peter Admirand

- *A Christian-Muslim Comparative Theology of Saints: The Community of God's Friends*, by Hans A. Harmakaputra, reviewed by Charles Tieszen
- *The Religious Dimensions of Shared Space: When and How Religion Matters in Space-Sharing Arrangements*, by Paul D. Numrich, reviewed by Kevin McCarty
- *A Global Racial Enemy: Muslims and 21st-Century Racism*, by Saher Selod, Inaash Islam, and Steve Garner, reviewed by Valeria Vergani

The issue closes with a book review essay by Steven Jacobs reflecting on two of Mark Juergensmeyer's books: *When God Stops Fighting: How Religious Violence Ends* and *God at War: A Meditation on Religion and Warfare*.

As usual, I remain grateful to our Senior Editor, Lucinda Mosher, for her work copyediting this issue and editing our book reviews, as well as to Sze-Long Aaron Wong, our Research Fellow, for his work managing book reviews and executing production and layout for the issue.

I hope you enjoy this issue and find it intellectually stimulating and insightful. Thank you for your continued support and interest in the *Journal of Interreligious Studies*.

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