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# Lived Religion and Lived (In)Tolerance

Srdjan Sremac and R. Ruard Ganzevoort

Once long ago G.K. Chesterton boldly declared: “Tolerance (or what he generally termed ‘impartiality’) is the virtue of the man without convictions.” In a similar manner he described modern tolerance as a tyranny (Chesterton 1908, p. 25). Contemporary theorists use similar discourse in describing tolerance. Building on Marcuse’s notion of “repressive tolerance,” Žižek (2008) sees tolerance as an ideological category and “post-political ersatz.” Other theorists argue that our modern society has gone “beyond toleration” (Stepan and Taylor 2014). Habermas (2003, p. 3), for example, considers tolerance as a foundation of liberal political culture. It seems that liberal and secular democracies need more than ever a serious reconsideration of the concept and everyday practice of tolerance as a response to the new models of intolerance, social exclusion, and religious violence. A critical discourse on toleration and tolerance

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seems to have a particular weight in the context of political secularism and religion.<sup>1</sup> There has been an acceleration of interest in the relationship between religion, (in)tolerance and politics in modern societies. Numerous cases of contemporary debates in our multicultural and multi-religious societies are perceived as problems of intolerance—the present waves of Islamophobia, anti-migration sentiments, religiously inspired terrorism, blasphemy and free speech debates, various forms of religious and ethnic nationalism, racist and discriminatory behavior towards minorities, conflicts about religion and sexual diversity—these are just some of them. The question of tolerance and religion addresses some of the most challenging and persistent features of peaceful and equal coexistence in the world “risk society.”

In today’s world fueled with faith-based—or at least faith-legitimated—violence, tolerance and religion become deeply contested notions and profoundly important aspects of societal and political life. The politics of (in)tolerance become a public and often political and/or religious platform that contributes to the production and construction of people’s identities and belonging in highly charged political contexts. The topics of lived religion and lived (in)tolerance are thus immensely relevant both from a societal and an academic perspective. Accordingly, the notions of tolerance and intolerance have become increasingly prominent among philosophers, religious scholars, and political theorists. Religious arguments are often instrumental and conflicting boundary markers in political discursive spaces regarding sexuality (Sremac and Ganzevoort 2015; Young et al. 2015), nation-based religious intolerance (Grigoriadis 2013; Geyer and Lehmann 2004; Juergensmeyer 2008; Strenski 2010; Djupe 2015), race (Price 1999), and ethnicity (Claire 2006; Rogobete 2009).

Building on constructionist interpretations of religion, this volume investigates the complexities, negotiations, performances, and identity configurations of lived religion and the strategic use of (in)tolerance at a micro-level. The dynamics of tolerance and intolerance, exclusion, violence, and persecution or reconciliation and mutual understanding are pertinent cases for this investigation. The concept of lived religion can

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<sup>1</sup> Here we distinguish the term “tolerance” as a form of practices from “toleration” as the legal act (see Habermas 2003).

help us to understand religious practices (taken broadly) in complex cultural constellations and their connection to the politics of (in)tolerance. It will also allow us to better comprehend the micro-politics and aspects of religio-political identity configuration in the public space.

*Lived Religion and the Politics of (In)Tolerance* carefully analyzes and critically investigates the ways in which lived religion encourages and contributes to conflicts,<sup>2</sup> as well as fosters tolerance, in the interlocking rural, urban, and virtual social spheres. It intends to address some of the shortcomings in analyses of the relationship between lived religion and societal challenges and, theoretically (and empirically) offers a more nuanced understanding of the micro-politics of (in)tolerance and its connection to lived religion. Unlike other studies that have focused on institutionalized forms of the intersection between religion and the politics of (in)tolerance, the contributors in this volume consider how communities and individuals are able to articulate their everyday religious expression and practice at the micro-level of experience that effects meaning, power, and identity construction. In other words, we try to understand the ways in which people turn their religious values, norms, attitudes, stories, and experiences into everyday social and political actions. Against critics who often argue that the study of lived religion is politically irrelevant and preoccupied with intimate, domestic, or private spaces, this volume aims to explore the logic and forms of (in)tolerance in different cultural, religious, and political contexts and to investigate the ways in which lived religion and lived (in)tolerance are articulated, perceived, and performed in the realm of the political and the everyday. We focus on online and offline settings and on rural and urban contexts.

What are the limits of tolerance when it comes to religion? What are the emerging meanings of the concepts of tolerance and intolerance in ordinary/lived discourses? What are the ways in which cultures of (in)tolerance are sustained or spread through social media? What are the urban (multicultural) and rural shapes of religious identity and (in)tolerance? What is the role of lived religion in between public and private

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<sup>2</sup>This volume emerged from an international research network sponsored by The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) under the title *Transforming Religious Identities and Communities at the Intersections of the Rural, the Urban, and the Virtual*.

(in)tolerance? What are helpful and harmful aspects of lived religion in fostering lived (in)tolerance? Which shapes of lived religion are conducive and instrumental to violence and which shapes are supportive for tolerance? And how do lived religion and lived (in)tolerance intersect? These are questions we tried to answer in this volume.

## Lived Religion

In recent years, a framework for studying religion from the perspective of ordinary people covers a broad field of scientific discourses and gained popularity mostly within religious studies, (practical) theology, and social sciences in general. The very fact that the discussion on lived religion calls for both empirical reflection as well as conceptual clarification makes it an interesting area for multi- and interdisciplinary research.<sup>3</sup> Over the last decades the perspective of lived religion has emerged to remedy the shortcomings of earlier perspectives that approach religion as stable systems and that focus more on the official positions, traditions, creeds, and hierarchal structures (McGuire 2008; Maynard et al. 2010; Hall 1997; Talvacchia et al. 2015; Orsi 1985; Ammerman 2007, 2013; Tweed 1997; Ganzevoort and Roeland 2014; Streib et al. 2008; Dessing et al. 2004; Koepping 2008; Failing and Heimbrock 1998; Wanner 2012; Winston 2009). Taking up “the lived impulse” provides a foundation for critical hermeneutical examinations and an empirical analysis of religious–spiritual practice and expression outside the doctrinal and liturgical theatre. However, recent developments in the study of lived religion emphasize the importance of lived religion not merely in individual everyday religious–spiritual practices and experiences (or what is called “privatized religion” or “non-affiliated spirituality”) but also in the articulation and unfolding of traditions (Talvacchia et al. 2015, p. 6). This includes dual focus on the macro (sociocultural) and micro (individual or private)

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<sup>3</sup> Streib et al. (2008, p. iv) argue that the very concept of lived religion “suggests to leave it to the people as to what they understand as religion.” Similarly, Beck (2010, p. 16) argues that religious individualization or what we call here lived religion is a highly ambivalent process, and this has to be understood and explained “not only by the conceptual fuzziness of theory but by the complex nature of the real world.”

levels of lived realities and lives of actors in concrete situations. In other words, lived religion as an empirical cultural hermeneutics aims to understand the everyday habitus of religious actors (“religion from below”) and forms of appropriations and negotiations of the repertoire people encounter in religious and cultural tradition. Nancy Ammerman (2014, p. 190) cautioned against emphasizing solely a privatized form of religion, stating: “[w]hat happens inside religious organizations counts, too. Those who wish to ‘de-center’ congregations and other traditional religious communities will miss a great deal of where religion is lived if those spaces are excluded from our research endeavor.” Orsi (1985, p. xix) forcefully claims that a rethinking of religion-as-lived as the specific forms of cultural work “directs attention to institutions *and* persons, texts *and* rituals, practice *and* theology, things *and* ideas,—all as media of making and unmaking worlds.” The “subjective piety” of the “everydayness” and institutional religiosity are not mutually exclusive but may well reinforce each other.

The study of lived religion as a fluid and multilayered practice takes its starting point in what people actually do, experience, desire, think, imagine, touch,<sup>4</sup> live, and share.<sup>5</sup> Religious studies scholars have deployed the conceptual framework of lived religion as a hermeneutical tool that provides new insights to the body, experience, space, imagination, meaning-making, private/public boundaries, relationships, everyday life, and biography (Streib et al. 2008). Building on Husserlian phenomenology, Heimbrock (2010, p. 169) has pointed out that the lived-religion approach opens up to a refreshed understanding of human (religious) behavior and an analysis of “the culturally shaped forms and symbolic representations of life in order to describe religious experience as rooted in ‘lived experience.’”<sup>6</sup> Adopting the general framework of everyday lived

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<sup>4</sup>The material/physical dimension of lived religion is often a neglected area of study. It is important to investigate religious/spiritual everyday practicing through, for example, doing, seeing, touching, tasting, and smelling. See Meyer’s (2014) material approach to religion.

<sup>5</sup>Orsi (2003, p. 174) points out that the study of lived religion is—in Jamesian terminology—the discipline of “radical empiricism.” It holds “the possibility of disentangling us from our normative agendas and defamiliarizing us in relation to culture.”

<sup>6</sup>In his phenomenological approach, Husserl tried to grasp an “original” lived experience and reach “the things itself” in its “pure manifestation.” Heimbrock has made major theoretical contributions to the understanding of lived religion.

religion as the ethnographic and hermeneutical background for understanding the performative dimensions of “religion-in-action” as it functions in people’s ordinary lives will serve a better understanding of the interface of (in)tolerance and religion and how they interact with each other on the level of meaning and power. In this way, the lived religion approach identifies how religious actors use and articulate their experiences of (in)tolerance with political, cultural, and social realities.

## Lived (In)Tolerance

The next step in constructing our theoretical and methodological framework is to make the connection to lived (in)tolerance. Tolerance itself is not a coherent entity. It is a multilayered and multidimensional conceptual variable. As Sudita Kavirak (2010, p. 339) argues, like religion, toleration/tolerance refers to a variety of institutional fields (and we would add a range of non-institutional fields), crossing “an ethical order, a social order, philosophical systems, political institutions.” Tolerance always involves power relations where “the powerful make decisions about how to tolerate the ‘intolerable’” (Barkley 2014). Or in the words of King (1971, p. 197): “A person will be said to be tolerant only where he has the power not to be tolerant.” This does not mean that only those with structural power positions can be (in)tolerant. Marginalized and minority groups can resort to violence or appeal to courts of justice and/or public opinion to fight what they consider to be intolerable (e.g. in debates about blasphemy or in the aggression against refugees). In these cases the struggle is first about developing the degree of power that is necessary to express and effectuate intolerance.

As a profoundly contested concept, tolerance can vary significantly from religious or secular postures (based on a different religious or secular discursive regimes) and its often complex doctrinal and/or ideological configurations and dimensions. Barkley (2014, p. 205) argues that toleration is “an organizational by-product of relations between public authorities and communities (or individuals) and relations between communities with regard to how to coexist, refrain from violence and persecution of the other, and ensure their livelihood.” In a similar vein, Katznelson (2014)

argues that if we want to assess toleration, we must do so in institutional contexts. Although we acknowledge the importance of institutional dimensions in (in)tolerance, this volume argues that we need to move beyond the institutional/social arrangements in order to understand the complexity of (in)toleration. We argue that (in)tolerance and its connection to religion cannot be fully understood unless analyzed from below, which means that the focus needs to be not *only* on public institutions or religio-political spaces but on (in)tolerance of ordinary people and their performativity, practices, and interests in non-institutionalized spaces. Focusing solely on institutions and social networks rather than individuals does not provide a complete account of the complexity. In the context of (in)tolerance, lived religion can be seen as a strategic-political performance of values taken to be sacred that connects the “everydayness” of ordinary people with the structural institutional relations and discursive regimes that provide context and meaning within which lived experience is performed, and which leads to (in)tolerance.

## The Structure of the Volume

The convergence of lived religion and lived (in)tolerance is highly context-dependent. The analyses in this volume are therefore explicitly framed in concrete social, national, and religious contexts. The case studies focus on nation-based religious intolerance, between religious and secular authorities in the context of minorities debates, between secular and religious paradigms of reconciliation, transitional justice, and so on. The volume is divided into two parts. The first part examines cases of lived religion fostering intolerance. The second part analyzes lived religion factors in fostering tolerance.

### Part I: Fostering Intolerance

To begin with, in “Paradigms of [In]Tolerance? On Sri Lanka’s Bodu Bala Sena, #prezpolls2015, and Transformative Dynamics of Lived Religion,” Chamindra Weerawardhana focuses on the evolving roles of



the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist movement in shaping and reshaping the politics of post-war Sri Lanka. Exploring the dynamics of state deployment of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism as a political tool to reinforce its power on the one hand, and outlining the ideological cleavages within the Sinhala-Buddhist establishment on the other, Weerawardhana demonstrates how the Buddhist clergy's political engagement has intensified in post-war Sri Lanka, to a level of active engagement with policy issues, bargaining, party politics, and coalition-building. Against a backdrop of ideological cleavages and differences in political allegiance, the chapter argues that the post-war Sinhala Buddhist establishment collectively plays a decisive role in shaping the politics of ethno-religious (in)tolerance, diminishing the prospects for inclusive political reform.

In "Notes on the Christian Battle to End the 'Abortion Holocaust,'" Katharina von Kellenbach elaborates on the rhetoric of genocide and Holocaust that increasingly permeates the campaign literature of the Christian pro-life movement, especially in the United States of America. Focusing on right-wing Christian websites with names such as "Genocide Awareness Project," "Babykaust.de," and "[abortionsurvivor.org](http://abortionsurvivor.org)," Kellenbach shows how the differences between mass murder and women's reproductive control are discursively erased. The chapter examines the appeal of this trope in constituting a Christian pro-life politics that is beginning to move from the extreme fringe into the mainstream. This makes the worldwide pro-life movement important for any ethical and political analysis of the politics of (in)tolerance.

Based in Northern Ireland's violent conflicts, "Lived Religion and the Intolerance of the Cross" deals with the hostility and intolerance behind the incident of "Harry McCartan's crucifixion," linking it to the wider context of sectarian intolerance and violence in Northern Ireland. David Tombs draws on this incident to reflect upon Roman crucifixions as even more extreme acts of theatrical violence and intolerance. Tombs argues that even though the cross is one of the most widely recognized symbols in the world, the reason that it was unspeakable is rarely examined, and the link between sexual violence and crucifixion is invariably omitted and evaded in Christian memory of the cross. The consequence of this amnesia—Tombs claims—is that the true scandal of the dehumanizing violence and intolerance of the cross is unlikely to impact on lived religion.

The extreme violence and intolerance of Roman crucifixions may be seen in the light of its link to sexual violence as an intolerance of life; an intolerance of memory; an intolerance of the victim's humanity and standing before God. Finally, Tombs asks how the dehumanizing violence of the cross might be more appropriately recognized and remembered in lived religion, and how might it empower action and advocacy against violence and social intolerance in Northern Ireland and other societies.

In "The Patriarch and the Pride: Discourse Analysis of the Online Public Response to the Serbian Orthodox Church Condemnation of the 2012 Gay Pride Parade," Dubravka Valić-Nedeljković, Ruard Ganzevoort, and Srdjan Sremac explore the complex field of lived religion, nationalism, sexual diversity, and intolerance by analyzing the online public responses to the Serbian Orthodox Church Patriarch Irinej's comments on the Belgrade Gay Pride Parade in 2012. The authors identify several discursive strategies found in the material and organize them in three main categories that highlight the content of the interactions: relational, linguistic, and argumentative strategies. This analysis thus highlights how online lived religion plays a part in furthering a public discourse of intolerance.

In "Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol': Lived religion, conflict and intolerance in Brazilian films," Julio César Adam discusses how the theoretical perspectives of Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan may contribute to the understanding of lived religion, nationalism and (in)tolerance in the multi-religious and multicultural societies of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Jeftić argues that the (non-)existing Bosnian identity operates through "jouissance" of nationalism, intolerance, and religion. Accordingly, the main discourse of power functions with both sexuality and religion in order to establish the "jigsaw puzzle of Bosnian identity" and to restrict the enigmatic encounter with the Real, which is replaced by a surplus of imprisoned tolerance and understanding.

In his article, Júlio César Adam analyzes the relationship between religion, conflict and intolerance present in the Brazilian cinematic context. The films were chosen taking into account the evidence of the relationship between conflict and intolerance present in the plot and their relationship with religious elements. Adam's chapter proposes three types of socio-cultural-religious conflict: a) the socio-political conflict with developments in the religious field; b) the conflict and intolerance both within the religious field; and, c) conflict of hopelessness and life perspective.

## Part II: Fostering Tolerance

In her historical analysis in “God, Government, and Greenbelt: Lived Religion and the Cultural Politics of (In)Tolerance in the Social Engineering of a Cooperative New Deal Resettlement Town, 1937–1940,” Sally Sims Stokes examines the efforts of the US government and the Federal Council of Churches to establish religion in the public cooperative community Greenbelt (a typical example of social engineering in the New Deal era), and of Greenbelt’s idealistic clergy’s efforts to achieve interfaith understanding among Protestants, Catholics, Mormons, and Jews. It also examines the projection of a lived religion, through cooperation and tolerance, in the new town, and assesses how well these hopes for tolerance played out in the first few years before the US entered World War II.

In “Uncanny Landscapes of Memory: ‘Bosnian Pyramids’ and the Contemporary World-Making in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” Maja Lovrenović gives an anthropological account about the extraordinary case of the “Bosnian Pyramids” in central Bosnia-Herzegovina (a pseudo-archeological narrative which claims that the largest human-made ancient pyramids on Earth have been discovered in Bosnia and Herzegovina). Lovrenović argues that the “pyramid craze” highlights the pivotal role of *landscape* in the reconstruction of the post-war and transitional subjectivities and people’s struggles to rebuild daily routines in search of a meaningful future, as well as to situate and make sense of their experiences of the violent past. Ethnographic accounts of people’s everyday lives situated within Bosnian post-war landscape point to the necessity of grounding the debate on lived religion and tolerance in Bosnia-Herzegovina within these intricate patchworking processes of remembering and forgetting (“memory studies” approach), concealing and revealing (objects, representations, silences/“public secrets”), imagining the future in relation to the past (“historical imagination,” fantasy), and dealing with experiences of violence and intolerance. With this approach, the chapter argues for the urgency of developing a new perspective into the physical and metaphorical “landscapes of memory” in post-conflict societies.

In “Reconciliation, Justice and (In)Tolerance Hijacked by Religious Apathy: Transforming Reconciliation 20 years after the TRC in South Africa,” Christo Thesnaar engages with the context of post-apartheid South Africa. He claims that the concept of lived religion can assist faith communities

to be part of an active citizenry within a post-apartheid era in order to continue to become an advocate for reconciliation, justice, reparation, and healing. He argues that only as a community of hope can the Church contribute to the reduction of intolerance, repetition of violence, xenophobia, and radical nationalism that has become evident in South African society.

In “The Politics of Intolerance, Lived Religion, and Theological Reflection around Belfast’s Separation Barriers,” Jonathan examines how the intolerance that is deeply entrenched in the history of the city of Belfast can be transformed. Utilizing a reflective model informed equally by the legacies of Latin American liberation theology and by theologies of reconciliation, the barriers in the city can be interpreted as examples of idolatry as described in the biblical text: physical objects constructed to provide safety, security, and identity in place of traditional sources deemed unreliable. By developing such practical, contextual theological reflections, Hatch argues that churches and faith communities in Belfast can begin to expand their vision of their lived religion in their social context and reimagine their role in its transformation.

Finally, in “Fostering Religious Tolerance in Education: The Dutch Perspective,” Gerdien Bertram-Troost and Siebren Miedema address the question: What role can lived religion play in education concerning the way pupils perceive religious diversity in the Dutch context? They elaborate on different hypotheses connected to this question on the basis of both empirical findings and theoretical reflections. They show that not all schools in the Netherlands have seriously taken up their pedagogical–political responsibility to fully prepare children for a religiously diverse society. The authors discuss the possible consequences of the current situation for the development of religious (in)tolerance among Dutch children and youngsters.

## Reflections

The ten case studies collected in this volume represent highly divergent contexts, with varying levels of religiosity and different dominant religious traditions (Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Buddhism in Sri Lanka, and Christianity in other contexts). The conflicts differ from ethical issues in public debate to political struggles, and civil war. Still, some common themes and factors can be observed throughout.

The chapters of this volume show that the relationship between lived religion and the politics of (in)tolerance is socially and politically more significant than many scholars assume. A central issue for many contributors in this volume is how social actors and their networks of relations and institutions interact with the everyday experience that provide the context and the meaning within which they act and live. When religious empowerment is constrained by the state with a sacred source of legitimation, individuals and groups are exposed to the practices of (in)tolerance on the micro level. In Part I—focusing on narratives and practices of fostering intolerance—Weerawardhana and Tombs argue that religion is a marker of ethnicity that contributes to the formation of identities, communities, and politics. In post-conflict societies, such as Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, religion has positioned itself to represent a decisive component of national and/or ethnic identity that can endorse intolerance. In these societies of “frozen conflict,” the religious ethos can be invoked to reinforce the identity of particular ethnic, racial, and religious groups.

Two case studies in this section focus on the connection between lived religion, sexuality, and intolerance in the virtual space. Valić, Ganzevoort, and Sremac (in the case of Belgrade Gay Pride) and von Kellenbach (in the case of anti-abortionists) show how moral ideologies serve to connect the religious discourse to the discourse of national identity and values. Religious discourse on demographic and ethnic issues, in particular when related to LGBT issues and abortion can be read as an attempt to directly promote intolerance especially in the virtual sphere. For example, Valić, Ganzevoort, and Sremac show how religio-sexual nationalism in Serbia has been shaped in antagonism to the “liberal” discourse of human rights, associated with national values, which it interprets as the centering of all that is traditional, patriarchal, and ethnic. All chapters in the first part of the volume thus testify to lived religion’s potential to be instrumental in the development of intolerance, exclusion, and violence. In each case study it is clear that the relationship between lived religion and intolerance should not be interpreted as unidirectional or causal. Lived religion cannot only serve to develop intolerance, but is also part of the group identity construction that results from this intolerance.

In Part II the contributors demonstrate that there are multiple variations of the emergence of tolerance and that in the “everydayness” where

tolerance becomes possible, lived religion can function as a vehicle for the fostering of tolerance. The authors show the possibility of fostering tolerance and non-discrimination through public religious education (Bertram-Troost and Miedema), reconciliation (Lovrenović, Hatch, Thesnaar), and interfaith understanding (Stokes). In that sense lived tolerance is the fundamental conviction and commitment of many actors in concrete situations where diversity and difference are the norm, where tolerance becomes the important aspect of identity politics, and therefore remains a core vehicle to the practices of tolerance and peaceful coexistence with mutual respect on the micro-political and societal level.

The everyday politics of tolerance and its connection to lived religion both reflects and critiques the values and trajectories of its societal, cultural, religious, and ideological realities. This perspective no doubt informs our understanding of how lived religion penetrates everyday life in order to promote the individual's political and theological paradigms of tolerance.

As the contributors show, the micropolitics of lived religion to some extent shape and form individual behavior, moral and political value systems that are constituted and reproduced through the social, cultural, political, and religious engagements of the individuals. Taken together, these chapters, therefore, help us to understand the micro-political engagement of (in)tolerance at the level of both lived religion and identity construction in specific national, cultural, and religious contexts. By negotiating alternative theoretical and methodological approaches and diverse religious, social, and cultural traditions, we hope that this volume will open dynamic debates that facilitate critical analysis on the relationship between lived religion and lived (in)tolerance.

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