Dispute resolution practitioners, like many professionals, vary in their perspectives on matters of faith and in how important religion is to them on a personal level. For some, their spiritual lives are central, motivating perhaps not only their decision to enter this field but the way they practice. For others, matters of faith are important but private — something to be left outside the door, much like shoes at a Buddhist temple. Some, including those who consider themselves agnostics or atheists, may respect others’ beliefs but not consider organized religion an important part of their own existence.

And yet even in the most secular-seeming corners of our society, we often find that many of the conflicts that arise within particular communities involve the spiritual beliefs and religious practices of the participants — and at times, those of the neutral. Some conflicts are doctrinal or involve leadership roles within religious organizations; in other contexts, they are personal or family-oriented. But in both instances, the spiritual orientation of the participants often leads them to a religious tribunal or a process in which the neutral recognizes that religion is a crucial component of the dispute and also its resolution. The growing emergence of these trends compels our attention.

Any discussion of faith or worldview has the potential to sharpen disagreement. But the right answer — particularly for those in our field — must not be to turn away from differences. In this issue, therefore, we invite readers to consider two different questions.

The first, broader question asks what we might learn from or about the worldviews or teachings of different faith traditions on matters of conflict. Two articles in this issue, by Jeff Seul, a lawyer and educator who works with an international conflict resolution organization, and Sukhsimranjit Singh, a law professor and mediator who specializes in conflicts involving religious institutions, focus on the values and principles that underlie a spiritual framework and explore how those worldviews can at times be a source of conflict — but can also offer a pathway to resolving the dispute.

In organizing this issue, the editors also wondered what we might learn from or about the efforts of those in particular religious or faith communities whose members employ dispute resolution mechanisms that differ in some way from mainstream or secular approaches. Two articles, by Julie Macfarlane, a Canadian law professor who has studied Islamic divorce in North America, and G. Daniel Bowling, a mediator, public policy conflict resolution facilitator, and Buddhist, and a review by California lawyer and mediator Frederick Hertz of two recent academic books on religious tribunals all explore the structures, procedures, and possibilities that are embedded in various religion-based conflict resolution methods.

Perhaps because our individual relationships with religion are so personal, we realize that one magazine issue can offer, at most, a limited number of perspectives. We hope that you find these articles respectful, provocative, and helpful.

— The Dispute Resolution Magazine Editorial Board