The hundredth anniversary of the 1905 law in France on the separation of church and state has led to a rich harvest of new scholarly work on laïcité and religion in public life. Centenaries often inspire conferences and publishing projects, especially in France. In the case of the 1905 law the temptation became irresistible in the wake of the creation of the Conseil français du culte musulman in 2002 (see the special spring 2005 issue of FPC&S on the CFCM) and years of controversy over the wearing of Muslim headscarves in public schools. The Stasi Commission’s 2004 recommendation to ban the wearing of ostentatious religious signs in public schools, and a 2005 act of Parliament that made that view law, inspired sharp debate in France and beyond, adding further impetus to scholarly discussion of religion, politics, and the government’s regulation of matters religious.

Among the several conferences on laïcité and church-state relations that took place in 2005 was one on laïcité hosted at New York University’s Institute of French Studies, where American and French scholars examined church-state relations in the US and France. Since then and unrelated to the NYU conference, the journal has also received a number of excellent articles on similar subjects, so much so as to exceed what we can publish in a single special issue. Instead, we will publish “dossiers” in three consecutive issues, beginning with the present one. As an ensemble, the articles in these dossiers range across disciplines, nations, periods, and themes. All, however, shed light on how and why people in France have struggled, as they have since the eighteenth century (and not least today), with the challenges of protecting religious liberty, accepting religious diversity, and defining and enforcing the boundaries of religious authority in public life.