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Abstracts

Vincent Goossaert
The Concept of Religion in China and the West

The religious question in China, which is today marked by various conflicts between the state and unrecognized confessional organizations, can be understood only in a historical perspective. In particular the adoption early in the 20th century of a notion of religion coming directly from the West, and narrowly defined, has justified a policy that grants a relative but controlled freedom to five great religions while actively condemning others, which are seen as 'superstitions'. The article details the implications of this notion of 'religion' in modern and contemporary China and looks at how Chinese religious traditions have adapted to it.

Jean-Luc Lambert
Orthodox Christianity, Soviet Atheism and 'Animist' Practices in the Russianized World

In Russia a monotheism – Orthodox Christianity – and atheism in its Marxist version have succeeded each other as state systems of rites and representations. Rather than contrasting one with the other, term with term, this paper proposes to bring in a third term: the local religious systems of Russia's animist minorities. We examine how Christianity and atheism tried one after the other to get established there and also consider the reactions they encountered. The analysis as planned is undertaken on two levels: on an overall level we look at the strategies and aims of the state and its representatives, and on the local level – illustrated by the particular example of the Nenets – concrete and always specific mechanisms are presented, which application of general policy has implemented on the ground.

Arnaud Sérandour
On the Appearance of a Monotheism in the Religion of Israel (3rd century BC or Later?)

Monotheism: the word indicates a system of thought that proceeds from a recognition of the divinity of a single god to the exclusion of all other. This exclusivity

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distinguishes monotheism from henotheism or monolatry and explains why monotheism is a question of belief, unlike traditional eastern religions, among them the religion of the Old Testament. The paper shows that monotheism is in fact absent from the Hebrew Bible by examining in particular the Creation stories and the vocabulary of divine oneness. It is in the Roman period, particularly in Philo of Alexandria's work, that we find more properly monotheistic writing, influenced by exegesis based on cosmogonic myths, foremost among them the biblical story known as the Creation. Imperial power would have had to assume a truly universal character for the idea of a single god assuring that power to emerge from the multitude.

Renée Koch Piettre
Paul and the Athens Epicureans: Between Polytheisms, Atheisms and Monotheisms

The paradoxical affinities that research has managed to identify between the Epicurean philosophical 'sect' and the Christian sect in the early centuries of our era are recalled, then examined in detail in relation to the first document that attests to a specific encounter between the two sects, the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles, which shows Paul discussing with the Athens Epicureans and Stoics, then recovers for us Paul's speech before the Areopagus in Athens. It seems that Paul sets himself up as a philosopher to expound his doctrine in terms that are to a certain extent compatible with a materialist or even polytheistic doctrine.

Matthew T. Kapstein
The Buddhist Refusal of Theism

Early Buddhism was not interested in questions about existence and the nature of God, considering these unimportant in relation to the question of the release from earthly suffering which is at the heart of Buddhist soteriology. Later Buddhist thought considered theism incompatible with Buddhist doctrine, but at the same time Buddhism developed a dimension of devotion that resembled theistic faith. Conscious of their different religious heritage, Buddhist thinkers in more recent times have nevertheless embraced dialogue with monotheistic religions, emphasizing their common ethical preoccupations, while retaining the non-theistic viewpoint of traditional Buddhism.

Giordana Charuty
'Standing Upright before the Heavens': Metamorphoses of Customary Christianity

The methods employed by structuralist anthropology in the European area to free lived Christianity from its categorization as a popular religion steeped in 'pagan relics' also facilitate the analytical description of social practices and rituals that in

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France are part of the anti-clerical struggle of the late 19th century. More than forms of philosophical or militant atheism, the spiritualist movements introduce 'Science' as a symbolic entity in order to revive learning of counter-empirical ideas at the heart of a mode of religious transmission that persists today and takes on board the demands of secular societies for religious pluralism.

Haïm Zafrani
Visions of Suffering and Death in Jewish Societies of the Muslim West

The author encountered evocations of suffering and death in all the studies and research he devoted, over 40 or so years, to the intellectual, social and religious life of western Muslim Judaism, and indeed the whole of traditional Jewish thought and its varied modes of expression: rabbinical law, Hebrew poetry, the literature of homily and preaching, mystical writings and the kabbala, dialect and popular literatures in Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Berber. Some passages are taken from the Zohar ('The town the angel of death cannot enter', for instance). The author also refers to the Talmud and magic therapeutics, the power of sacred names, Jewish and Muslim miracle workers, hunting down and casting out demons, etc. Agony, refusal to die, joyous commemoration of death, the cemetery and the cult of the dead, Judeo-Muslim pilgrimages, the wealth of the customs, beliefs and rites of the past lead the author to reflect on the question of death in the present-day world.

Micheline Galley
Death in Folk Tales (A Brief Note)

A dramatic image of death is reflected from a cycle of folktales (Aarne-Thompson Types 505 to 508) in which a man dying in debt is refused burial, until the hero of the tale pays the ransom and fulfills the ancestral funeral ritual. Then the tale may develop into a further sequence centred on the Grateful Dead. The texts alluded to here come from both Northern Europe and the Mediterranean area, and from ancient and modern tales.

Abdelwahab Bouhdiba
The Message of Islam

Islamic culture may be labelled a 'superculture' on account of its richness, whose living message goes from the peasants of the Indian subcontinent to Africa, for instance, dating back fourteen centuries in time. The author contrasts with an Islam that is frozen in its medieval form an Islam capable of inventing new solutions. The drama of today's Muslim populations is living under the sign of a failure to adapt, because there has been no adequate analysis of the demands of their time. But there is a social message in Islam, of brotherhood, justice, effort, liberation, which remains to be translated into a project for joint action for current generations. There is

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integration, the complementarity of individual action, collective effort and spirituality. But the integration of the sacred into social life is so 'un-contemporary' that in Islamic lands an extra effort is required to grasp its true implications.

Kwasi Wiredu

Reflections on Cultural Diversity

A dialectical interaction exists between cultural unity and diversity. These two factors can operate for good or ill. In order to strengthen the positive factor and limit the negative, it is important to have a good conceptual grasp of the basis of the unity, as well as of the diversity of cultures. Such an understanding should facilitate dialogue in intercultural relations, dialogue that is the most rational of all ways of coexistence. This article aims to explore the underlying conceptual themes.

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