

Editorial Foreword

Religion and Politics. Those who think about history on a grand scale often make the intersection of religion and politics an organizing principle—the core of Toynbee’s civilizations, the chief characteristic of ancient Egypt or Asoka’s India, the issue that distinguishes Byzantium from Western Christianity, the very essence of Islam. In accounts written on a smaller scale, however, religion and politics are likely to be presented in terms either of their conflicting aims or their combined reflection of culture and social structure. Although the three essays here differ greatly in their range, all explore ways in which religion and politics shape each other. Christopher Adamson compares that process in nineteenth-century Canada and the United States, countries with similarities so overwhelming that differences demand explanation. Adamson finds it in the ways evangelical religion and republicanism in the United States (note earlier articles in *CSSH* by Howe, in 14:3, Appleby, 20:2; and Camic, 25:1) reinforced each other as monarchy and religious hierarchy did in Canada.

In writing about Zoroastrian communities, Patricia Crone must work from limited evidence difficult to see clearly through the mists of Christian and Muslim reconstructions of history and God’s will. Yet from gnosticism and characteristic Indo-European themes (see Trompf, 31:4, and Linke, 34:4) to state making, resistance to taxation, and a quite modern association of communism with pacifism and vegetarianism, there is much that is familiar here, especially in the central issue of the rules of sexual conduct. The ancient world tried a variety of systems for regulating the ties of sex and property (Hopkins, 22:3; Harris, 34:4), and other solutions have remained part of the dream and the downfall of later utopian religious communities (Moore and Fishman, both in 29:4). Current concerns are still more prominent in analyses of Islam, and Nikki Keddie must clear away widespread assumptions about Muslim politics in order to conduct her survey of Islamic revolts. Using comparisons that encompass the world of Islam, Keddie emphasizes the impact of European trade and population growth, the role of weak states and intellectual change; and opposition to imperialism, topics often discussed in these pages (on revolts in Islam, see Keddie, 4:3; Akhavi, 25:2; Scott, 29:3; Cole, 31:1; Edwards, 31:4; and Bernal, 36:1).

The Ethics of Difference. The construction of ethnic distinction has been the subject of impressive research, and Lauren Derby’s uncovers the materials for just such a construction along the frontier that divides Haiti from the Dominican Republic: a state with a police force and a vague modernizing project plus a popular culture that in daily life interwove money and magic and blood (note Taussig, 19:2, and compare Diamond, 25:3). The further complication is that

the vectors of wealth, employment, markets, politics, and occult knowledge pointed in contradictory directions. Ethnic distinctions were regularly drawn (compare Goulet and Walshok, 13:4, and Roberts, 27:3), but they did not align the border as the state might wish (see Wilkie, 19:1; Klieman, 22:2; and Klein, 34:3). On the Dominican side, when people spoke of *raza*, they meant differences less tangible than race and not so easy to order hierarchically, a confusion that with government help exploded in violence in 1937. Attached to power, ethnic distinctions create minorities (note Horowitz, 23:2) that in turn pose ethical dilemmas even on a single and Catholic Caribbean island. These issues became an explicit and even philosophical problem in South Africa. Afrikaners opposed to the country's racist system still sought some morally acceptable special role for their communal existence. That effort, Hermann Giliomee shows, belongs to a pain-filled intellectual tradition; and he cites such famous figures as Martin Buber and Albert Camus in addition to South African intellectuals (on their awkward history, see also Henderson, 14:4; Vickery, 16:3; Du Toit, 27:2; and Merrett and Grivil, 33:2). Gnawing consciences required something worth defending beyond wealth and power; the agonies of minority ethicists make a cogent subject for comparison.

Post-Colonial Identity. Where language, religion, and history point to distinctive groups, states, institutions, and elites may strive to establish one overarching identity, using invented histories and rituals, both aided and burdened by legacies of colonialism (see Appadurai, 30:1; Sangren, 30:3; Deringil, 35:1; Lelyfeld, 35:4; and Ramaswamy, 35:4). In Mauritius, where ethnic and religious differences are firmly established, expressions of a national identity have developed without violence; and Thomas Eriksen explores how that has happened. Underscoring its significance for theories of identity and nationalism, he outlines a process which includes familiar themes of modernization—increased trade and communication, new employment opportunities that erode ascriptive status, and public education—and in which underlying tensions and contradictions are softened through public ceremonies and rhetoric that acknowledge distinct communities yet represent their interaction as distinctly Mauritian. Pearl Robinson analyzes another kind of political process through the striking parallels between the French Revolution and campaigns for reform in contemporary Francophone Africa, where a Rousseauian vocabulary and the principle of an Estates General give focus to demands and proceedings connected to France and French history but independent of them and no mere imitation. The African experience of French colonialism (see Lewis, 4:2, and Smith, 20:1) was important intellectually (see Lambert, 35:2) as well as institutionally and economically; and that experience contributes, along with other traditions and newer international factors, to the important political changes now taking place (compare Azarya and Chazan, 29:1; Owusu, 31:2; and Dixon, 33:1).