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Religions in Conflict



Religions in Conflict. From Polemics to Wars (Late Antiquity–18th Century)

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Religions in Conflict. From Polemics to Wars (Late Antiquity–18th Century)

The articles gathered in this volume were first presented as papers at the 3rd European History Symposium, held in Volos from June 11–13, 2004.¹ The papers explored strategies in the construction of identities and of otherness in religious groups and communities, examined mechanisms and processes of confrontation and of stigmatization of the other and pointed to the shift from previously tolerated images of the other to a climate of religious intolerance in various historical eras. The fields of investigation included wars of narrative, representations, mechanisms of persecution and historiographical approaches.

Introduction

Is there an ethics of religious violence? Despina Iosif argues that the lack of a coherent and definite view regarding war and the resort to violence has led to the selective use of passages from the New Testament in support of divergent interpretations and strategies. In his paper, Dimitris Kyrtatas views the anti-heretical campaigns launched by the leaders of the Christian community of Rome in the second century as an integral part of their drive to establish a universal Church. Paris Gounaridis seeks to illuminate the political circumstances that led to a climate of intolerance regarding what was systematically denounced as deviant philosophical views in eleventh-century Byzantium. Robert Moore shows that in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the pursuit on the part of the Roman Church of a monopoly of religious authority involved the denigration of possible alternatives, Christian and non Christian, and, equally, the invention of an external foe seeking to corrupt the Latin West through missionary work.

Similarly, religious conflict takes place in the domain of representations and this is also due to the fact that the faithful are not always free from doubt. How do medieval narratives attest to these doubts, usually projected on to the “other”? Based on three Christian tales about Mary, Ora Limor discusses the role of the Jews as “witnesses of the truth” in Christian narrative. Rika Benveniste focuses on the mass conversions of Jews in the early Middle Ages and stresses the centrality of those considered as *relapsi* in the context of what she describes as emergent “thought structures” that were to prove particularly durable in the Middle Ages.

In his paper James Given points to a particular strategy adopted by the French king Philip IV in order to overcome the constraints imposed on the exercise of royal authority in early fourteenth-century France. This involved the creation of “a zone of terror”, where the perceived enemies of the king would find themselves facing charges whose very fantastic nature made it nearly impossible to refute them.

The French wars of religion offer the background to three contributions: Philip Benedict shows that the systematic Protestant denigration of the noble house of Guise as “evil advisors to the king” in the power struggle that erupted in the early 1560s resulted in finally identifying them as the chief instigators of a Catholic plot to exterminate French Protestants; the dynamic Protestant reaction to this perceived threat initiated the entire cycle of civil war. Taking the Colloquy of Poissy of 1561 as a starting point of his investigation, Costas Gaganakis argues that the rhetoric of religious convergence promoted by both confessional camps actually masked a strategy of the forced conversion of the opponent. He stresses that a notion of “religious war” motivated the rival camps. This was the product of the mutually shared belief that “God’s Truth” was irreconcilable with any other reading of the Gospels and that those “chosen by God” carried a divine mandate to fight a total war against the “forces of darkness”. In his article, Denis Crouzet focuses on the ideal type of “Christian zealot” as promoted by the propaganda of the ultra-Catholic League in the 1580s. The ideal of Christian self-sacrifice as an integral part of the “mystical quest for salvation” of the faithful served to negate royal authority by replacing obedience to the French king by obedience to the divine will.

Pushing the field of investigation into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Effi Gazi explores the complex relation of the concepts “Hellenism” and “Christianity” in modern Greece by primarily focusing on discursive shifts and connotative processes that surrounded the emergence and articulation of the “Helleno-Christian civilization”. She discusses the ways eleventh-century Byzantine controversies and polemics over the place of ancient thought in the curriculum of Christian education re-emerged and were re-interpreted in the process of the development of Greek national ideology.

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- 1 The full program of the symposium can be viewed at: <http://extras.ha.uth.gr/ric/programme.shtml> (accessed 28 September 2006)