

Editorial Foreword

PROFANE USES OF THE SACRED. Everyone believes that religion is a fundamental influence in shaping secular society; yet we remain somehow uncomfortable with specific cases. Perhaps cultural bias, as much as any failure of the social sciences, accounts for the tendency of Western scholars to sound surprised when describing each new example of religion's impact on markets, politics, or public entertainment. Perhaps our awareness of how pervasive religious culture tends to be makes it difficult to trace precise connections; for there are surprisingly few rules about how and where to look, and it is no longer possible to set about that task with the happy confidence of a Gibbon or Voltaire. Almost instinctively, we look first to theology—an approach so reasonable that it is shared by a public much wider than those who have read Max Weber. Take the case of South Africa. What could be more natural than for that society's rigid exclusivity to rest on some kind of atrophied, Calvinist sense of election—a proposition so believable it has rarely been questioned. Just as the ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment (see Camie in *CSSH* 25:1), the economic policies of Hutterites, or the Mennonite attitudes toward knowledge (Urry and Peter, both in 25:2) were rooted in religion, so the policies of the Boers could be expected to follow from the belief that they were a chosen people. André du Toit's careful argument thus comes as a surprise: Such a belief did not evolve from the ancient ancestral creed but was a recent nationalist invention. His comparative assessment of Calvinisms then shows how different from the Boers the Puritans were. Not only did the Boers' assertions not grow out of Calvin's doctrines, but it is unlikely that they could have done so. That the Boers claimed religious sanction for their secular views tells us nothing at all about Calvinism but quite a bit about modern politics. The uses of religion are not necessarily religious; yet the very vitality of religious life obscures such boundaries.

Similarly, attacks on religion are not necessarily the expressions of secularism they seem to be. Among the horrors of the Spanish Civil War, the desecrations of Catholic churches have remained famous as symbols of fratricidal savagery. To some a mere extension of anticlericalism, they have been treated by most historians as a momentary (and therefore essentially inexplicable) excess. Bruce Lincoln here refuses these more soothing interpretations, insisting that even shocking behavior must be taken seriously. His search seeks to explain social obscenity, finding it to be neither so rare nor so useless as propriety suggests and making along the way a number of points that fit with other observations of radical religious movements (Mair, 1:2; Jayawardena, 8:2; Akhavi, 25:2), of the use of sacred symbols in India (Freitag and Yang, both 22:4), and of millenarianism (Hill, 13:3; Sharot, 22:3). The Spanish desecrations, he suggests, in fact recognized the power of

Catholicism and sought to undermine its efficacy while preparing the way for other beliefs. In this remarkable assessment Lincoln extends his earlier study of myth (25:1), and the political, even military, power of myth is nicely confirmed in Gerald Berg's study of the role of muskets in the building of the Madagascar state. We are more accustomed to think of the impact of Christianity on colonial societies (Beidelman, Rigby, Schieffelin, and Shapiro on missionaries in 23:1) than of the effect of local religions upon imported technology. Everywhere, it is clear, culture plays a major part in determining how technology is used (Skinner, 18:1; Bailes, 23:3; Du Boff, 26:4), but it is especially valuable to be shown concretely that even in state building guns are not enough. In the use of technology as in forms of kingship, rebellion, or economic development (Strickland, 18:3; Traugott, 21:3; Perinbam, 19:2; Dumett, 25:4), the adjustments African societies made to outside pressure were indigenously shaped. In Africa and America (Clendinnen, 23:3), myth mediated between cultures much as it did between ideologies in Spain. The ways in which secular, even profane, purposes may intersect with religious culture are not neatly predictable, and the review essays in this section demonstrate how modest we must remain about our ability to uncover the infinity of connections between a religion and the society that seeks to surround it.

MONEY AND PROPERTY BEFORE CAPITALISM. It may be a bit culture bound, Marilyn Gerriets nicely reminds us, to assume that the principal function of money must always be for use in exchange. Ireland once used money primarily to establish those equivalences among men and their crimes that could make a legal system work. The understanding of that (see Hallpike on reciprocity, 17:1) in turn affects one's reading of ancient legal texts. Their social meaning is thus clarified, and so is the economic practice of the time, by distinguishing between the two. Differences in legal systems and in the practice of using money, adds Dharma Kumar, have led to the misconception that medieval India did not know rights in property (compare Habib, 6:4, on usury in medieval India). Such tangible matters as money and property must not remain invisible to modern commentators even if their social functions were once as different from those of later times as the centralized state was from the early medieval governments that tried well before capitalism to define money and protect property.