Notes on Recent Publications

Editor's Note: Listed below (in the order of appearance) are the section titles in which notes appear. No single issue of RSR will likely include every section; however, those sections that are included will always appear in this order.

Texts, Tools, and Media

Comparative Studies
Methodology and Theory
Psychology of Religion
Sociology and Anthropology of Religion
Gender Studies
Religion and Science
Ritual, Cult, Worship
Philosophy of Religion
Theology
Ethics
Arts, Literature, Culture, and Religion
Ancient Near East
Greece, Rome, Greco-Roman Period
Zoroastrianism
Christian Origins
History of Christianity
History of Christianity (through Early Modern Period)
Modern European Christianity
Jewish Thought
Judaism: Hellenistic through Late Antiquity
Judaism: Medieval
Judaism: Modern
Islam
Africa
The Americas: Central and South America
The Americas: Canada
The Americas: U.S.A.
South Asia
East Asia
Buddhism
Inner Asia
Australia and the Pacific

Comparative Studies


Written by a former Professor of Divinity at Oxford, the book is addressed "primarily to Western and Christian readers, as a way into the current dialogue among the great religions of the world." Written from a Christian point of view, with the intention of learning from other traditions, his meditations on the uses and limitations of interreligious dialogue are of special interest. The meditators are broadly defined as human figures—"spiritual geniuses"—who have communicated a conception of a holy being to their people; they are, besides the two of the title, Zoroaster, Lao-zu, Buddha, Confucius, Socrates, Krishna, and Jesus. Nine brief and elegant biographies of these figures, accessible to a general reading pubic, form the main part of the work. The author is interested in mediators as human beings who have lived in history, an approach that frequently involves him in distinguishing between legend and history—though the "symbolic truth" of legend is also acknowledged. The ecumenical spirit of mediators is very occasionally marred by dubious or ungenerous judgments, several in the chapter on Muhammad, for instance.

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Methodology & Theory


Capps joins the congeries of authors intent upon legitimizing religious studies by articulating a history of the ideas which shape the field. He provides overviews of a vast array of thinkers who have influenced the academic study of religion; the book is a useful reference tool, despite its failure to provide footnotes for quotations. Capps's aim is to identify the "single argument," the "continuous narrative" which constitutes religious studies qua discipline. Second-order traditions are key to discipline formation and maintenance; it is just this second-order tradition which Capps seeks to "compose" and "narrate." Beginning with Descartes and Kant, he understands religious studies as an Enlightenment product. His narrative groups the academic study of religion around key questions: What is religion? How did religion come into being? How shall religion be described? What is the function or purpose of religion? In addition to presenting successive and parallel renditions of these questions and their answers, Capps addresses himself to how religion is expressed, to relations between religions in a discussion of comparison and the question of whether all religions are true, and to the future of the field.

Capps's conclusions emphasize multiplicity and commonality. On the one hand, "the subject is multiple, and the methods of approach are numerous." On the other hand, religious studies reveals throughout "the same intention, namely, to make religion intelligible." Capps's history of ideas is indeed a legitimizing history, offering