



Following 9/11: Religion Coverage in the New York Times

Christopher Vecsey

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Following 9/11 examines the religious ramifications of 9/11 and its aftershocks through the lens of the New York Times. At the moment of the attacks, the Times turned to its standards of journalistic comprehension and its institutional memory regarding religious phenomena to grasp the news with customary tools of coverage. The events made good copy, surely, but also uncovered persistent themes in the treatment of religion in the Times. Day in, day out, the New York Times is one of the most important news sources for understanding the contemporary world. Through the pages of the newspaper, Vecsey compiles an encyclopedic record of religion in our day. Analysis of religion coverage in the Times, focusing on 9/11 and its upshots, shows not only how the paper reported on the tragedy and its consequences, but also how it presented its conventional religious themes-about traditions, diversity, tolerance, institutional organization, interfaith cooperation, ethical judgment, etc.-in the crucible of the crisis,... 9/11 was a political as well as a religious event, and it becomes evident-by probing Times coverage-how religion and politics have defined one another since 2001. Vecsey draws attention especially to the volatile public phrases "culture wars" and "clash of civilizations" to perceive the ways in which 9/11 crystallized and recast those concepts, so important in understanding the political dimensions of religion over the past decade. For years after 2001, in stories related to the tragedy, the Times moved beyond political coverage to the social, the cultural, the artistic, the intellectual, and especially the religious. Above all, however, the paper showed how religion, politics, and journalism define each other in these times following 9/11.

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