



Religions vs. racial theories and racial politics (15th-21st centuries)

Le Mans (1st-2nd June 2016), Paris (3rd June 2016)

Call for papers

The birth of the notion of “race” in early modern Europe has long been thought to be closely linked with the development of scientific thought and practices. The conflicts that pitted science against religion have first crystallised on the question of the origins of mankind, and before scientific monogenism appeared in the 18th century, those tensions mainly opposed the advocates of polygenism and those who believed in the Genesis narrative.

The problem with this oversimplistic view is twofold. First, religions have long been thinking along racial lines, as the recent historiography of South America has shown, underlining some persistence with late Medieval Spain – the idea, for instance, that baptismal water cannot erase the stain of original sin in a convert’s blood. This might lead us to wonder about the processes through which the religious can be racialised, or at least how religious narratives can potentially be racialised, especially when they aim at creating genealogies. Another aspect that fails to be taken into account is the fact that the joint history of race and science is mainly Europe-oriented, and therefore gives Euro-Mediterranean monotheisms pride of place as religious constructs. Other areas of the world are consequently left aside when studying relations between religions and racial identities, especially in contexts that allowed those European paradigms to confront the cultural and religious realities of other continents.

This conference will therefore aim at exploring how racialised religious myths are constructed and disseminated, and what impact they might have on strategies of conversions, and on the newly converted themselves. We would be especially receptive to proposals focusing on how racialised minorities react to such processes, within larger religious groups – whether they reaffirm their belief in the single origin of mankind, develop counter-discourses and/or leave out their group entirely. Similarly, we would welcome proposals that study the way the European notion of “race” was received and adapted in non-European religious settings. Other topics could include the reactions of religious communities to racially infused policies – whether they oscillated between acceptance of such political practices, willingly submitted and/or vocally adhered to them. Another line of inquiry could focus on the contemporary relationship between religions and ethnicities and cultures formerly defined along racial lines.

Paper proposals (in French or in English) should not exceed 2,500 signs (spaces included) and should be sent before April 13th, 2016, with a short résumé, to vincent.vilmain@univ-lemans.fr. Do not hesitate to contact him for further information.