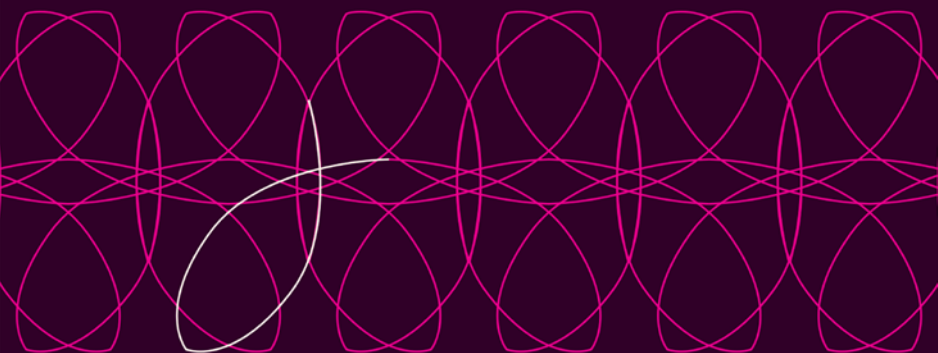


FRANÇOIS JULLIEN



RESOURCES
OF CHRISTIANITY

Resources of Christianity

Resources of Christianity

François Jullien

Translated by Pedro Rodriguez

polity

Originally published in French as *Ressources du christianisme*. © Éditions de L'Herne, 2018. Published by arrangement with Agence littéraire Astier-Pécher. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

This English edition © 2021 by Polity Press

Polity Press
65 Bridge Street
Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

Polity Press
101 Station Landing
Suite 300
Medford, MA 02155, USA

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ISBN-13: 978-1-5095-4695-4- hardback
ISBN-13: 978-1-5095-4696-1- paperback

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Jullien, François, 1951- author. | Rodríguez, Pedro, 1933- translator.

Title: Resources of Christianity / François Jullien ; translated by Pedro Rodríguez.

Other titles: Ressources du christianisme. English

Description: Cambridge, UK ; Medford, MA, USA : Polity Press, [2021] |

Originally published in French as *Ressources du christianisme*. Editions de L'Herne, 2018. | Includes bibliographical references. | Summary: "A fresh and erudite reflection on Christianity and its relevance today"-- Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020041424 (print) | LCCN 2020041425 (ebook) | ISBN 9781509546954 (hardback) | ISBN 9781509546961 (paperback) | ISBN 9781509546978 (epub) | ISBN 9781509547043 (pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: Christianity--Philosophy. | Bible. John--Criticism, interpretation, etc.

Classification: LCC BR100 .J8513 2021 (print) | LCC BR100 (ebook) | DDC 230--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020041424>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020041425>

Typeset in 12.5 on 15 pt Adobe Garamond by
Servis Filmsetting Ltd, Stockport, Cheshire
Printed and bound by Short Run Press Limited

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For Pascal David

This text expands on a lecture I gave in March 2016 for the *Cours méthodique et populaire de philosophie* at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, and in May 2016 at the Université Catholique de Lyon.

My thanks to Pascal David, who edited the first written version.

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I

Refusal to avoid (the question of Christianity)

Why, you might wonder, have I decided to deal today with “Christianity”? What more have we to do with it? I believe it’s important at present to take the trouble, to stop evading the question, because it is a fertile one: not for cultural identity (is Europe “Christian”?) but for culture, and especially for philosophy, which is the matter at hand. The eras of Christianity’s dominance and subsequent denunciation are behind us, and the era of its banishment upon us. It is high time to review what Christianity has caused to advene¹ in thought. What *possibilities* of the mind has it contributed, or buried? That is my reason. Because it needs doing. Even if, having spent so much time among the Greeks and the Chinese, I am

perhaps not ideally suited to the task. Perhaps the risk is worthwhile for me precisely because I take an external perspective, because I am further removed from the vassal's position.

I believe the time has come to stop evading the question of Christianity in contemporary thought. The very idea of "Europe," bound up as it is in that history, stands to gain. We in present-day Europe must determine what Christianity has contributed, transformed, discovered, or covered up in thought. We must determine what lies totalized (labeled) in the *-ity* of Christianity, which we see couched amid so many other *-ities* and *-isms*. I say *evading* [*évitement*] because the astonishing, even aberrant, affair known as Christianity is, in an ambient manner, a collective embarrassment to us. There is no denying this. We would like to see it over and done with, filed away. We would like to believe it to be a historical matter. And so we tacitly skirt the issue. But can we be rid of it? From Lacan to Mitterrand, a Mass is, *in fine*, perhaps not out of the question. . . . Even as we bother with so many false questions – questions that no longer deserve the name, questions that we keep alive in artificial debates – we shut our eyes to the matter

of genuine import in this troubling heritage of ours. Officially declaring our society to be secular has hardly unburdened us of Christianity, that “thing” we now find so difficult to grasp. Though a massive majority of us no longer “believes” – or, at any rate, no longer “practices” (there are so many passive Christians) – we have hardly obliterated Christianity’s imprint from our thought. We know this, of course, but how deeply do we *wish to know it*? Even if all that remained were a relic, we would still have to wonder what part of Christianity we could not get past. I wonder, in fact, if this evasion doesn’t extend into the Church itself, more comfortable now with ecology and humanitarianism than with the question I do not see being asked: What has Christianity *done to thought*?

Needless to say, I will not enter into the matter of Christianity with the traditional question: to “believe” or not. “He who believed in heaven / He who did not”² seems to me a somewhat outmoded dilemma. I will not first delve into Christianity from the standpoint of “faith.” Even the question whether “God” exists seems to me to have run its course. Though still of interest for the history of thought, it has bogged down