

# "The Common Ground On Which Students of Religion Meet": Methodology and Theory Within the IAHR<sup>1</sup>

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Only thanks to the guiding lights and the overwhelming majority of the members of the International Association for the History of Religions have the most recent world congresses of this body avoided slipping into congresses of religion after the model of the Parliament held in Chicago in 1893. If the history of religions is to preserve its spirit and further its autonomy, it must not only work out the peculiarities of its methods, it must also revive its religio-critical, or rather, its ideological function.

- Kurt Rudolph

## The Need for Theories of Religion

Apart from the meetings of the North American Association for the Study of Religion (NAASR), that coincide with both the American Academy of Religion's (AAR) and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion's (SSSR) annual meetings, North American scholars have traditionally had few opportunities for meeting and discussing issues of theory and methodology with their colleagues in the wider field. Other than such sessions at the AAR's annual meetings for the History of the Study of Religion and Critical Theory<sup>2</sup>, there are few avenues for engaging in methodological critique and, perhaps more importantly, for developing and debating the merits of various theories of religion. Certainly there exist those well known publications on methods and theories rightly associated with the Chicago School in the History of Religions<sup>3</sup>, but they are generally limited to issues of description, interpretation, and understanding and remain completely devoid of efforts to develop explanations and theories of religion.

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1 My thanks to Armin Geertz, Rosalind Hackett, Predrag Klasnja, Luther Martin, Michael Pye, and Donald Wiebe for their helpful comments on an earlier draft and for providing some much needed information. A version of this paper is also to appear in the *Bulletin* of the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion.

2 At the 1995 meeting of the AAR these two sessions offered some very interesting topics: seven papers on nineteenth and twentieth century evolutionary theories of religion, in the case of the former, and a panel on the state of critical theory in the AAR, in the case of the latter. The changing reception of Eliade's work by scholars of religion will be the focus of a panel at the 1996 meeting in New Orleans.

3 I have in mind not simply those methodological articles in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987), but also *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*. Mircea Eliade and Joseph Kitagawa (eds.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959; *The History of Religions: Essays on the Problem of Understanding*. Joseph Kitagawa (ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967. *Essays in the History of Religions*. Joseph Kitagawa and Gregory Alles (eds.). New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1988.

As I have noted elsewhere<sup>4</sup>, during his address at NAASR's 1992 meetings in San Francisco, Jonathan Z. Smith made in passing what turns out to have been an extremely important observation. He noted that, unfortunately, scholars were generally not working on devising new theories of religion; he drew attention to the fact that the distinction between those who engage in theoretical analysis of aspects of religion (such as myths, rituals, institutions, etc.), and those who develop theories about religion is one that is often overlooked, as if we all know precisely, and possibly intuitively, what religion is or does and now only need to engage in describing and understanding its distinct and identifiable parts. It is as if an unarticulated consensus concerning the inability to define and theorize on religion had been reached. This consensus has traditionally centered on conceptions of religion as *sui generis*, a conception which in large part has prevented the kind of ideological critique recommended by Kurt Rudolph in the opening epigraph.

Given the dominance, one could even go so far as saying the hegemony, of the discourse on *sui generis* religion in North America, for it has provided one of the most prominent means whereby autonomous departments have developed within institutions, it should come as no surprise that the effort to critique methodologies and develop testable theories of religion have often not been a priority in North American circles<sup>5</sup>. Simply put, if the institutional identity, unity, and autonomy of religion departments is legitimized in terms of the presumed identity, unity, and autonomy of their data (i.e., the sacred, the *mysterium*, power, God, religious consciousness and feelings, etc.), then theories of religion, and in particular, testable, naturalistic theories of religion, would seem to have little place for they fundamentally call into question the very presuppositions that currently ground the discipline. Instead, where such meta-scholarship is to be found, and the Chicago volumes mentioned above serve as a good example, it most often avoids questions of the historical and material function as well as the cause of religion and settles instead on phenomenological questions concerning the accurate description of privileged insider accounts followed by hermeneutical attempts to access their deep meaning for both the devotee and researcher alike. This is precisely the rather suspect stance heralded in the early 1960s by Eliade as the "new humanism."

If, as I think is the case, the current lack of identity within the study of religion is directly linked to the ambiguity and vagueness of the discourse on *sui generis* religion, then the future institutional well-being of the field will be linked to the ability of its practitioners to propose testable and publicly criticizable theories of religion, religious practices, and institutions<sup>6</sup>. Two important means for accomplishing this would arguably be, first, developing international, professional organizations and associations where such concerns can be debated and critiqued publicly and, second, developing scholarly periodicals where this same research can routinely and consistently be published and made available to an international audience.

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4 Review of Stewart Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion*. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33/1 (1994): 81-82.

5 I have defined and documented the discourse on *sui generis* religion in much greater detail in my upcoming book, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (Oxford University Press).

6 Besides Stewart Guthrie's new work in theory of religion, one should also take account of Pascal Boyer's *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory of Religion*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994, and Walter Burkert's *Creation of the Sacred: Tracks of Biology in Early Religion*. New Haven: Harvard University Press, 1996. Also, see Daniel Pals' useful classroom text *Seven Theories of Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Whether one knows it or not, both of these avenues currently exist; in terms of the first I have in mind the International Association of History of Religions (IAHR), with which North American scholars are affiliated through the NAASR, itself born at the IAHR's 1985 Sydney, Australia, Congress<sup>7</sup>. In terms of the second, I am thinking of the IAHR periodical *Numen*, now nearing its fiftieth year, and, perhaps more specifically, NAASR's quarterly journal, *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion (MTSR)*, now in its eighth year. Most recently, the prominence given to methodological and theoretical scholarship on religion, scholarship that does not presume, from the outset, that religion is irreducible and a special case, was high-lighted at the IAHR's 1995 Congress held in Mexico City. At that Congress there were two sessions, meeting simultaneously, each occupying two full days of meetings, papers, and panels, one devoted to the History of Religions and the Social Sciences and the other to Global Perspectives on Methodology in the Study of Religion. In light of these developments, and also with a number of recent IAHR sponsored and/or initiated regional conferences and publications in mind, this survey article is meant as an introduction to some of the international, theoretical work that is now taking place under the aegis of the IAHR.

### **The Case of *Numen* and *MTSR***

Founded in 1954, *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions* continues as one of the central international periodicals in the field. Now published three times a year, *Numen* (co-edited by Hans G. Kippenberg and E. Thomas Lawson) continues its long history of publishing important articles not simply on a wide variety of substantive topics in the field but also in such areas as the history of the field and critical studies in its methodologies and theories. Take, for example, any one of the following articles that appeared in its first twenty-five years: "The History, Science, and Comparative Study of Religion" (E. O. James, 1: 91-105); "The Relation of the History of Religions to Kindred Religious Sciences" (C. J. Bleeker, 1: 141-155); "*Religionswissenschaft*" (E. R. Goodenough, 6: 77-95); "The Phenomenological Method" (C. J. Bleeker, 6: 96-111); "Theoretical Speculations on Sacrifice" (Th. P. van Baaren, 11: 1-12); "Magic and Methodology" (Islwyn Blythin, 17: 45-59); "La Méthode Comparative: Entre Philologie et Phénoménologie" (Geo Widengren, 18: 161-172); "*Religionswissenschaft* or Religiology?" (Reinhard Pummer, 19: 91-127); "Religion Between Reality and Idea" (Jacques Waardenburg, 19: 128-203); "Beyond Eliade: The Future of Theory in Religion" (Ninian Smart, 25: 171-183), and the critical exchange between Donald Wiebe (26: 234-248) and Wilfred Cantwell Smith (27: 247-255) on the role of the category "belief" in scholarship on religion.

Over the years, *Numen* has come to be known not just for creative historical studies but also for its wide-ranging and useful survey essays and review articles that construct a discourse at a specifiable site. For example, early on one finds Reinhard Pummer's very useful survey, "Recent Publications on the Methodology of the Science of Religion" which addresses over forty works (22: 161-182)<sup>8</sup>. Under the editorship of Kippenberg and Lawson this genre has flourished for it now includes such

7 As of the 1995 Congress in Mexico City, it is only through NAASR that North American scholars can become affiliated with the IAHR, for the American Society for the Study of Religion (ASSR) is no longer affiliated.

8 Readers of *Religious Studies Review* may recall Hans Penner's equally important historical survey of nearly thirty works, "The Fall and Rise of Methodology: A Retrospective Review" (2/1: 11-16).

examples as: a symposium on J. Z. Smith's *Drudgery Divine* (39: 217-238); comparative studies in fundamentalism (38: 128-150); the problem of literacy in the History of Religions (39: 102-156); semiotic approaches to the gospels (41: 88-97); esotericism and the science of religion (42: 48-77); recent studies on Chinese religions (42: 197-203); and the very category of religion in recent scholarship (42: 284-309). Apart from the intellectual contribution such essays make, more importantly they serve the crucial social function of introducing readers to a body of literature with which they are not usually or necessarily familiar, making scholarship in diverse and seemingly unconnected areas available to a wide scholarly audience.

Where *Numen* has published a number of crucial articles on methodological and theoretical topics as part of its overall publishing agenda, *MTSR* exclusively publishes articles and review essays in this area. That such a focus could be viewed by some to be an inessential indulgence was anticipated by the founding editors, Ann Baranowski and John Morgan (both of whom were, at that time, doctoral students at the University of Toronto's Centre for the Study of Religion). As they wrote in its inaugural issue,

*MTSR* arises out of the observation that there is no journal exclusively devoted to the discussion and debate of issues concerning method and theory in the study of religion. For some, a journal devoted to method and theory in the study of religion is itself in need of some justification. . . . [T]o the extent that academic study is characterized by the on-going questioning of its own premises and presuppositions, and since fields of research are never, or at least never should be, relaxed concerning methods of study and theories about the focus of study, we believe this journal addresses a crucial component of the study of religion. (*MTSR* 1: 1)

Published by Mouton de Gruyter of Berlin and currently edited by Willi Braun, Darlene Juschka, Arthur McCalla, and Russell McCutcheon, *MTSR* is coming to be known for publishing articles by both senior and young scholars that call into question issues that are, for some in the field, apparently settled. The tone was set from the start by the critique, "How Historical is the History of Religions?" (Robert Segal, 1: 2-19), a critical reading of the ideological posture of the *Encyclopedia of Religion* (Neil McMullin, 1: 80-96)<sup>9</sup>, and a review symposium on Eric Sharpe's *Comparative Religion: A History* (1: 41-79). From there, *MTSR* went on to publish a complete issue on the contributions of Cantwell Smith to the study of religion (vol. 4), where one finds Wiebe revisiting his *Numen* debate with Cantwell Smith, an attempt to reconstruct a phenomenology of religion (Jeppe Sinding Jensen, 5: 109-133), a materialist critique of some contemporary forms of feminist theorizing (Marsha A. Hewitt, 5: 135-154), a post-structuralist critique of Occidental Humanism as it is found in the modern study of religion (Tim Murphy, 6: 119-146), an assessment of intellectual biography in anthropology (Gregory Alles, 6: 251-275), and an inquiry into the theoretical shortcomings of the holistic approach to comparative religious ethics (Michael Levine, 7: 131-162).

While a special issue in 1997 will be devoted to assessing John Wansbrough's contributions to the

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<sup>9</sup> The interested reader is directed to the intriguing, critical exchange that follows these two articles, which resulted from Gary Ebersole's letter to the editors, on the one hand, and McMullin's and Segal's responses to it, on the other (1: 238-251).

study of the Quran (guest editor, Herbert Berg), *MTSR* has a number of theme issues already in print or soon to appear. Most recently one thinks of issue 7/4, "Pathologies in the Academic Study of Religion" which surveys six North American institutional case studies to discern the current health of departments of religion (guest editor, Gary Lease)<sup>10</sup>. Issue 8/1 (1996) collects symposium papers from a 1994 regional meeting of the AAR devoted to "The New Comparativism in the Study of Religion," a symposium which examines the recent proposals of the University of Vermont scholar, William Paden, concerning elements necessary for a post-Eliadean comparative study of religion. All of issue 8/2 (1996) is devoted to exploring the growing application of cognitive theorizing to the study of religion, featuring such articles as "Why are Perfect Animals, Hybrids, and Monsters Food for Symbolic Thought" (Dan Sperber) and, moving beyond their earlier critique of the supposed autonomy of religion<sup>11</sup>, E. Thomas Lawson and Robert McCauley critique anthropology's apparent ownership of the category of culture. Finally, issue 8/3 (1996) presents the papers from a session at the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) meeting in Chicago: "Ancient Myths and Modern Theories of Christian Origins: A Discussion," with contributions by Merrill P. Miller, Ron Cameron, Burton L. Mack, Jonathan Z. Smith, and John S. Kloppenborg.

### **IAHR Congresses and Regional Meetings**

Between them, *Numen* and *MTSR* more than represent an historically central aspect of the IAHR: the effort of its members to scrutinize the methods and theoretical presuppositions that operate in the study of religion as practiced worldwide. Where much North American scholarship of the past few decades has de-emphasized, some might say even ignored, such theoretical issues in favor of describing and chronicling the supposedly "hard" and "unique" data of religion, the international association has continued to produce sophisticated scholarship that critically examines theoretical presuppositions widely operating in the field. This relation between methodological and theoretical critique, on the one hand, and the international character of the IAHR, on the other, is most apparent in the various Congresses and regional meetings the society holds. Even a casual glance through the pages of *Numen* and *MTSR* will yield authors whose country of origin and/or scholarship takes place in any number of national settings: from Belgium, to Scotland, England, France, Russia, China, Japan, Taiwan, Germany, Italy, Poland, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the United States, Canada, Israel, Nigeria, Denmark, Finland, Norway, India, Australia, New Zealand, and Mexico. And, perhaps more importantly, the sites where the IAHR meets, both in its full Congress every five years and in its smaller, regional yearly meetings, truly reflect its international character. Looking back over the past thirty-five years, Congresses have not simply taken place in Europe, as they once did;

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10 The universities are: Lethbridge, Edmonton, Toronto, California at Santa Cruz, Pennsylvania, and Arizona State, with a conclusion by Jonathan Z. Smith of the University of Chicago.

11 See *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition to Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993 [1990]): 9: "It should be obvious that *we* balk when scholars of religion cite such considerations [i.e., the autonomy and irreducibility of *sui generis* religion] in order to attack even the *possibility* of formulating theories about religious behavior. . . . To cite theology *in this context*, though, is simply to beg the question."

instead, their sites have been varied, from Mexico City<sup>12</sup>, to Rome<sup>13</sup>, Sydney<sup>14</sup>, Winnipeg<sup>15</sup>, Lancaster<sup>16</sup>, Stockholm<sup>17</sup>, Claremont<sup>18</sup>, Marburg<sup>19</sup>, and

Tokyo<sup>20</sup>. Further, at the Mexico City Congress plans began to hold the year 2000's Congress in South Africa.

It is at such meetings, including the various regional meetings held most recently in such sites as Marburg (1960 Congress, 1988 regional meeting)<sup>21</sup>, Warsaw (in 1979 and 1989)<sup>22</sup>, Vermont (1991)<sup>23</sup>, Harare (1992)<sup>24</sup>, Beijing (1992)<sup>25</sup>, and Brno, the Czech Republic (1994)<sup>26</sup> where the IAHR's commitment to method and theory has been most evident. For example, at the 1989 Warsaw meeting, entitled, "Studies on Religion in the Context of the Social Sciences: Methodology and

- 12 Selected papers from Mexico City meeting are currently being assembled and edited by Armin Geertz and Russell McCutcheon under the working title, *Method and Theory in the IAHR: Collected Essays from the XVIIth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, Mexico City 1995*
- 13 *The Notion of "Religion" in Comparative Research*. Ugo Bianchi (ed.). Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1994.
- 14 *Identity Issues and World Religions: Proceedings of the XV Congress of the IAHR, 1985*. Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1986. See in particular Hubert Seiwert's opening essay, "What Constitutes the Identity of a Religion?" and Ursula King's "Female Identity and the History of Religions" where she writes: "The area of methodology and theory is as crucial for the identity of our field as for us as individuals involved in a particular scholarly enterprise" (83).
- 15 *Traditions in Contact and Change: Selected Proceedings of the XIV Congress of the IAHR*. Peter Slater and Donald Wiebe (eds.). Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983. In particular, see Joseph Kitagawa's "Humanistic and Theological History of Religions with Special Reference to the North American Scene."
- 16 *History of Religions: Proceedings of the XIII Congress of the IAHR, 1975*. Leicester Studies in Religion, 1980. Among the papers on methodology one finds an early study by Lawson on the application of linguistics models to the study of ritual language, Jacques Waardenburg's analysis of *Religionswissenschaft* in Continental Europe since 1970, and Guilford Dudley's critique of Eliade as an "anti-historian of religions", a critique which is the basis for his important book, *Religion on Trial: Mircea Eliade and His Critics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977).
- 17 *Proceedings of the XII International Congress of the IAHR, Stockholm 1970*. C. J. Bleeker, Geo Widengren, and Eric Sharpe (eds.). Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975.
- 18 *Proceedings of the XI International Congress of the IAHR, Claremont, CA*. 3 vols. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968.
- 19 *Internationaler Kongress für Religionsgeschichte, Marburg 1960*. Marburg: Kommissions-verlag N. G. Elwert, 1961.
- 20 *Proceedings of the IX International Congress for the History of Religions, Tokyo and Kyoto, 1958*. Compiled by the Japanese Organizing Committee. Tokyo: Maruzen, 1960.
- 21 The 1988 conference was published as *Marburg Revisited: Institutions and Strategies in the Study of Religion*. Michael Pye (ed.). Marburg: diagonal Verlag, 1989. The section devoted to theory includes E. Thomas Lawson's and Luther H. Martin's separate thoughts on the "Fundamental Problems in the World-wide Pursuit of the Study of Religion," and Donald Wiebe's "History or Mythistory in the Study of Religion? The Problem of Demarcation." Note Lawson's observation that the study of religion "is desperately in need of theories which produce new and interesting knowledge about the phenomena that count as religion" (21).
- 22 The 1979 Warsaw conference was later published as *Current Progress in the Methodology of the Science of Religions*. Witold Tyloch (ed.). Warsaw: Polish Scientific Publishers, 1984. The proceedings from the 1989 conference can be found in *Studies on Religions in the Context of Social Sciences: Methodological and Theoretical Relations*. Witold Tyloch (ed.). Warsaw: Polish Scientific Publishers, 1990.
- 23 *Religious Transformations and Socio-Political Change: Eastern Europe and Latin America*. Luther H. Martin (ed.). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1993.
- 24 See the report by Rosalind Hackett, "The Study of Religions in Africa: Report on the IAHR Regional Conference, Harare, Zimbabwe, September 15-19, 1992," *MTSR* 5 (1993): 63-69.
- 25 See Christian Jochim's report on the conference in *MTSR* 3 (1991): 261-264. Also, the proceedings have just appeared: Dai Kangsheng, Zhang Xinying, and Michael Pye (eds.), *Religion and Modernization in China*. Cambridge: Roots and Branches, 1995. In particular see the section on "Theoretical Reflections on Religion."
- 26 Publication of the Brno proceedings is imminent. Also note the meeting held in Bechy...e in the former Czechoslovakia, entitled, "The Bible in Cultural Contact," which was co-sponsored by NAASR, the Czechoslovakian Association for Religious Studies (now the Czech Association, also an IAHR affiliate), Masaryk University, Brno, and the Czechoslovakian Academy of Sciences.

Theoretical Relations" (1989), the following was agreed upon:

A convergence of opinion became apparent with regard to the nature of 'history' that permits reconceiving the history of religions as a human and cultural science. There was also agreement that a reconceived study of religion would understand 'religion' as a reality that interconnects social activities both implicitly and explicitly. . . . There was agreement that analyzing social processes which are correlative with religious phenomena would require the evaluation and use of innovative social theories and models as well as those from cognate disciplines. Whether such methodological orientation will prove fruitful must be judged in the context of future research<sup>27</sup>.

Not unlike the well-known public statement concerning, in Werblowsky's words, "the basic minimum conditions for the study of the history of religions," that resulted from the 1960 Congress held in Marburg<sup>28</sup>, a declaration that addressed and critiqued the apparently theological preoccupations and religious motivations of some of that Congress' participants (a declaration to which, interestingly enough, Mircea Eliade was able to sign his name), we read in the Warsaw statement a firm commitment long associated with the IAHR: to conceptualizing religion as a historical phenomenon, to engage in empirically-based research, all of which is part of the larger project of studying human culture<sup>29</sup>. Such a strong, historically-based declaration flies in the face of alternative conceptions of the field that are notoriously vague, ill-defined, ahistorical, and speculative, all of which contributes to the general identity crisis which has traditionally characterized the study of religion. Simply put, in what other field would "mystery" or "ultimate" constitute widely used scholarly categories?

In many cases, to find the proceedings of the Congresses and meetings named above, one need only look as far as either the E. J. Brill supplements to *Numen* series, *Studies in the History of Religions* (whose general editors are now Hans Kippenberg and E. Thomas Lawson), or one of Mouton de Gruyter's two series: *Religion and Reason*, or *Religion and Society* (general editors: Luther H. Martin, Donald Wiebe, Jacques Waardenburg). Both presses have a long history of publishing important methodological and theoretical work in the study of religion. For example, Brill's series, begun forty years ago, now numbers over sixty volumes, among which are not only conference

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27 Michael Pye cites the full statement in his "Religious Studies in Europe: Structures and Desiderata," in *Religious Studies: Issues, Prospects, and Proposals*. Klaus Klostermaier and Larry Hurtado (eds.). Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991. Pp. 39-55 (in particular, see his note 2). For a report on the meeting, see Armin Geertz's "The Second Conference on Methodology and Theory," *Temenos* 25 (1989): 107-108.

28 Regarding the Marburg Declaration, see R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, "Marburg, And After?" and Annemarie Schimmel, "Summary of the Discussion," both in *Numen* 7 (1960)

29 Both these declarations are comparable to Sam Gill's sometimes provocative statement of the boundary conditions necessary for an academic study of religion (*Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62 [1994]: 965-975), conditions which he believes are not routinely met in the AAR.

proceedings<sup>30</sup>, but also various *Festschriften*<sup>31</sup>, and collections of methodological essays<sup>32</sup>. More recently, Brill has published a collection of Kurt Rudolph's essays in German<sup>33</sup>, English essays on reductionism and the influence of the social sciences<sup>34</sup>, and the anthropologist Benson Saler's detailed proposal for an open, family resemblance definition of religion<sup>35</sup>.

Although not officially affiliated with the IAHR, Mouton's Religion and Reason, as well as their newer Religion and Society, series are also worth taking into account for both are explicitly aimed at publishing theoretically self-conscious works, many of which have been authored by IAHR members. The former series is perhaps well known due to Robert Baird's influential collection of methodological essays, *Category Formation and the History of Religions* (1971) and Jacques Waardenburg's two volume edited work, *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion* (1973) as well as his *Reflections on the Study of Religion* (1978)<sup>36</sup>, but it is also the site of the two companion volumes on methodology, *Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion* (edited by Frank Whaling, 1984; vol. 1 The Humanities; vol. 2 The Social Sciences, a one volume, softcover version is now available) and where the influential proceedings of the IAHR's 1973 regional conference on methodology was published<sup>37</sup>. One must also note the collected papers from the Groningen working-group on methodology, *Religion, Culture, and Methodology* (1973)<sup>38</sup>, *Principles of Integral Science of Religion* (Georg Schmid, 1979), *Interpretive Theories of Religion* (Donald Crosby, 1981), *Religion and Truth* (Donald Wiebe, 1981), and the most recent Groningen papers, *Concepts of Person in Religion and Thought* (Hans Kippenberg and A. F. Sanders, eds., 1990). Mouton's Religion and Society series, now numbering over thirty volumes, provided the context for the papers from the NAASR/IAHR's 1991 regional meeting at the University of Vermont which

30 For example, *Problems and Methods of the History of Religions: Proceedings of the Study Conference Organized by the Italian Society for the History of Religions* (1972), notably Ugo Bianchi's "The Definition of Religion: On the Methodology of Historical-Comparative Research", and *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale* (2 vols., 1980, 1981).

31 For example, *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* (1968). Particular attention is drawn to Willard Oxtoby's paper "Religionswissenschaft Revisited"; *Liber Amicorum: Studies in Honor of Professor Dr. C. J. Bleeker* (1969); *Ex Orbe Religionum: Studia Geo Widengren* (2 vols., 1972); *Transitions and Transformations in the History of Religions: Essays in Honor of Joseph Kitagawa* (1980); *Gilgul: Essays on Transformation, Revolution, and Permanence in the History of Religions. Dedicated to R. J. Zwi Werblowsky* (1987). See Kurt Rudolph's "The History of Religions (*Religionswissenschaft*) and the Religious Situation in Eastern Europe" (203-216), and Eric Sharpe's "The Secularization of the History of Religions" (257-269).

32 For example, see C. J. Bleeker's two collections, *The Sacred Bridge: Researches into the Nature and Structure of Religion* (1963) and *The Rainbow: A Collection of Studies in the Science of Religion* (1975), especially the opening essay to the latter collection, "Methodology and the Science of Religion."

33 *Geschichte und Probleme der Religionswissenschaft*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992. The book is divided into four parts: Theory and Methodology, Problems in Philology, Historical Studies in Religion, and the History of *Religionswissenschaft* (see especially his two articles in this last section on Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade).

34 *Religion and Reductionism: Essays on Eliade, Segal, and the Challenge of the Social Sciences for the Study of Religion*. Thomas Idinopulos and Edward Yonan (eds.). Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994. Many of the scholars who have entered the debate on reductionism over the past decade are represented in this collection.

35 *Conceptualizing Religion: Immanent Anthropologists, Transcendent Natives, and Unbounded Categories*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993.

36 In this volume, see the two essays "A Need for Methodology" and "The Quest for Methodology," both of which were originally presented in the early 1970s at meetings in Utrecht, the Netherlands.

37 *Science of Religion: Studies in Methodology: Proceedings of the Study Conference of the IAHR, held in Turku, Finland, 1973* (1979).

38 Note Hans Drijvers's essay in this volume, "Theory Formation in Science of Religion and the Study of the History of Religions," 57-77.

brought together scholars from what was then Western and Eastern Europe with scholars from the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Argentina, and Russia<sup>39</sup>. Moreover, as part of the Religion and Society series, the forthcoming *Dictionary of Religion, Society, and Culture* (general editors: E. Thomas Lawson, Luther H. Martin, and Russell McCutcheon) is an excellent example of the practical application of theoretical scholarship so characteristic of the IAHR, for it is not only a word book<sup>40</sup> but, more significantly, a collection of essays on a variety of topics, *all of which* demonstrate theoretically self-conscious scholarship in action.

Like Mouton's two series, Peter Lang's monograph series, Toronto Studies in Religion (general editor: Donald Wiebe, who is also the IAHR's current Treasurer), is not officially affiliated with the IAHR. However, mention must be made of Toronto Studies for it continues to publish notable works in methodological and theoretical scholarship on religion that are often representative of NAASR and IAHR members. For example, in this series one finds Thomas Ryba's *The Essence of Phenomenology and Its Meaning for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Hans Penner's *Impasse and Resolution: A Critique of the Study of Religion*, Robert Segal's collected essays, *Explaining and Interpreting Religion*, Frits Staal's *Rules Without Meaning*, and, most recently, the *Festschrift* for Ninian Smart, *Aspects of Religion*.

### **The Congresses in Rome and Mexico City**

When it comes to issues of methodological and theoretical import, specific attention must be drawn to the two most recent international Congresses held by the IAHR, Rome and Mexico City. The Rome papers, totaling over 900 pages in all, represent the work of only a portion of the total number of papers delivered in 1990. The Congress' official theme was the notion of "religion" itself but whose unofficial theme seems to have been, in the words of the then General Secretary Michael Pye, "regional diversification", scholars from thirty-four different countries addressed the Congress. Apart from the many essays on one or another religious tradition, the volume contains thirteen papers on methodology (concerning the effort to define religion, see, in particular, Joannes Snoek's "Classification and Definition Theory: An Overview" and Jan Platvoet's "Defining the Definers") eight on phenomenology, and eight on anthropology and philosophy of religion<sup>41</sup>.

The movement from the theory and methodology sessions in Rome to those in Mexico City is easily made: in 1990 Benson Saler presented a paper entitled, "Cultural Anthropology and the Definition of Religion," and in 1995 an extremely well-attended session was devoted to responses and critiques of his related book, *Conceptualizing Religion* (1993). This book symposium was simply one aspect of the History of Religions and the Social Sciences sessions, other papers being Lawson and McCauley's application of cognitive theorizing to the study of memory and ritual action, Wiebe's

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39 In particular, see the closing section of these papers, "Theoretical and Methodological Implications," containing essays by Armin W. Geertz, Ugo Bianchi, Jeppe Sinding Jensen, Rosalind I. J. Hackett, and Donald Wiebe.

40 For example, *The Continuum Dictionary of Religion* (New York: Continuum, 1994), whose general editor is Michael Pye, the former General Secretary and the current President of the IAHR, is a more traditional dictionary that can be used by both new and seasoned students in the field. (See in particular the entry on "hermeneutical vortex": "The inescapable whirlpool down which those depart who agonize greatly over difficulties of interpretation!")

41 For a more detailed assessment of the Rome papers see my own "The Category 'Religion' in Recent Publications: A Critical Survey," *Numen* 42/3 (1995): 284-309.

critique of theological influence in the formation and history of the AAR (an influence evident, he argued, from the academy's annual presidential addresses), Walter Capps' survey of unresolved methodological issues in the field<sup>42</sup>, Robert Segal's paper on the application of the medical metaphor of "diagnosis" to the social scientific study of religion, and Veikko Anttonen's attempt to rehabilitate the term "sacred" based on cognitive theorizing. Cognitive theorizing also appeared in Luther Martin's paper on syncretism, delivered as part of the panel on Syncretism in Historical and Critical Perspective.

Another methodology session, organized by Armin Geertz (the IAHR's new General Secretary), opened with his detailed paper on the effect of post-modern and post-colonial critique on the study of religion, entitled "Global Perspectives in Methodology in the Study of Religion." This session turned out to be one of the best overall attended sessions of the Congress. Its papers varied from such topics as the politics of early comparative religion and a re-examination of the empirical category of religion, to a survey of the scholarly study of religion as carried out in Muslim countries and a critique of the category religion as insufficient for the task of studying human culture and the construction of social values.

The representation of feminist studies at the IAHR has steadily increased, so that in Mexico City there were several successful panels devoted specifically to feminism, gender, and religion. (Papers from the Rome sessions were edited by Ursula King and published under the title, *Religion & Gender* [Blackwell, 1995])<sup>43</sup>. Of particular note was the Theory and Method in Gender and Religion session, one of the Religion and Gender sessions organized by Sylvia Marcos and Rosalind Hackett, the latter being the IAHR's newly elected Deputy General Secretary. Besides Hackett's own paper, "Art as Text in the Study of Gender and Religion in Africa," which grew from research carried out for her upcoming book, *Art and Religion in Africa* (Pinter Press), contributions to this panel included a critical assessment of the pre-patriarchal hypothesis, and a study of gender ideology, religious discourses, and Buddhist monasticism<sup>44</sup>.

But what was most certainly one of the more intriguing sessions of the Congress was the last day's panel devoted to the topic of Ninian Smart's proposal for the development of a World Academy of Religion. With Smart, Ursula King, Jacob Olupona, and Armin Geertz all delivered brief addresses and then they, along with members of the audience, debated the question of whether the IAHR ought to change its name and structure to match an AAR-type model. Specifically, Smart's original proposal was that

though the overall aim of a World Academy of Religion would be the cross-cultural, multidisciplinary and reflective study of religion, it has, to make real progress, to embrace all kinds of committed and non-committed scholarly organizations, it has to embrace Jewish exegetes and Christian theologians, Islamic historians and editors of

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42 This paper was a summary of his new book, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995.

43 Beyond King's often cited critique of the role played by women scholars in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* (MTR 2 [1990]: 91-97), in this volume see in particular Rosalind Shaw's feminist critique of *sui generis* religion and Penelope Margaret Magee's "Disputing the Sacred: Some Theoretical Approaches to Gender and Religion."

44 A collection of papers from the Religion and Gender sessions will soon appear as a thematic issue, guest edited by Sylvia Marcos and Rosalind Hackett, in the periodical *Religion*.

Vaishnava texts, Marxists historians of atheism and Catholic jurists, liberal New Testament scholars and Sikh professors, and so forth."<sup>45</sup>

Understandably, perhaps, not all the members of the panel, nor the audience in general, found such a proposal to be helpful for it severely conflates the practice of religion and religiously committed scholarship, on the one hand, with non-religious theorizing on religion, on the other. In other words, the World Academy of Religion is so inclusive as to make the academic study of religion, conceived as an effort *not to promote* religion but *to theorize on why* it is that people, from time to time, invoke immaterial beings and powers, all but impossible.

The proposal relies on and promotes a dysfunctional model of *Religionswissenschaft*, a model dependent upon a long tradition that misconceives all scholarship on religion as simply comprising different species of the genus inter-religious dialogue. Indeed, the dialogical model has dominated the field from its very inception and continues to this day, most notably in the case of comparative religion textbooks<sup>46</sup>. In its rush to come to consensual and supposedly mutually beneficial understandings between devotee and scholar, the World Academy proposal presumes the question of theory to already have been solved. If anything, the preceding survey, along with the now re-energized market for books in theory of religion, should suggest that this is hardly the case.

### Issues for the Future

What the 1995 Mexico City Congress brought home for many of those who attended it was the challenge that the IAHR faces as it enters into the twenty first century. The challenge is, in spite of the ironically ahistorical reputation of the History of Religions, at least in North America<sup>47</sup>, to continue developing the international association's well deserved reputation not simply for extending scholarly cooperation and collegiality beyond institutional, disciplinary, and national boundaries, but also for the production of methodologically and theoretically self-conscious research on religion, conceived not as a special case but as a *historical, cultural* datum open to the kinds of critical tools mentioned by Rudolph at the outset of this survey, tools that we as scholars routinely employ to study any number of other sites within human society and culture<sup>48</sup>. No longer do we find the field comprised of an unarticulated consensus of hermeneuts and phenomenologists, for now a wide array of new theoretical perspectives informs our research. The work of the

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45 For Smart's original proposal see his essay, "Concluding Reflections: Religious Studies in Global Perspective," in *Turning Points in Religious Studies: Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Parrinder*. Ursula King (ed.). Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990. For earlier examples of this debate, see the various reviews and critical replies between Ninian Smart and Ursula King, on the one hand, and Donald Wiebe and Luther Martin, on the other, in issues 22 (1992) and 23 (1993) of *Religion* and issue 5/1 (1993) of *MTSR*.

46 This is the conclusion reached in my own survey of these classroom resources, "The Poverty of Theory in the Classroom," which comprises chapter 4 of my own forthcoming book, *Manufacturing Religion*.

47 See Robert Segal's essay already cited earlier in this survey, and, among others, Kurt Rudolph's "We Learn What Religion is from History," Hans Kippenberg's "Rivalry Among Scholars," Carsten Colpe's "The Science of Religion, the History of Religion, and the Phenomenology of Religion," and Arthur McCalla's essay "When is History not History?" all in the special issue of *Historical Reflections* (20 [1994], guest edited by Luther Martin) devoted to the topic of conceiving the history of religions not as methodologically autonomous but as an aspect of general historiography.

48 For an excellent example of how a culture studies model can be brought to the study of religion, see Tim Fitzgerald's "A Critique of the Concept of Religion," *MTSR* forthcoming.

University of Chicago scholar, Bruce Lincoln, work that he labels as "actively and aggressively anti-disciplinary", provides an excellent and timely example of the diversity and creativity of contemporary theoretical perspectives available to the scholar of religion<sup>49</sup>. But uniting these into a coherent institutional framework conducive for theorizing about, defining, and studying religion as a sub-category of human culture will be the challenge for the future. A small number of North American departments have already faced the challenge of justifying their continued existence (a fact explored in Lease's special issue of *MTSR*). The question that the twenty first century study of religion must pose is: What do all these diverse methodologies and theoretical perspectives have in common? In the post-modern age, will they share anything at all? In the post-modern university, will it have a place? Once we have completely shaken off earlier theological, dialogical models, what will unite us?

That the IAHR has recently been debating a name change is evidence that these questions are currently being seriously addressed. The answer, or at least the beginning of one, may be no further than Werblowsky's second minimum condition from the Declaration at the 1960 Marburg Congress, a condition to which I alluded in my title. Werblowsky writes:

The common ground on which students of religion *qua* students of religion meet is the realization that the awareness of the numinous or the experience of transcendence (where these happen to exist in religions) are, whatever else they may be, undoubtedly empirical facts of human existence and history, to be studied like all human facts, by the appropriate methods. (*Numen* 7 [1960]: 236)

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<sup>49</sup> Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, 173. See also Lincoln's most recent book, *Authority: Construction and Corrosion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.