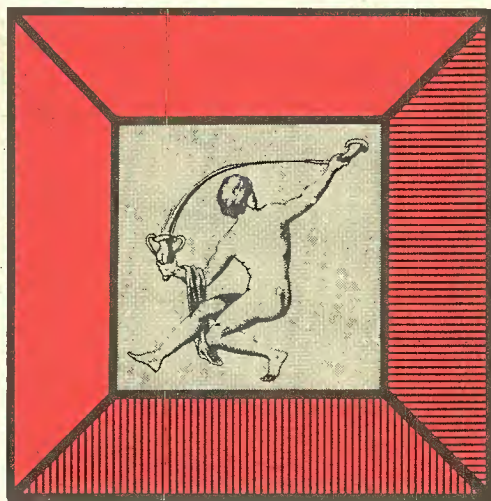


# The Notion of «Religion» in Comparative Research

Selected Proceedings of the  
XVI I A H R Congress



Edited by Ugo Bianchi

Storia delle religioni

«L'ERMA» di BRETSCHNEIDER

STORIA DELLE RELIGIONI

8

Collana diretta da Ugo Bianchi e Giulia Piccaluga

THE NOTION OF «RELIGION»  
IN COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

SELECTED PROCEEDINGS  
OF THE XVI<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS  
OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
FOR THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS  
ROME, 3<sup>RD</sup>-8<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 1990

EDITED BY UGO BIANCHI

WITH THE COOPERATION OF  
FABIO MORA AND LORENZO BIANCHI

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## THE CONGRESS: GENERALITIES

In accordance with the decisions taken by the XVth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (I.A.H.R.) at Sydney in August 1985, the XVIth International Congress has been held at Rome University "La Sapienza" from 3rd to 8th September 1990.

This continued the tradition of earlier international Congresses of the History of Religions (Paris 1900, Basle 1904, Oxford 1908, Leyden 1912, Lund 1927, Brussels 1935, Amsterdam 1950; then, following the foundation of the I.A.H.R., at Rome in 1955, Tokyo 1958, Marburg 1960, Claremont (Calif.) 1965, Stockholm 1970, Lancaster 1975, Winnipeg 1980, and Sydney 1985).

The theme of the Congress was:

*The notion of "religion" in comparative research.*

The Official languages of the Congress were: English, French, German, and Italian.

The proceedings themselves had been divided into plenary sessions and a number of sections and panels. The plenary sessions were reserved to inaugural speeches, to general reports —at the invitation of the Organizing Committee— mainly concerning the theme of the Congress, and to a final discussion on the theme "The History of Religions: Restrospect and Prospect". The individual sections concentrated mainly on specific regional and cross-cultural topics within the framework of the central theme of the Congress. Panels were organized for special purposes of current research, to accommodate, as far as possible, specific requests coming from groups of participants. There were two: "Mithraic Studies" and "Religion and Gender".

## VENUE OF THE CONGRESS

The opening sessions and all the other plenary sessions took place in the Aula Magna of Rome University "La Sapienza", Città Universitaria. The various sections met in the class-rooms of the Faculty of Economics or of the Faculty of Letters. The closing session was held in the Aula of the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche.

The sections met in the morning, while the plenary sessions (except for the final session) took place in the afternoon. The final session was divided into two parts: a) "The History of Religions: Retrospect and Prospect"; b) General Assembly of the I.A.H.R. The outgoing Executive Committee met on Monday Sept. 3rd at 9:30. The International Committee met on Wednesday Sept. 5th at 10:00. The incoming Executive Committee met on Saturday Sept. 8th, at 12:30.

## SECTIONS OF THE CONGRESS

The following sections of the Congress had been envisaged:

- 1 - Prehistory
- 2 - Australia, Oceania and Peripheral Cultures
- 3 - African Religions
- 4 - American Native Religions
- 5 - Mesoamerica and Peru
- 6 - East Asia
- 7 - India and South Asia
- 8 - Iran and Central Asia
- 9 - Ancient Egypt
- 10 - Ancient Near East
- 11 A - Greece
- 11 B - Rome
- 11 C - Hellenism
- 12 - Pre-Christian Europe
- 13 - Old Testament and Judaism
- 14 A - Christianity in the first centuries
- 14 B - Christianity in the Middle Ages
- 14 C - Christianity in modern times
- 14 D - Gnosticism
- 14 E - Manichaeism
- 15 - Islam
- 16 - Buddhism
- 17 - Religious Folklore
- 18 - The "New Religions"
- 19 A - Methodology of Comparative Research
- 19 B - Phenomenology of Religion
- 19 C - Anthropology of Religion
- 19 D - Psychology of Religion
- 19 E - Sociology of Religion
- 19 F - Philosophy of Religion
- 19 G - Varia
- 20 - Panels. 1. Mithraic Studies. 2. Religion and Gender.

## THE THEME OF THE CONGRESS

The theme of the Congress had been specified as follows:

Correctly understood, the theme of the Congress will not be dealt with speculatively or normatively, but on a positive and inductive basis, with reference to research being carried out in the various cultural and religious areas and with particular attention to the varying national and factual implications of the use of the term "religion".

Far from being the object of mere terminological or "definitional" study, the term will be tested as an instrument and a problem for historical and comparative research, from its Latin origins down to Latin-speaking late Antiquity, Medieval and Modern Europe, with particular attention to the problems involved in the use of the term by European-trained scholars dealing with extra-European cultures as well as by scholars belonging to these and expressing themselves in European languages. Special attention will also be given to such partially alternative notions as "Law" and "Path" and to problems of notional continuity and discontinuity between pre-Christian and Christian, pre-Islamic and Islamic, pre-Buddhist and Buddhist use of "religious" terminology.

## CONGRESS EVENTS

An excursion to Ostia took place on Wednesday, Sept. 5th in the afternoon.

A visit to Vatican and its Museums, at the intention of the accompanying persons, took place on Thursday, Sept. 6th.

The members of the Congress were invited to dinner in the gardens of Capitol by the Mayor of Rome, Dr. Franco Carraro, on Sept. 3rd.

The social banquet took place on Thursday, Sept. 6th.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to the following Institutions which facilitated financially the organization of the Congress: Università di Roma "La Sapienza"; Dipartimento di Studi storico-religiosi dell'Università di Roma "La Sapienza"; Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche; Giunta Centrale per gli Studi Storici; Istituto Italiano per il Medio e l'Estremo Oriente; Cassa di Risparmio di Roma.

Thanks are due to Prof. Dr. Giorgio Tecce, Rector Magnificus of the University of Rome "La Sapienza", to Prof. Dr. Achille Tartaro, Dean *pro tempore* of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Rome "La Sapienza", to Prof. Dr. Maria Grazia Mara, President of the Dipartimento di Studi storico-religiosi of the University of Rome "La Sapienza", to Prof. Dr. Luigi Rossi Bernardi, President of the C.N.R., to Sen. Prof. Dr. Giovanni Spadolini, President of the Giunta Centrale per gli Studi Storici, to Prof. Dr. Gherardo Gnoli, President of the IsMEO, to Prof. Dr. Pellegrino Capaldo, President of the Cassa di Risparmio di Roma. Thanks are also due to Prof. Dr. Ernesto Chiacchierini, Dean of the Faculty of Economics of the University of Rome "La Sapienza", who supplied important needs of the Congress.



THE OUTGOING EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE INTERNATIONAL  
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Prof. Dr. D. Wiebe	
Prof. Dr. Sung-Hae Kim	Coopted Observer

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## ITALIAN SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Prof. Dr. Achille Tartaro, Dean of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy.  
Prof. Dr. Ugo Bianchi, President of the Italian Society for the History of Religions.  
Prof. Dr. Gherardo Gnoli, Vice-President of the Italian Society for the History of Religions.  
Prof. Dr. Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, Secretary and Honorary Treasurer of the Italian Society for the History of Religions.  
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Prof. Dr. Corrado Pensa.  
Prof. Dr. Giulia Piccaluga.  
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## LOCAL ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

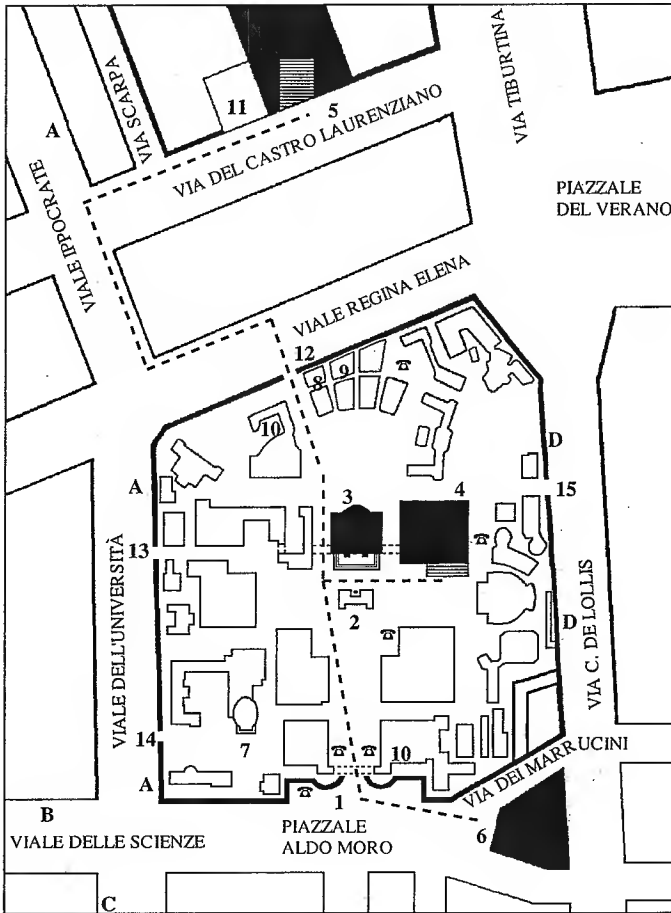
Prof. Dr. Ugo Bianchi.  
Dr. Ric. Ida Paladino.  
Dr. Ric. Paola Pisi.  
Dr. Maria Teresa Bianchi  
Dr. Giorgia Sabatinelli

The following academic Authorities addressed the participants: Prof. Dr. Giorgio Tecce, Rector Magnificus; Prof. Dr. Achille Tartaro, Dean *pro tempore* of the Faculty of Letters; Prof. Dr. Paolo Brezzi, Vice-President of the Giunta di Studi Storici; Prof. Dr. Franco Bolgiani, in the last session, on behalf of Prof. Dr. Luigi Rossi Bernardi, President of the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche. There followed the Presidential Address of the I.A.H.R. President, Prof. Dr. Annemarie Schimmel, and the addresses of the Secretary-General of the Association, Prof. Dr. Michael Pye and of the Convenor and President of the Congress, Prof. Dr. Ugo Bianchi.

## TIMETABLE

	Monday Sept. 3rd	Tuesday Sept. 4th	Wednesday Sept. 5th	Thursday Sept. 6th	Friday Sept. 7th	Saturday Sept. 8th		
9.00 - 9.30	REGISTRATIONS	Sections and panels	Sections and panels	Sections and panels	Sections and panels	The history of religions: Retrospect and prospect		
9.30 - 10.00			Executive committee (outgoing)				Sections and panels	International com- mittee
10.00 - 10.30								
10.30 - 11.00		Break	Break	Break	Break			
11.00 - 11.30								
11.30 - 12.00			Sections and panels	Sections and panels	Sections and panels		Sections and panels	General Assembly
12.00 - 12.30			Sections and panels	Sections and panels	Sections and panels		Sections and panels	
12.30 - 13.00							Executive committee (incoming)	
13.00 - 13.30			Lunch	Lunch	Lunch		Lunch	Lunch
13.30 - 14.00								
14.00 - 14.30								
14.30 - 15.00								
15.00 - 15.30	Opening of the congress	General lectures	Excursion to Ostia	General lectures	General lectures	Departures Executive committee (continued)		
15.30 - 16.00								
16.00 - 16.30								
16.30 - 17.00								
17.00 - 17.30								
17.30 - 18.00								
18.00 - 18.30								
18.30 - 19.00								
19.00 - 19.30					Departure to restaurant			
19.30 - 20.00					Banquet			
20.00 - 20.30								
20.30 - 21.00								
..... - .....								

## CITTÀ UNIVERSITARIA



### LEGEND

1. Propylaea - Entrance piazzale A. Moro
2. Minerva
3. Aula Magna
4. Faculty of Letters
5. Faculty of Economics
6. Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche (CNR)
7. University Chapel
8. Post Office
9. Bank
10. Bar
11. Mensa

12. Entrance viale Regina Elena
  13. Entrance viale dell'Università
  14. Entrance viale dell'Università
  15. Entrance via De Lollis
- ☎ Phones

### Bus Stop

- A. Line 310 from Stazione Termini
- B. Line 9 from Stazione Termini
- C. Lines 9, 310 to Stazione Termini
- D. Line 492 to Stazione Termini

PROF. MICHAEL PYE  
REPORT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

When five years have passed after the previous Congress of the IAHR it is usual for the Secretary-General to provide a report on the intervening period. However during the last five years a simple but, I hope, informative bulletin has been sent regularly to three officers of each national association. Moreover a meeting of the International Committee was held in Marburg, in 1988, which was quite well attended and at which a good number of matters were dealt with. Of course the various representatives change from time to time, and so too do many of the Congress participants. For this reason some of the information has been assembled in a special issue of the IAHR Bulletin which, in a general sense, may be regarded as one long report. I hope this will be helpful.

In view of this my immediate report concentrates on one theme to which I have devoted some efforts during the past five years, namely the regional diversification of the IAHR. In spite of some important exceptions, notably Japan (which has provided the IAHR over the years with a major Congress, an extremely distinguished Congress Patron, and Executive Committee members including vice-presidents) there has been a tendency for the activities of the IAHR, including conferences and publications, to be centred on so-called "western countries". Yet much of the subject matter in the study of religion is located in other regions where, nowadays, it is also in fact studied. Some of the underlying reasons for this, and the alternatives open to us, were considered at the Special Conference in Marburg two years ago, and those interested may like to take note of the proceedings which have since been published. However I should like to dwell here on the practical steps which have been taken and on some of the perspectives for the future, for there is much work still to be done.

One of the most important tasks of the General Assembly will be the affiliation of recently founded associations from various parts of the world. On this occasion, if the International Committee recommends those which have been handed in most recently, no less than seven applications will be considered. I intend to say a few words about these because they illustrate the principle of regional diversification graphically. Further information may be sought from the representatives who are present during the next few days, and I hope that a special welcome will be extended to them.

First another word about the General Assembly itself. The quinquennial meeting will be held on Saturday August 8th as shown in the Congress programme. The Assembly is open to all participants at the Congress *who are also members of their affiliated national associations*. Other participants may of course be present as observers. It should be remembered that the main representative forum of the IAHR is the International Committee, in which every national association has a direct voice and which discusses and adopts major policy decisions. The International Committee elects the

Executive Committee including the officers of the IAHR. The Executive Committee deals with practical implications and forward planning. Although the General Assembly cannot deal with many detailed questions it does have a most important public function. Apart from the affiliations already mentioned it will also be asked this time to approve some minor amendments to the statutes which have been recommended by the International Committee. These are set out on a special sheet which is also included in this bulletin. In the meantime any participants who have detailed questions or suggestions about the running of the IAHR are requested to contact the representatives of their national associations who will be meeting, as the International Committee, on Wednesday, September 5th.

This is the fourth major Congress at which Chinese participation has been possible. Within the last two years intensive correspondence and conversations (in which Prof. Hubert Seiwert has rendered particular assistance) led to the point where it was possible to publish the statutes of a restructured Chinese Association for the Study of Religion in the IAHR Bulletin. An extensive list of committee members has also been supplied and an IAHR regional conference in China is proposed for the autumn of 1991. On this basis I hope that the formal affiliation of the Chinese association can now be effected. Representing it at the Congress for this purpose is Professor Kong Fan from Beijing, who will be able to answer any questions which you may have.

It is well known that the history of religions in Indonesia has been particularly complex right up until present times. In this case the correspondence has centred on Yogyakarta, where various specialists in the study of religion are active. Assistance in the establishment of these contacts has come from diverse quarters. A recently formed Indonesian Society for the Comparative Study of Religion has applied for affiliation and is represented here by Dr. Burhanuddin Daya. This application is also of great interest, both because of the Islamic context of religious studies in Indonesia and because of the value of Yogyakarta as a potential conference venue for the IAHR.

Thirdly I have especial pleasure in reporting the application of the recently formed Asociación Latinoamericana para los estudios de las Religiones, at whose foundation meeting I was privileged to be present earlier this year. In Latin America it is quite essential to have a regional association because several of the individual countries simply would not be able to maintain full-scale organisations of their own. (The exception has proved to be Mexico.) This development in Latin America has been carried forward in particular by Professor Elio Masferrer Kan, who is also present at this Congress. A scientific review, *Religiones Latinoamericanas*, with an annual bibliographical issue is also about to be launched, and for this I have been able to secure the promise of long-term financial support via the participation of the IAHR in the UNESCO-based Council for Philosophical and Humanistic Studies.

The fourth major region in which new developments are in progress is the Soviet Union. We have among us two representatives of the recently formed *Sovietskaya Asatsiatsiya Istorikov Religii*, for which affiliation to the IAHR is also sought. As late as

May this year, at the opening of the excellent Regional Conference in Helsinki, the fairly numerous Soviet participants were requested to consider the possibility of founding an appropriate association. As a result extremely cordial relations were established with colleagues from various cities. There had of course been earlier contacts, developed especially by Professors Juha Pentikäinen, Witold Tyloch, Jacques Waardenburg and myself. It is well known that organisational questions in the Soviet Union are no less complex than in other large countries, and it has been and still will be difficult to balance the needs of the different major centres: Leningrad, Moscow, Novosibirsk, not to mention other places such as Syktyvkar; and of the different types of scholars who specialise in religion: orientalist, anthropologist, philosopher, etc. To be frank, the degree of integration which one might like to see has not yet been achieved. However I believe that it can be developed and that the proposal made by Professor Pishchik, which I was able to discuss with him in detail in Moscow this summer, is a most valuable starting point and worthy of our support. It is my hope that an IAHR Regional Conference can be organised before too long in a major Soviet centre.

These four applications for affiliation come from major, distinct regions of the world, each with its own fascinating history of religions and complex contemporary phenomena. The representatives of these regions at this Congress are few in number. However the number of specialists in these places who are working on religion, our largely unknown colleagues, is very great. We all help both each other and ourselves if we support these affiliations, not merely by an act of approval at the General Assembly, but by continued practical support in the coming years.

At its most recent meeting (Marburg 1988) the International Committee passed a recommendation that the North American Association for the Study of Religion (NAASR) should be affiliated. Although United States participation (via the ASSR) has always been significant, this new association will open the membership to a wider circle of specialists in the study of religion than was possible hitherto. This will not affect the voting strength of the Canadian association. In accordance with the political trend in Canada however there has also been formed a Société Québécoise pour l'Étude de la Religion which has, with the agreement of the existing Canadian association, applied for affiliation. This application still has to be considered by the International Committee. In view of the number of people engaged in the study of religion in North America some complexity in the institutional arrangements is no doubt unavoidable. On this background, and considering the great differences in size between some of the affiliated associations, especially the size of the regions which they represent, it may be desirable at some future stage to consider the numerical voting rules from a more realistic viewpoint. Most of the European countries are smaller than either California or Quebec; on the other hand their long-standing IAHR-affiliated associations are in many cases extremely strong, and undoubtedly deserve independent representation even in the context of increasing European integration.

I said that there were seven applications for affiliation, and so far have only mentioned six. The relaxed political situation in Eastern Europe has also borne fruit in other ways for the IAHR. At the Special Conference in Warszawa last year, just as Mr. Mazowiecki was forming his new government, a crucial contact was established which led to the efficient foundation, with statutes and a good members list, of the Czechoslovak Association for the Study of Religion. This association, represented here in Rome by Dr. Papousek and Dr. Balaban, also seeks affiliation. It may be said that this development is entirely due to the loyal work of late Professor Tyloch and others in Warszawa. During the same months, but rather as a result of the Helsinki conference mentioned already, the Hungarian association has been revitalised under new leadership; however this will not require a new affiliation procedure. In general we may certainly say that the IAHR has kept pace with the developments in Eastern Europe, but I would like to emphasise that this has been possible partly because of the contacts maintained during all those years when such things were less fashionable. I believe we should take the same approach in other areas where difficulties may be experienced sometimes.

The newly formed associations will continue to need support in various ways, especially from those strong and reliable member groups which run their affairs well, pay their subscriptions, keep their list of members up-to-date, publish their rules and hold their elections, and maintain a good flow of information among their members about the activities of the IAHR. For various reasons some of our existing member groups do not always achieve all these goals. Sometimes they even go into a brief, and I hope, refreshing sleep, from which they need to be awakened by the Secretary-General. Perhaps these organisational questions may seem rather dull at times. I sometimes share this view. There are more interesting things in life, such as research and ideas, physical occupations, music and poetry. However if the national associations are not organised well, many interesting colleagues fail to meet each other, and this is a loss for all concerned. In particular, if an association is centred on one strong personality, without any real organisation, it is difficult to know what to do when he or she retires from the scene. For this reason I would like to call upon all of you to take an interest in your own national association and to make sure that it functions in an appropriate way. Simple things such as a copy of the rules of association and a list of members may be essential to maintain communication in changing circumstances.

As to the future regional diversification of the IAHR, there is considerable interest in Africa south of the Sahara. Two strong associations are represented at the Congress, but a regional conference is proposed for a third country, namely Zimbabwe. There is more about Africa in the minutes of the International Committee. Looking elsewhere it may be noted that the largest single country without any formal representation in the IAHR, if the currently proposed affiliations are approved, will be India. This is regrettable, since India, as one of the major homes of the religions of the world, has also produced a splendid array of scholars of religion. I would therefore challenge the Indian participants at this Congress to meet together here in Rome and to lay the foundations



for a well organised Indian Association for the History of Religions, which I am sure would have a brilliant future.

Regional strategy is also conference strategy. However conference strategy is an organisational question and an economic question, especially in a world where economic imbalance seems to be common. We shall have to try to resolve these questions in a responsible manner in order to achieve an integrated development for our subject in the future. Current conference proposals include locations in China, France, Indonesia, Mexico, the Soviet Union, Turkey, the United States and Zimbabwe, but the details will have to be considered by the committees in the next few days.

It is striking that in most of these places the official languages are not the same as those four languages in which the IAHR journal *Numen* has been published in recent years, namely English, French, German and Italian. I am therefore proposing to the International Committee that the official languages of IAHR conferences should normally be three, namely, English, French, and the language(s) of the country or city in which the meeting takes place. Thus in Beijing Chinese would be added and in Mexico City Spanish. Prof. Peter Antes, from Germany, who has been supporting me as Deputy Secretary-General these past five years, will shortly be addressing the Congress in French in order to reinforce this point in a positive spirit.

One of the two new editors of the IAHR journal *Numen*, Prof. Hans Kippenberg, who also resides in Germany, will be speaking in English, at his own choice. At this point I would like publicly to express the appreciation of the Executive Committee, and I am sure of many others, for the care which has been shown for the journal by the outgoing editors Prof. Zwi Werblowsky and Prof. Mathieu Heerma van Voss. The other new editor is Prof. Thomas Lawson, chairman of the Department of Religion at the University of Western Michigan. Any matters to do with *Numen* should now be addressed to Prof. Kippenberg or Prof. Lawson.

During the Congress the IAHR secretariat will enjoy the services of three voluntary assistants from Marburg who may be able to give and certainly will be able to receive information or messages. They are Steffen Rink (publications), Katya Konrad and Beate Schutt.

PROF. UGO BIANCHI  
PERSPECTIVES DU CONGRÈS

Il y a exactement quatre-vingt-dix ans, le premier congrès d'Histoire des religions se réunissait à Paris dans le cadre des grandes manifestations de l'Exposition universelle. Je dis 'exactement' du fait que le congrès de Paris s'ouvrait le même mois et le même jour —le 3 de septembre— qui sont aussi le mois et le jour de l'inauguration de nos travaux dans cette Université de Rome. Voilà —espérons-le— notre congrès favorisé par un horoscope et une échéance jubilaire qui nous invite à commémorer une période de temps qui n'a pas été de la simple durée.

Le congrès de Paris marquait pour nos études la conclusion d'un siècle, celui des premières découvertes égyptiennes et assyriennes, et le commencement d'un autre, qu'on entrevoyait à la lumière éblouissante d'une confiance pleine dans le progrès fatal et 'salvifique', un pronostic —hélas— que les circonstances de ces quatre-vingt-dix ans n'ont pas toujours confirmé.

Le congrès parisien avait été précédé par deux autres conférences internationales ayant pour objet les religions et leur étude: le grand congrès des religions à Chicago en 1893, dans le cadre d'une exposition universelle, et le congrès de Stockholm de 1897 présidé par Fries.

Il s'agissait à Chicago, et aussi à Stockholm, de montrer dans un contexte interconfessionnel le rôle de la religion et des religions dans la culture et la vie humaines, sous le signe de la tolérance, de l'estime réciproque et —dirions-nous aujourd'hui— du dialogue. Le congrès de Paris se caractérisait différemment. Étant lié, comme par un cordon ombilical, à l'existence, depuis 1887, de la Section des sciences religieuses à l'École pratique des hautes études et subissant l'influence de certaines orientations idéologiques et politiques plus générales propres à la France de l'époque, le congrès de Paris insistait sur un aspect qui allait marquer l'avenir de ces études, l'aspect historique. Au cours de l'avant-dernière décennie du dix-neuvième siècle, une discipline nouvelle était née dans la constellation académique d'un certain nombre d'universités, de la Suisse à la Hollande, de la France à l'Italie: l'Histoire des religions, discipline qui se voulait fondée sur l'application de la méthode historico-critique et destinée à s'accomplir dans le comparatisme. Une discipline, faut-il ajouter, qui naissait dans une situation autre que celle des universités d'Allemagne, où les facultés de théologie de l'État polarisaient les études religieuses universitaires. Il est inutile de rappeler les réserves très fortes de Adolf von Harnack à propos de la nouvelle discipline. Il est vrai qu'au congrès de Paris de 1900 d'autres voix ne firent pas défaut, qui se nourrissaient de situations culturelles différentes, tel le mythologisme naturiste —situation archaïque destinée selon l'allemand-anglais Fr. Max Müller à laisser en définitive la place à une religion plus intérieure — ou le spiritualisme romantique de l'italien de Gubernatis, qui en ces années terminait son activité universitaire et qui vit se confier par les organisateurs du congrès l'allocution de clôture, intitulée *L'avenir des religions*.

Le terme histoire revenait plusieurs fois dans les contributions des congressistes, bien que souvent plié à des significations que le progrès de la recherche aurait bientôt fait l'objet d'une critique serrée. Il suffit de considérer la façon où un autre important personnage du congrès parisien, le Comte Goblet d'Alviella, pensait pouvoir reconstruire le passé par le cheminement d'un évolutionnisme élémentaire qui, sautant d'une culture à l'autre, trouvait trop facilement les *missing links* d'une prétendue évolution unilinéaire de l'humanité non-civilisée. Bien plus proche d'une exigence critico-documentaire relative aux cultures archaïques, était la position de Fr. Max Müller, l'un des pères de l'Histoire des religions. Retenu par son état de santé il s'était intéressé au congrès parisien, auquel il avait envoyé un message qui fut lu en séance plénière. "Vous savez combien —écrivait-il—, dès le premier commencement de mes travaux, j'ai toujours tenu ferme pour le caractère historique de notre oeuvre... Mon oeuvre, comme la vôtre, a toujours été une étude historique et comparée des religions, et c'est pour cela que j'ai commencé mes publications par l'*editio princeps* du RigVeda". Le sauvage primitif des anthropologues évolutionnistes, le poète primitif enivré de la grandeur des événements et des entités du ciel, selon la linguistique de Max Müller, voici deux points de départ, inadéquats certes, mais qui par leur cohabitation annonçaient déjà le terrain difficile et découpé sur lequel la discipline naissante allait faire ses épreuves et montrer ses possibilités. Les anthropologues de l'école de Tylor et Lang trouvaient réductif le comparatisme linguistique du savant d'Oxford, qui comparait seulement ce qui était linguistiquement comparable, et reconstruisait par les trouvailles indo-européennes l'histoire religieuse de l'humanité primitive, tandis que —à son tour— l'évolutionnisme était bientôt battu en brèche par l'ethnologie historico-culturelle allemande et autrichienne, de Graebner et Ankermann à Frobenius et W. Schmidt; ce même Frobenius qui annonçait déjà, d'autre part, les succès et les périls d'une approche aux données culturelles faite de *Erlebnis* et d'*Einführung*.

Quoi qu'il en soit, il convient de citer les mots d'Albert Réville à l'inauguration du congrès: "La légitimité —disait-il— et l'intérêt de nos travaux dépendent entièrement de l'idée qu'il convient de se faire de l'histoire". Certes, le problème de l'application de la méthode historique à l'étude des religions était plus profond que Réville lui-même n'aurait pu l'imaginer. Mais on ne saurait nier qu'avec ces mots il avait touché comme d'instinct au point délicat de la nouvelle discipline.

Évidemment, notre but n'est pas ici de parcourir la chronique de ces congrès, qui, en comptant l'actuel, arrivent au nombre de seize, une série interrompue seulement par les deux guerres. Nous mentionnerons toutefois le congrès de Leyde en 1911, qui décida de la vocation scientifique de R. Pettazzoni, le fondateur, avec U. Pestalozza, de l'Histoire des religions en Italie, le premier qui occupa une chaire stable de cette discipline dans ce pays et dans cette université, en 1924; le co-fondateur de la International Association for the History of Religions, puis président de celle-ci à la mort de G. van der Leeuw, et finalement organisateur du congrès de la I.A.H.R. qui se tint à Rome en 1955 sur le thème de la royauté sacrée. Je ne saurais terminer ces notes sans mentionner les autres savants qui ont présidé notre association, G. Widengren, M. Simon, Annemarie Schimmel; avec eux, et parmi les disparus, d'autres qui ont coopéré à la vie de

la I.A.H.R.: C.J. Bleeker, Fr. Heiler, H.-Ch. Puech, S.G.F. Brandon, A. Brelich et A. Bausani, tous les deux de Rome, G. Dumézil et M. Eliade, les trois derniers étant disparus dans l'espace de ce lustre, et que nous entendons commémorer aujourd'hui.

Notre congrès, que dix ans seulement séparent du passage du siècle, voire du millénaire, se trouve affronté à une situation des études assez différente de celle de 1900. L'émergence de séries entières de documents nouveaux, de Qumran à l'Égypte, de la Grèce à l'Asie centrale, jusqu'aux peuples de style oral une fois mal connus, et d'autre part l'affirmation des disciplines sociales et psychologiques, obligent l'Histoire des religions à une méthodologie idiographique et comparée avertie, à la fidélité à l'approche holistique dans le traitement des faits religieux.

C'est pourquoi nous avons choisi ce thème, *La notion de 'religion' dans la recherche comparative*; un terme, celui de religion, qui dans l'usage des historiens des religions et, respectivement, des anthropologues oscille tour à tour entre un sens plénier et univoque, comme chez Otto et Eliade, et un certain refus que lui opposent les sociologues, plus intéressés au découpage classificatoire et fonctionnel des matériaux documentaires.