

## *History of the ISSR – Part 2*

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### **2.-ROME – OPATIJA: THE FIRST MUTATION** <sup>\*,†</sup>

In the sixties, the CISR was confronted by different major issues: its internalization, its denominational character and the redefinition of its objectives.

#### 1. The internalization of CISR

Did the CISR live up to its international aspirations expressed in its name? Already at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference, 66 people were present from 6 different countries: Italy, Germany and the USA joined the three original countries. At the 4<sup>th</sup> Conference, three more countries could be added: Austria, Canada and Spain. In 1956, at the 5<sup>th</sup> Conference, 262 people attended from 18 different countries. These participants came from Europe, North and South America. In 1970, the new Secretary General wrote in the *Bulletin de Liaison*: 360 persons from 40 countries, who have attended the conferences, are registered and they receive the *Bulletin de Liaison*. They came from all continents, especially from Europe (West and East) and North America, respectively 60 and 26 percent. This was partly due to the rotating locations of the conferences: we had the first nine conferences in seven different countries, of which, one in the so called New World.

Not only were the audiences international, papers presented at the conference also had an international spectrum. From the second conference on there were papers presented about research on the religious situation in Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain. At the 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference we have to add papers presented by colleagues from Canada, Chile, Columbia, Hungary, Italy, USA and Zaïre; and at the 4<sup>th</sup> conference Austria joined. Later conferences confirmed this trend and, consequently, extended the scope of the Conference.

The internationalization brought to the fore its initial option to be a nondenominational association. From the 5<sup>th</sup> Conference on there were papers presented by Christians other than Catholics. However, according to the statutes it was a Catholic organization.

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## 2. The CISR drops its denominational character

In the second part of the 1960s, the strained relationship between CISR and Rome made the President and the Secretary General propose new statutes for the CISR, and they suggested in the CISR *Bulletin* to ask the Holy See for its approval. Many members objected vehemently, and Rome was never contacted. It is clear that a new generation of academics could not accept the "self-imposed" limitations of the objectives of the CISR and that they wanted to link up again with the mainstream of sociology and the sociological tradition of Durkheim and Weber. Drastic changes occurred at the end of the 1960s.

In 1968, the then Secretary General of the CISR, Emile Pin, proposed new statutes in the *Bulletin de Liaison* (1968,1), which, according to the next *Bulletin* (1968,2) were accepted for lack of objections. What was new in these statutes? The purpose of the CISR was no longer limited to the methodology; almost all references to religious bodies were eliminated, except that the membership of the Executive Committee should at least include two Roman Catholics and two members of other Christian churches. Furthermore, active membership of the association was reserved for social scientists "interested in the progress of religion", although any person interested in the sociology of religion might become an "affiliated member". Finally, a "preparatory committee" was established to prepare for each conference: until then papers had been offered by members, and others were solicited by the secretary general.

The 10<sup>th</sup> conference was held in Rome (1969), and the acts present 17 papers offering a criticism of "religious sociology", a discussion of theoretical and methodological issues in the sociological study of religion, and studies on sects, atheism, and irreligion. Almost all papers had references to mainstream sociology, Durkheim and his school included. Bryan Wilson presented a paper at the conference and was referred to in other conference papers. Other studies explicitly referred to recent works of Berger and Luckmann, who reformulated the central questions of the sociology of religion and criticized "church sociology". More than half of the 116 participants were clerics. Half of the participants were Italians, the other half came from 15 countries, of which the best represented were USA (13), Belgium (9) and France (7). There were three participants from Eastern Europe, one from Asia, one from Africa and one from Latin America. Of the 17 papers presented in the Acts, thirteen were in English and four in French.

At that conference, Jacques Verscheure was designated the new Secretary General, to stay in office until his death in 1985. Together with the Presidents Bryan Wilson (1971-1975)

and David Martin (1975-1983), he had a major impact on the CISR. When he started his task, he was the director of the Socio-Religious Research Centre in Lille (France). He accepted the designation under a silent agreement with Jean Remy and myself that emerged after a walk in the nice garden of the convent where the conference took place. He asked us if we would accept to take over at the next conference in case he was forced to resign. Jean Remy did not feel that he could promise that, so finally I agreed. Indeed, Verscheure had to ask the consent of his bishop and he also wanted to see if he had the support of the members of the CISR in the difficult tasks that awaited him.

At the 10<sup>th</sup> conference in Rome, the General Assembly decided to abrogate "in the new statutes and activities" all denominational references. Consequently, a revision of the statutes became essential, a first task that fell unto Verscheure. To mark the openness of the CISR it was also decided that the next conference should take place in Opatija (Yugoslavia). The central theme of this conference being "Religion and Religiosity, Atheism and Non-belief in Industrial and Urban Society". This was a second major task for him. How to ensure that the conference would be a scientific meeting and not a discussion of Christians versus Marxists. And in Yugoslavia, he had to ensure that the conference did not incite oppositions from the Catholic Church, the Apostolic Nuncio and the Archbishop of Zagreb, and the Yugoslavian State Institute on Religions and Atheism. Furthermore, he asked himself if a reoriented CISR could survive. On the one hand, what would be its specificity *vis-à-vis* the *Research Committee 22: Sociology of Religion* of the International Sociological Association (ISA) if the CISR became purely scientific? And, on the other hand, being from France, he was confronted with the existing *Groupe de Sociologie des Religions* (GSR) of the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (Paris), that was founded in 1954, of whom none were present. This group wanted to differentiate itself from traditional "religious sociology" and from the "Durkheim tradition" expressing this in their name "Group of Sociology of Religions". Was a dual membership acceptable for them? Poulat (1990) refers in his article to the different negotiations that Verscheure undertook during the intra conference period with the Research committee 22 of the ISA (Mol and Birnbaum) and the GSR, which he chaired. Poulat helped Verscheure in rewriting the new statutes. And Verscheure got the insurances he lobbied for and the financial support from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs to organize the conference.

The 11<sup>th</sup> Conference in Opatija (1971) was a success; there were 211 participants from 23 different countries; one third came from Yugoslavia; one third from Belgium, France and Italy; and among the other participants, 6 came from Eastern Europe (none from Russia), and

3 from Africa. Desroche (Groupe de [sociologie des religions](#), CNRS Paris) wrote an enthusiastic report in the *Archives de Sociologie des Religions*, underscoring the plurality of the domains covered and of the methodologies used.

There were 83 members present at the General Assembly and 78 adopted the new Statutes. The most important change was that the purpose of the CISR is "scientific". The clauses that "members should be interested in the progress of religion" and that "the membership of the Executive Committee should include at least two roman Catholics and two members of other Christian Churches" were eliminated. And the category "affiliated members" was suppressed. Indeed for many years, sociologists had sought to restrict CISR membership and conference attendance to sociologists and academics in related sciences (e.g. anthropology, history, and psychology). By the suppression of this category, pastoral workers might be excluded. The impact of the latter on the discussions had indeed come to be negatively evaluated. Consequently, in Opatija, the CISR shed the last vestiges of its religious past and Bryan Wilson became the President. In his person he symbolised the changes: being an internationally recognized scientist, an agnostic interested in all forms of religion and an Anglophone. Indeed in Opatija, the CISR, born francophone, became officially bilingual: English and French.

Since Opatija, the object of the CISR was specified and still is in the Art. 3 and 4 of its statutes: . "The CISR shall be a scientific Association. Its object shall be to advance sociology and related sciences in the analysis and interpretation of religious and related phenomena". "To fulfil its purposes, the Association shall give priority to the two following objectives: a) to promote throughout the world relations between sociologists and, more generally, between specialists of the various disciplines concerned with the object of the Association; and b) to organize periodical international conferences". Since then regular conferences were held every two years. The 12<sup>th</sup> conference in The Hague (Netherlands) in 1973, confirmed its success and the mutation that had taken place. Its membership had grown in four years from 72 to 329 from 54 countries including a delegation of Japan..

### 3. CISR: "*sociologie religieuse*" or "*sociologie des religions*"?

An important number of members wanted to change the French name in *Conférence Internationale de Sociologie des Religions* to mark the mutation that the society had undergone. This proposal was defeated at the General Assembly during the XI Conference in

Opatija by 36 votes for, 39 votes to keep *Sociologie Religieuse* and 8 abstentions. A majority of two thirds was required to change the name of the society.

In his article, Poulat plays down the symbolic meaning of the term "*sociologie religieuse*". Each and every language has its particularities, he stated; take for example "*sociologie urbaine, rurale, industrielle, etc.* Which is true, but it is not the point. The term "*sociologie religieuse*" implied an ideological option, which is obvious when he pointed out that the group "*sociologie des religions*" of the CNRS, of which he was the chairman, was established in 1954 in Paris, to differentiate itself from the Durkheimian tradition and from another "*de marque catholique*" that labelled itself "*sociologie religieuse*".

Consequently, when a proposal to change the name from "*Sociologie Religieuse*" into "*Sociologie des Religions*" was defeated in the General Assembly, I suspect that this was because two different groups had a vested interest in perpetuating the old name. On the one hand, the "*Groupe de Sociologie des Religions*" from France wanted to maintain its own specific identity vis-à-vis the "*sociologie religieuse*", and, on the other hand, some "clerics" wanted to keep the CISR, at least implicitly, as a Catholic organization which promoted a sociology at the service of the Church; a sociology that was sociological only in its acceptance of the empirical techniques, and that rejected sociological theory.

It was this type of sociology, identified as religious sociology that many participants wanted to combat, from the 1960s onwards. What was it that promoted this hostile attitude and led to changes in CISR? As Tschannen documents in his paper in the Acts of the CISR, a new generation of sociologists came to the fore coached, one may say, by mentors like Luckmann, Martin and Wilson. I should like to stress the impact that this generation has undergone from the disintegration of the Catholic identity and from the impact of the meetings in the ISA RC22 and other professional organisations to understand their negative attitude to "religious sociology".

The major changes in our association were related to changes in the social environment. At the end of the 1960s, cultural change was rampant and it had a major effect on Catholics. This became quite obvious in the drastic fall in mass attendance on weekends. Catholics were up against a major identity crisis, and this also had its impact on Catholic sociologists: "religious sociology" became, from the 1960s on, as was the case in the American Catholic Sociological Society according to Paul Reiss (1969: 126-127), a "sociology of Catholicism (resp. Protestantism)". Sociologists started studying Catholic life and not just Church life. In the Netherlands and Belgium, for example a sociology of "pillarization" developed. Sociologists of religion and sociologists of polity started studying

the emergence and the development of, and the changes in, Catholic/Protestant organizations, and the impact of these organizations on the political equilibrium of these countries (Billiet, Dobbelaere, Huyse, Remy, Van den Brande and Voyé in Belgium and Kruyt, Lijphart, Thung and Thurlings in the Netherlands to name a few). The latter development, it seems to me, was not a cause but more an effect of the major changes in Catholicism and Protestantism. But, it shows the reorientation of their research.

Moreover, a new generation of sociologists took over from the former generation in the CISR, and the great majority of them were lay people. The former generation – Carrier De Volder, Duocastella, Goddijn, Houtart, Leclercq, Pin, Verscheure and others – were priests and primarily theologians and philosophers, and the great majority of them had no training whatsoever in sociology. The new generation was trained in sociology, either within catholic institutions or elsewhere; a possible church affiliation was irrelevant for their professional work; and their major reference group was not the Church but professional sociologists. This became very clear in their memberships: dual affiliations – both the CISR and the RC 22 Sociology of Religion of the ISA were prevalent. Aquaviva, Cipriani, Dobbelaere, Guizzardi, Isambert, Laeyendecker and Maitre, met with Barker, Beckford, Demerath, Luckmann, Martin, Mol and Wilson, and other sociologists at CISR and ISA meetings. Some core members of the CISR were even officers of the CR 22 of the ISA (Cipriani, Dobbelaere, and later on Davie). Consequently, the ISA played for the CISR-members the same role as the American Sociological Association (ASA) did for the members of the American Catholic Sociological Society (Reiss, 1969: 127 – 128). Many young sociologists also went to conferences in the USA, i.e. the meetings of the ASA, of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR) and of the Association for the Sociology of Religion (ASR). And in the French-speaking world, I would like to point out a similar trend: the impact of the *Comité de Recherche de Sociologie des Religions* meeting under the auspices of the *Association Internationale de Sociologues de Langue Française* (AISLF). There Lalive d'Épinay, Cipriani, Pace, Prandi, Ferraroti, Zylberberg, Remy, Voyé, and others met and still meet. All these people were and are active in these organizations because they are professional sociologists and their possible religious affiliation is irrelevant for their professional work.

Consequently, in my view, the major change that altered the CISR completely, like the American Catholic Sociological Association, was the switch in reference behaviour of sociologists of Catholic origin. Which resulted from the identity crisis in Catholicism and the extensive international contacts that accompanied the major change. These sociologists

looked for professional support: they wanted to be sociologists and went to other international meetings. They also brought sociologists from other associations into the CISR. Consequently, the CISR became an international organization of sociologists, whether they were affiliated to a church or not, and the question of religious affiliation was totally irrelevant for the organization. Since that time, the CISR has been an international organization of sociologists interested in changes in society and religion. The primary purpose of their studies is to gain insight and knowledge, to build theories and not to serve religious bodies. Or if I may put it this way: the CISR is dedicated not to religion but to science. Thus it is that, for a long time, the CISR has no longer held its meetings in the premises of churches, i.e. convents, but rather in universities. However, it will take another decade before the logo will carry "Sociology of ReligionS".

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