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THE HISTORY (STUDY) OF RELIGIONS IN SPAIN
AND THE SECR (SOCIEDAD ESPAÑOLA
DE CIENCIAS DE LAS RELIGIONES /
SPANISH ASSOCIATION FOR THE
SCIENCES OF RELIGIONS)

Francisco Díez de Velasco
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ABSTRACT: This paper reviews the circumstances of the establishment in Spain in 1993 of the SECR (Sociedad Española de Ciencias de las Religiones / Spanish Association for the Sciences of Religions). The situation of the discipline in Spain prior to this date is outlined with particular attention to the difficulty of developing this area of study in the context of a dominant National-Catholic official ideology. In the decades of democracy the discipline faced biased (antipluralistic or antireligious) tendencies from both the academic and political authorities and also the consequences of the collapse of humanities, in which the discipline is included. Despite these obstacles, this area of study now forms a part of the university curriculum and the creation of the SECR can be regarded as an example of the discipline's institutionalization. In the last part of the paper, the main interests and activities of the SECR are described and the challenges for the future discussed.

Keywords: History of Religions in Spain, Religious Studies in Spain, SECR, Spanish Association for the Sciences of Religions.

RESUMEN: En este artículo se estudian las circunstancias de la creación en España en 1993 de la SECR (Sociedad Española de Ciencias de las Religiones). Se revisa la situación en España de la disciplina (que se puede denominar Historia de las Religiones / Estudios de las Religiones / Ciencias de las Religiones) con anterioridad a esta fecha, destacando en particular las dificultades a la hora de desarrollar este tipo de estudios en un contexto con una religión oficial establecida como era el nacionalcatolicismo franquista. En los años desde la instauración de la democracia, la disciplina se ha enfrentado en su desarrollo a dos tendencias opuestas, la antipluralística y la antirreligiosa, por parte tanto de las autoridades políticas como académicas. Añádanse las consecuencias del colapso general de las humanidades en cuyo seno la disciplina se engloba en España. A pesar de estos obstáculos, esta área de estudio forma parte en la actualidad de los currículos universitarios, y la creación de la SECR puede servir de evidencia del proceso de institucionalización de la disciplina en España. En la parte final del artículo se describen los intereses principales de la SECR, las actividades desarrolladas hasta la actualidad y los retos de futuro.

Palabras clave: Historia de las Religiones en España, Ciencias de las Religiones en España, SECR, Sociedad Española de Ciencias de las Religiones.

In this paper¹ I use «History (Study) of Religions» as a term for our discipline, following the designations still in use in the main international association, the IAHR (International Association for the History of Religions: <<http://www.iahr.dk>>) and in the European association, the EASR (European Association for the Study of Religions: <<http://easr.eu>>).

That said, when I use «History of Religions», I do not adopt a strict definition of the term as embodying an exclusively historical approach to the study of religions, but as a multidisciplinary examination of religious phenomena characterized by a core attitudinal focus: the conscious and explicit rejection of religiocentrism accompanied by a concomitant openness to plurality.

It would appear that adopting such a position is no simple matter, particularly in Spain².

A structural problem: the ideological background of the discipline in Spain

In Spain an official religion held sway for many centuries. Spanish identity was built on the denial of difference and religion was used as the corner stone of this putative homogeneity (also in matters of culture and education), not only on the well known dates of 1492 (the expulsion of Jews) or 1502/1609 (the expulsion of Muslims and Moriscos) but even in the early years of modernity, in 1812, the first Spanish Constitution (a liberal one) makes this stance explicit in article 12: «The religion of the Spanish Nation is, and ever shall be, the Roman Catholic Apostolic and one true faith; the Nation shall, by means of wise and just laws, protect it and prevent the exercise of any other»³. This denial of religious freedom is dated twenty years after the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America (including, as it did, the anti-establishment and free exercise clauses that provided the bases for religious freedom).

As recently as the 1960s in the context of global changes in attitudes and values, and the progressive construction of post-colonial ideologies

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the «Coloquio inaugural da Associação Portuguesa para o Estudo das Religiões: A Situação e as Perspectivas do Estudo Científico das Religiões em Portugal», held in Lisbon, 4-5 April 2008, hosted by the Instituto de Ciências Sociais of the University of Lisbon. I wish to thank the organizers for their invitation. I especially wish to thank Sally Burgess for acting as an author's editor of the paper.

2. The development of the discipline in Spain is outlined in Diez de Velasco 1995a; Diez de Velasco-Teja 2002; Wiegers 2002; Diez de Velasco 2007a; Diez de Velasco 2007b; Antes 2008: 51 f.; Stausberg 2008a; Stausberg 2008b: 308; Marcos 2009; Diez de Velasco 2009.

3. «La Religión de la Nación española es y será perpetuamente la católica, apostólica, romana, única verdadera. La Nación la protege por leyes sabias y justas y prohíbe el ejercicio de cualquiera otra.»

characterized by openness to diversity, in religious matters as well, Franco's regime maintained a non-pluralistic position. The end point was the 1978 democratic Constitution defining Spain as a non-confessional State, but the processes of building a multi-religious model of coexistence continue even today.

In such a context and with a historical background of this nature, a non-religiocentric study of religions is clearly not something that is easily established.

There is a problem of focus: the study of religions is not favorably regarded by those who embrace the Spanish National-Catholic ideology or the Catholic integrism and who reject the study of religious matters from a pluralist perspective; for those who adopt the opposite view, that of Spanish anticlericalism or even an explicitly antireligious ideology, the study of religion and even religions, in plural, is regarded with suspicion (and seen as covert clericalism).

Religiocentric attitudes (the insider view: theological-confessional and its opposite, the antireligious view) have represented a genuine obstacle to the development of the discipline and allow us to account for the recent history of the establishment of this area of study in Spain and particularly the late creation of the SECR (Sociedad Española de Ciencias de las Religiones / Spanish Association for the Sciences of Religions) in comparison to other neighboring European associations.

Paths cut short: a discipline in limbo

But the story might have been a very different one. In 1954 was created the first chair of «Historia de las Religiones» (History of Religions) in Spain, in the University of Madrid. The first full professor was Ángel Álvarez de Miranda, a disciple of the great Italian scholar Raffaele Pettazzoni⁴. Álvarez de Miranda and his chair of History of Religions were exceptions in the National-Catholicism of Franco's Spain, coming as they did in the context of the «liberal years» (1951-1956) of Joaquín Ruiz Giménez at the head of the Ministry of Education. A personal friend of Álvarez de Miranda, Ruiz Giménez had a great interest in religious issues and was involved from the beginning in the project as a key element in countering the opposition to the creation of the chair. The timid educational openness promoted by Ruiz Giménez's group (which also included scholars such as Pedro Laín Entralgo, President of the University of Madrid) was cut short by a conservative backlash in 1956 (Diez de Velasco 2007a: 118 ff.).

4. In 1952 under his supervision Álvarez de Miranda presented a doctoral thesis entitled *Miti e riti sulla sacralità del toro. L'origine magica delle «corridas» nella Penisola Iberica ed in Creta* in the University of Rome (published posthumously in Spanish translation: Álvarez de Miranda 1962).

Álvarez de Miranda had an open way of understanding the discipline (centered on a general and comparative perspective, on support for the autonomy of the History of Religions along the same lines as the Scuola di Roma: Álvarez de Miranda 1955; 1962, see Diez de Velasco 2007b: 34 ff.). Sadly, his premature death in 1957 left the newly established chair vulnerable to attack and did not allow him time to bring to fruition his many projects for the development of the discipline. After his death, the chair disappeared *de facto*; one of the arguments apparently having been expressed in the following crude terms: «Why History of Religions if there's only one religion?». Franco's regime at that time opted for technocracy; some of the new leaders (especially those with power in educational and cultural affairs) held a position close to the Catholic integrism promoted, for example, by Opus Dei. The pluralist position which defines History of Religions had no great future in such a context and the discipline saw itself increasingly at odds with the interests of the University leaders of Franco's regime.

Regrettably, the situation of Religious Studies in democratic Spain can hardly be said to have improved. The Ministry of Education has, for the most part, been in the hands of those with non- or anti-religious points of view (or merely not interested by the subject), in the case of leftwing governments, or conservative Catholics or even integrists when the right has been in power. The leading authorities in the universities adopt parallel positions to those who govern the country. There is a further complicating factor in the policy decisions that should be taken into consideration: the collapse in the last two decades of the humanities in Spanish universities. Since Religious Studies are usually categorized as «humanities» in Spain, the rapid decline of interest in and support for humanities disciplines has meant that the social relevance of this area of research has been obscured or rendered invisible.

Even so, up until the 1990s it proved possible to maintain History of Religions as an independent area of study, albeit in only one state-run university, namely the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, where it occupied a minor position in the curriculum and without a full professor in charge (Diez de Velasco 2007a: 124 ff.; 2007b: 50 ff.). In the Catholic universities the discipline had a higher profile but in a theological-phenomenological-confessional context with strong religio-centric premises. In fact a number of Catholic scholars emerged from religious institutions and went on to teach in public universities in a bid to gain the freedom to develop their research interests unencumbered by the obstacles and impediments religiocentrism and confessional approaches represents.

Despite the indifference (or even overt opposition) of the authorities, in the Spanish University in the seventies and the eighties an increasing number of researchers and scholars from different disciplines (historical, philological, juridical, sociological, anthropological, philosophical, psychological, etc.) embraced the study of religion an impor-

tant area of research. They constitute a critical mass, and when the general conditions changed, and they had the opportunity, with the reform of the early nineties, to redefine programs of study in their universities from the bottom up, the unenviable situation of the study of religions in the Spanish University saw a noteworthy improvement. It was in that context that the SECR was founded.

It is important to mention that prior to the foundation of the SECR its now defunct predecessor, the «Societat d'Història de les Religions / Sociedad de Historia de las Religiones» (Association for the History of Religions) had been established in Barcelona in October 1972, only to dissolve in 1983. While the Association did not operate at the Spanish national level, drawing its membership from Catalonia, and, in the period after Franco's death⁵, calling itself the «Societat Catalana d'Història de les Religions» (Catalan Association for the History of Religions), non-Catalan Spanish researchers were invited to participate in its activities (Julio Caro Baroja is a case in point). In 1973 the Association even applied for affiliation to the IAHR. The existence of the Catalan Association is an interesting example of the importance and institutionalization of the discipline in Catalonia from the 1970s. A number of Catalan scholars have an interest not only in the development of this area of study but also in finding an international audience for their work and the term used for the discipline in Catalonia is mainly History of Religions⁶.

The expansion in the nineties and the constitution of the SECR

The SECR was formally constituted in May 1993 in Madrid as an inclusive and multidisciplinary project of cooperation between more than a hundred scholars of varying disciplinary backgrounds and regional origins. The initiative was connected with the earlier creation in the Universidad Complutense de Madrid of the ICR «Instituto de Ciencias de las Religiones» (Institute for the Sciences of Religions: see <<http://www.ucm.es/info/iucr>>; Abumalham 2002, Wiegers 2002 or Marcos 2009) in 1993. The ICR was the initiative of a single university (even though it included a significant number of invited professors from other institutions and had a very important impact beyond the limits of the Universidad Complutense); the SECR was the culmination of a collective endeavor bringing together members of almost all the universities and research centers in Spain with interests in the discipline.

5. In the context of Franco's regime the foundation of a specific «Catalan Society for the History of Religions» represented a considerable challenge given the rigid administrative and political controls on associations and the restrictive official position of the authorities with regard to Catalan initiatives of this type.

6. An example of that persistent interest was the review of the 1990 IAHR Congress made by Jaume Pòrtulas (1991) or the masters studies on «Història de les Religions» in the University of Barcelona (see <<http://www.giga.ub.edu/acad/npost/fitxes/2/200711497.php>>).

From the outset the Spanish Association saw the need for internationalization. Professor Zwi Werblowski, in those days Vice-president of the IAHR, was present at the Spanish Association foundation meeting, in which one of the first decisions taken was to apply for membership of the International Association, application that was formally accepted at the 1995 Congress in Mexico City. The Spanish Association had also been involved from the outset in the establishment of the European Association for the Study of Religions, with representation on the Preparatory Working Committee, for example, and on all the subsequent Executive Committees⁷. Members of the Executive Committee of the Spanish Association were also involved in the aborted Eurassoc (European Association for the Academic Study of Religions) project⁸.

The panorama of Religious Studies in the early years of the SECR was one of rapid expansion. The new curricula in a large number of universities included religious subjects, particularly, in the cases of the University of Madrid (with the weight of the ICR and a doctorate in Sciences of Religions with official recognition of excellence), of the University of La Laguna (which offers a specialization in History of Religions), of the University Pompeu Fabra of Barcelona, of the University of Cantabria at Santander, the University of Santiago de Compostela, the University of Seville, and many more (Diez de Velasco 1995: 60 f.). The list might well have continued to expand, though in the course of the reforms of the Spanish University system to bring it into line with higher education in European Union as a whole, the number of the subjects offered at undergraduate degree level (for example in history, sociology, psychology, philosophy, philology or anthropology) is likely to diminish as a result of the move away from specialization in degree programs. At the same time, the proposals for masters level studies in History/Sciences of Religions presented (or being drafted) by a range of universities would seem to show an increase in the perceived importance of this area (see Marcos 2009).

Returning to the origins of the Spanish Association, it may be interesting (and not only for rhetorical and scholarly reasons) to say something briefly about the choice of the name. In both cases, in the ICR (of the Universidad Complutense de Madrid) and the SECR, the term used has been «Ciencias de las Religiones» (Sciences of Religions) and not the more traditional «History of Religions».

The reasoning behind the choice of term runs as follows: the Spanish Association is not the result of a coherent and systematic disciplinary construction of the kind Álvarez de Miranda's might have envisaged. The SECR was built by the inclusion of scholars from various fields,

7. See <<http://easr.eu/minutes.html>>; <<http://easr.eu/committee.html>>; <http://easr.eu/committee_archive.html>.

8. See <<http://www.restena.lu/eurassoc/604.htm>>; <<http://www.restena.lu/eurassoc/62.htm>>.

who used a range of scientific approaches to the subject. Only a minority were in favor of a general and comparative approach and the establishment of an autonomous discipline (a Science of Religion in the German sense of the term, a «Religionswissenschaft», or a «Storia delle Religioni» in that of the «Scuola di Roma»). In «Sciences of Religions», «Sciences» refers to the plurality of disciplinary approaches; «Religions» refers to the plurality of religions to be studied. The choice goes beyond an individual disciplinary view. Instead what is sought is a convergent project open to a range of interested parties, the model does, it might be argued, offer less, because there is a fragmentation of knowledge, a renunciation of a structured research agenda which seeks through the instruments of scientific method to understand religion and religions.

One would hope that this choice of name was not, at the same time, a comfortable way out of the explanatory ambitions implied in the terms «History of Religions» or «Science of Religion» or a bid to leave such questions to other approaches. It is important to bear in mind that the theological and confessional perspectives are powerful in Spain (with considerable importance in publishing and the media⁹) and that the study of religion from these perspectives in the Spanish Catholic universities (and also in the Spanish speaking countries) often identified by the ambiguous term «Ciencias Religiosas» (Religious Sciences). It is arguably the case that the covert mental schema implied for some (confessional, quasi-confessional or para-confessional) scholars is that History of Religions (and the other fragmented possible approaches —the other Sciences of Religions, including Phenomenology of Religion—) could be merely reduced to *ancillae Theologiae*.

Milestones in the history of the SECR

1994 saw the beginning of one of the most important undertakings of the Association, namely that of holding a conference every two years.

The first was hosted by the Universidad Complutense de Madrid and the ICR (Instituto de Ciencias de las Religiones) under the direction of Julio Trebolle and Montserrat Abumalham, both key figures in the SECR. Trebolle was the first Vicepresident (also the first Director of the ICR) and Abumalham the first General Secretary. Thirty of the papers presented were included in the post-event publication in the first issue (number 0, see Trebolle 1995) of the newly-created journal of the ICR and the major periodical publication of the discipline in Spain,

9. The number of Catholic (or confessional) publishing companies in Spain is noteworthy (B.A.C. [Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos], San Pablo, Fundación Santa María [SM], Publicaciones Claretianas, Desclée de Brouwer, Sal Terrae, Verbo Divino, Sígueme, Mensajero, etc.) as well as the volume and impact of their publications in Spain and in Spanish speaking countries. The publishers distribute through a number of specialized bookstores and rely on a loyal (and even devoted) readership.

named *'Ilu. Revista de Ciencias de las religiones'*¹⁰. The volume provides a perspective on the variety of interests of the first members of the Association. Ancient Religions, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Philosophy and Law are the fields best represented, but Anthropology, Sociology or Psychology also have their place.

A more detailed review of the disciplinary affiliations of the members of the Association might well provide information on the part played by religious subjects in Spanish scholarship.

The emphasis on ancient religions, studied from historical and philological perspectives, is an outstanding feature, comparable, perhaps, to the case of our Italian and French counterparts in the «Società Italiana di Storia delle Religioni» and the «Société Ernest-Renan». In Spain, interest in religions without living followers has been relatively acceptable. This was so even in the pre-democratic decades with the proviso that there should be no explicit comparison with Christianity. In fact even Álvarez de Miranda came from that historical and philological background and the core of his publications was devoted to ancient religions (Iberian religion, Classical Greek religion).

His heritage was followed by colleagues and friends, Classical philologists or historians, such as José María Blázquez, honorary member of the SECR, who formed and lead an active school of specialists on religious subjects, some of them members of the SECR (see Montero 1999). Among them was Ramón Teja, a specialist in Ancient Christianity and Honorary President of the SECR. He was the organizer, with his team (and here the involvement of Mar Marcos and Juana Torres needs to be emphasized), of the VI congress of the SECR, held in Santander in 2004, jointly celebrated with the IV Congress of the EASR as a Special IAHR Conference on the subject «Religious Tolerance and Intolerance» (see Marcos-Teja 2008 for a partial publication of the proceedings). Another disciple of Blázquez is Santiago Montero Herrero, current Director of the ICR and son of the supervisor of the Spanish thesis of Álvarez de Miranda, Santiago Montero Díaz, who, from 1957 until his retirement in 1981, was responsible for the teaching of the subject History of Religions in the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Blázquez was his successor). The IV Congress of the SECR hosted in 2000 by the University of La Laguna on the subject «Millenium, Fear and Religion» was also organized by disciples of Blázquez (Francisco Diez de Velasco, Miguel Ángel Molinero Polo and José A. Delgado Delgado, see Diez de Velasco 2002 for a partial publication of the proceedings¹¹).

In the field of Classical Philology, the specialists in Greek and/or Roman religions are well represented in the SECR, for example Emilio Suá-

10. See the webpage of the journal (with a free access to the publications) at: <<http://www.ucm.es/BUCM/revistasBUC/portal/modules.php?name=Revistas2&id=ILUR>>.

11. See the webpage of the congress for the complete publication of the proceedings: <<http://www2.ull.es/congresos/conmirel>>.

rez de La Torre, current President and organizer of the VIII biennial Congress, held at the University of Valladolid in October 2008 on the subject «Lex Sacra» (see Suárez de la Torre 2010 for a partial publication of the proceedings).

The weight of Islamic studies in the Spanish Association is also noteworthy. The Andalusí heritage and the geopolitical position of Spain in relation to the Maghreb and the Arab World (it is a key factor during Franco's regime and accounts for the considerable expenditure on educational-cultural capital) explains the importance of these areas of study in the Spanish University. But in our case the figure of Montserrat Abumalham, current Vice-president of the Spanish Association (and also former Vice-President of the IAHR), and one of the founders and supporters of the whole project, is also very important. She has attracted to the Association an active group of specialists in Islamic studies who, e.g., organized the III biennial Congress, held in the University of Seville in 1998 on the subject «Religious Mutations».

In stark contrast to Islamic Studies, Asian studies, a crucial field in the configuration of the discipline in many countries, are not prominent in Spanish scholarship and therefore in the University. Spanish interests were generally focused outside Asia (mainly in America), especially in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, a period which saw the development of Oriental studies not only among the colonial powers with interests in Asia but also in Germany, Italy and the United States. Some of the Spanish scholars who devoted their research attention to Buddhist, Indian, Japanese, Chinese, or to Asian studies in general, were forced to pursue careers outside Spain. A good example would be the first President of the Spanish Association (a presidency that held for more than a decade, from 1993 to 2004) and also current Honorary President, Raimon Panikkar (see Abumalham 2001), who lived in Spain before his retirement in the University of California in Santa Barbara. His career in the field of the Religious Studies was mainly built outside Spain and his disciples in the subject have not found a place in the Spanish universities. The Buddhologist Abraham Vélez, occasionally involved in the activities of the SECR (Vélez 2003), is a case in point among others. Nowadays, the situation would appear to be changing with the establishment of the Casa Asia foundation in Barcelona and the development of teaching programs focused on Asia in that city, in the UOC (Open University of Catalonia), in Salamanca and other universities being cases in point. Some of the scholars involved in those new projects are members of the SECR.

Another key area for the Spanish Association is Jewish Studies. One of the leading figures in the SECR was Julio Trebolle, the first Vice-president. Trebolle played a crucial role in the development of the institution. As a result of his efforts and of other scholars (e.g. Luis Girón or Javier Fernández Vallina) Jewish Studies was a constant presence and a

basic reference point in all the activities of the Association, in its conferences and publications.

A field with a striking prominence in the Association is legal-judicial science. The presence of legal scholars is much more significant in the SECR than in any other of the associations included in the IAHR. National-Catholicism may well explain, yet again, this difference. Under Franco's regime, the Catholic Church had a central position in the legal system. Canon law was applied in matrimonial and other private (and even public) matters. Church authorities gave their approval to the laws and some members of the Catholic hierarchy were members of the Franquist «pseudo»-parliament. Canon law was an important element in the study of law and it thus attracted the interest of a number of scholars. With the passing in 1978 of a Constitution defining Spain as a non-confessional state, some of those scholars changed their focus and the implications of religion and law became their main area of interest. They focused their attention particularly on the legal foundations for the application of religious freedom, the analysis of the legal implications of the transformation of Spain from a country with an official religion to a multi-religious context of coexistence or the implications of religious pluralism in the law (national and international) from a comparative perspective. These are issues of great importance for an association like the SECR, which is primarily concerned with the understanding of the place of religion in the past, at present and even in the future. Legal scholars currently have and have had an important place in the running of the Association. The former General Secretary, Fernando Américo, and the last editor of the SECR's Bulletin, José María Contreras, are legal scholars. It was in fact this group (under the presidency of Gustavo Suárez Perterra) that organized the VII SECR Congress, held in Toledo in 2006 on the subject «Religion and Power» and hosted by the UNED, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (National University for Distance Education).

The philosophical implications of the study of religion, and in general, Philosophy of Religion, is also a fairly well represented field in the Association, the second Congress, held in Barcelona, organized by Amador Vega in the University Pompeu Fabra and devoted to the subject «Aesthetics and Religion» (see Vega 1998 for the publication of the proceedings) provides evidence of this.

The participation in the Spanish Association of scholars from a wide range of disciplines is perhaps too varied to describe here, though the biennial congresses provide a good guide: the fifth Congress was organized by the group of psychologists of religion in the University of Valencia in 2002 under the subject «Religions, Identities and Minorities» (see Américo 2003 for the publication of the proceedings), and a group of sociologists of religion (under the presidency of Juan Luis Pintos de Cea) are planning the tenth Congress to be held at the University of Santiago de Compostela in 2010.

Another important tool in the construction of the SECR's shared knowledge space is the Association's Bulletin, entitled BSECR (Boletín de la Sociedad Española de Ciencias de las Religiones). The first issue (number 0) was published in 1993, the most recent, the nineteenth, in 2004, almost all the information included is accessible on the SECR's webpage (<<http://www.secr.es>>), another important tool in the development of a scientific association.

Challenges of the future

In this overview of the SECR it would seem appropriate to end by reflecting on the future of the Spanish Association and the challenges the discipline faces.

The main challenge, in my opinion, will be a redefining of the role of Religious Education in the Spanish School (and perhaps also at the European level: see e.g. Jensen 2007; Contreras 2007). The educational debate in Spain, up until now, has been a source of conflict in the political arena. The discourses, infected by «parti pris», tend to come down to two polarized positions akin to the structural problems I outlined above. In those circumstances, the SECR could offer expert advice to politicians in order to build a consensual model of Religious Education in Spain based on a long-term vision rather than short-term political agendas. One example has been the Cosgaya Manifesto («Manifiesto de Cosgaya sobre la enseñanza de las religiones en España»: see <<http://www.secr.es/pdf/Manifiesto%20Cosgaya.pdf>>), signed in 2004 by a group of members of the Spanish Association proposing a non-confessional and non-religiocentric model of Religious Education, in stark contrast to the current model which leads to a classroom ghettoization when religious issues are studied (the class is nowadays segregated into Catholics, Jews, Evangelical Christians, Muslims, those without religious affiliation and followers of a non-confessional religious Education). To clarify the panorama in the school would be, it goes without saying, a basic element in the consolidation of the teaching of History of Religions-Study of Religion at the University level.

Another challenge has to do with increasing the inclusiveness of the Spanish Association. We need to reach scholars and religious studies research groups thus far not greatly involved in the SECR project, especially anthropologists (see Rodríguez Becerra 2004) and sociologists. The focus on attracting other scholars needs to go beyond those involved in teaching the subject to include emergent groups of researchers in Spain. This implies expanding the objectives of the Spanish Association in terms of research. For example, there is the need to involve the SECR in the increasing number of research projects concerned with the study of religious diversity which receive support from official institutions and research centers. There has been tremendous growth in this area in recent

years as a result of the rise in immigration and the resultant changes in the transformation of the religious map of our country due to the exercise of religious freedom.

Perhaps the most ambitious longitudinal study is the one undertaken by a public Foundation under the auspices of the Spanish Ministry of Justice going by the name of «Pluralismo y Convivencia»¹². The first Director (until 2008) of the Foundation was José María Contreras, a legal scholar and prominent member of the SECR (as stated above, until 2004 the editor the Association's Bulletin). The main research agenda of the Foundation seeks to access up-to-date and accurate information on religious groups and communities in Spain, to trace their history, problems, social action, integration, interaction with the authorities (especially at the municipal level), needs, and so on. Pluralismo y Convivencia has signed research contracts with groups in several Spanish universities with the aim, over the next years, of providing, in each autonomous region, an approximate map of the religious minorities in Spain. The pioneering study was carried out in Catalonia, financed by the Generalitat de Catalunya (the Government of the Catalan Autonomy), completed four years ago, and the results published in Catalan in 2004 and translated in 2007 into Spanish (Estruch 2007). The studies of the Autonomies of Madrid (López & Ramírez 2007), Comunitat Valenciana (Buades & Vidal 2007), Canary Islands (Diez de Velasco 2008) and Castilla-La Mancha (Hernando de Larramendi & García Ortiz 2009) have also already been published. The publications of the studies of Andalusia, Murcia, Basque Country, Navarre and Aragon are in preparation, and will be followed by those of the remaining zones and also by other research initiatives (e.g. a qualitative research in religious minorities at the municipal level). Members of the SECR are involved in some of the projects of the Foundation, though, it should be said, not in all of them.

For a scientific society such as the SECR, the publication of an academic journal with an international impact factor is an important consideration. The third challenge (in my opinion a crucial one), concerns *Bandue*, the very journal in which this paper is to be found, and the heir of the BSECR (see *Bandue's* web page at <<http://www.secr.es/Bandue>> for more details).

An explanation of the name of the journal might serve to summarize the current characteristics and the future prospects of the SECR.

Bandue, is a pre-Roman Hispanic divinity of which around fifty documentary testimonials remain. There is no agreement on the functions of her/him/it (*Bandue's* gender changes in the sources). Depending on the disciplinary or theoretical position of the various scholars who have studied *Bandue*, a range of possibilities and etymologies have been considered, from the Celtic (in general) to the Galician or Lusitanian. Some

12. See <<http://www.pluralismoyconvivencia.es>>.

assert that the name simply means «god» or «goddess»; others that it refers to an aquatic divinity. Others have suggested that it has a functional specialization in war, protection or tutelage. An interpretation which is interesting for a multidisciplinary group of scholars who formed the Spanish Association is that it refers to a divinity of links, of interconnections (of bonds, an English word with its origins in one of the possible etymologies of *Bandue*). Another interesting hypothesis considers *Bandue* to be a divinity of the thresholds, of limits, both real and magical, of *limina*, of transitions, of *passages*.

This liminal nature is another of the characteristics of what is, in Spain in particular as we have seen in this paper, a diffuse disciplinary field dedicated to the study of religion. For the Spanish association, with all the challenges to definition it presents, *Bandue* provides a symbol of union in difference and a very apt name for its journal.

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