THE STUDY OF RELIGION IN ITS SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC CONTEXT: A PERSPECTIVE ON THE 1989 WARSAW CONFERENCE ON METHODOLOGY

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An invitational conference on “Studies of Religion in the Context of the Social Sciences” was held in the Palace of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Jablonna, outside Warsaw, 5-9 September, 1989. The conference was sponsored by the Polish Society for the Study of Religion and the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences under the auspices of the International Association for the History of Religions. As is characteristic of most recent methodological discussions in the field of “history of religions,” the conversation began from assumptions about the isolated autonomy of the academic study of religion, that is, its special or unique independence from other fields of academic inquiry.
Problems with such conventional assumptions soon emerged in the papers presented and in the discussion of alternative possibilities.

Although primarily concerned to focus attention on central problems in the study of religion, the conference also continued the dialogue between Eastern and Western scholars in the field that had been initiated at an earlier conference of this nature, held in Warsaw in 1979. The proceedings of this 1979 conference were published in 1985 as *Current Progress in the Methodology of the Science of Religion*, ed., W. Tyloch (Warsaw: Polish Scientific Publishers). The proceedings of the Jablonna Conference, also edited by W. Tyloch, are expected to be published during the coming year. The following is a preliminary report on this conference. It should be remembered that papers often ranged over issues that could have been classified under several of the divisions suggested in this report.

W. Tyloch (Poland, Conference Organizer and Convener) offered a general clarification of the theme of the conference in his paper on “The Studies of Religion in the Context of the Social Sciences.” Tyloch presented pressing reasons for increasing awareness of the many connections between scholars working in the field of religion and in the social sciences.

Several papers were devoted to matters of conceptual clarification. Papers here included those by T. Margul (Poland) on “The Social Elements in the Religious Phenomenon,” J. Szymy (Poland) on “Empirical Aspects of Religious Irrationalism as the Object of Scientific Research,” and T. Sodejga (Lithuania) on “The Structure of Faith in the Context of Philosophy” which re-emphasized the place of religious ideas in the history of religions. Issues of definition and taxonomy were raised for discussion by A. Wojtowicz (Poland) in his presentation, “Structural and Phenomenological Approaches in the Sociology of Religion,” and by P. Antes (FRG), who delineated the tensions between internal and external approaches to the study of religious phenomena within a particular historical context in his paper on “Muslim Mysticism in the Context of the Social Sciences.”

Two paper addressed the changing character of the study of religion in a Marxist context. In his paper on “The Development of the Study of Religion in Czechoslovakia,” I. Hodovsky (Czechoslovakia) pointed to the emergence of the study of religion in