

Entrevista

Internacional

PIERRE-ANTOINE

FABRE

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Interview by

Emanuel Colombo (DePaul University)
and **José Eduardo Franco** (Aberta University).

Brief presentation

Pierre-Antoine Fabre is one of the most notable French historians of our time, best known for his studies of religious history and anthropology, in their relations with cultural and political history. Remarkable works include *Ignacio de Loyola. El Lugar de la Imagen* (Ciudad de México, 2012 [1992]), and *La XXV^e Session du Concile de Trente* (Paris, 2013), which approach reception and representation processes. His research on the history of the Jesuits, on literature of spirituality and modern devotional movements, drawing on the legacy of Marcel Bataillon and Michel de Certeau, had a significant influence on the renewal of epistemological and methodological perspectives in the scientific field of European religious history, both as a foundation, and a promotor of other research fields, which benefit from the extension of critical approaches to the religious phenomena.

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Could you tell us briefly about your education path, to explain what led you to choose history as an academic career and an intellectual passion?

My background had nothing to do with history. Until attending École Normale Supérieure, I studied mainly philosophy. It was only after completing a master's degree on Schelling's *Philosophical Inquiries into the Essence of Human Freedom*, from the perspective of Martin Heidegger in his famous seminars of 1927, where he questions the posterity, in Schelling, of Kantian schematism, that I came across a great difficulty in this tradition, a difficulty which explains, by the way, the place of aesthetics in both Schelling's and Kant's thought: how can we represent the image-scheme hidden in the depths of the human soul, as Kant calls it? How can we represent the origin of representation itself? – a question which contains, moreover, the problem of representing *origin* as such, something which had me very interested in the poetic sketches of my childhood and youth, inhabited – I shall even say haunted – by prehistory, to which I shall return later! It was the transcendental question of the image-scheme that took me, in the early 1980s, to develop a PhD research on Caravaggio, the painter, about whom I conceived that

his reinvention of Christian painting might enable me to see a picture of the *image-scheme* (on the background of the Paleo-Christian images of subterranean Rome...). It was a rather naive and crude hypothesis, which can only be explained by the historical context, a time when studies about Caravaggio were much less developed than they are today. And it was an even more naive hypothesis for me, who, as a philosopher trained in a very unreligious – I'll even say counter religious, counter theological – France in the field of philosophical studies (unlike Italy, for example) and without any religious education or tradition brought from childhood (my father, a philosopher, a repentant Catholic and a critical Communist, was doubly distanced from any kind of «religious» adherence), completely ignored, to an unimaginable extent, all that involved, let's say, the Rome of Counter-Reformation. Therefore, I entered a prolonged second period of training – and this is perhaps what I've got in common with Ignatius of Loyola, who attended school at the age of 30! –, which led me precisely to the Society of Jesus as a cultural and spiritual force of this period, as well as to a question outlined somewhere by Pierre Francastel: why did Caravaggio never paint for the Jesuits? A second hypothesis arose: precisely because, paradoxically, as a figure of the image-scheme, Caravaggio could not *illustrate* through the image what the Spiritual Exercises *realized* only through the work of imagination: the composition of the image location.

This second hypothesis was as naive as the first, for me, who knew nothing about the history of «Ignatian spirituality». For this reason, I made a large detour by this history, by the Exercises, and by the question of articulating the imaginative practice and the material image, a detour which progressively shifted the core of my PhD research to Ignatius of Loyola; a detour which made me return to Caravaggio only more than 20 years after the publication of my first work in 1992, this time in «Le(s) rendez-vous manqué(s) du Caravage et de la Compagnie de Jesus» (*Ricerche sulla Storia Religiosa di Roma*, 2015), by invitation of my colleague and friend Guido Mongini. This is a quick summary of what happened.

How do you describe the state of historiographical studies in France when compared to international research being made on this field, particularly in your area of expertise?

As I mentioned above, during my training period, the philosophical discipline, either as history of philosophy, as philosophy of science or as aesthetics (the latter, probably, the most fragile, something which might help us to understand the philosophical familiarity of a man like Louis Marin with Mikel Dufrenne), was very little open to theological and religious culture. A few years ago, I remember finding a series of books on the European quarrel of China's rites, and discovering, to my delight as a historian of evangelization, figures such as Leibniz and Malebranche and texts which, for

me, had been far removed from this field. On the other hand, historians of religious modernity, whether Catholics or not (and, in France, the majority were), especially the ones working within a Marxist framework, dismissed the domain of spirituality, both as a private matter and a superstructure. In this context, one should recall that the first work dedicated to Ignatius of Loyola in contemporary France – before mine, if I'm allowed! – was signed by Roland Barthes, who was neither a historian nor a philosopher: the book *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, published in 1970¹. It seems to me that, particularly in France, the domain of spirituality of the 16th and 17th centuries withdraw from *both theology*, during an Early Modern period which was suspicious of theology as a discourse of encompassing the social world, *and philosophy*, which asserted itself against theology, for considering it the ultimate reference of self-discourse; in addition, without embodying literature, in which the religious people, essentially close to the Scripture, had difficulty in recognizing themselves; in turn, literature had equal difficulty in recognizing the tradition of literary studies, since the great writers had gradually replaced the figures of saints. A character as Blaise Pascal was, for this reason, equally fragile, as the great secular of the Great Century, a great writer of the 19th

¹ I've discussed this book in (1996). *Rhétorique, mystique et lieu de l'image*. Roland Barthes, *Lecteur des -Exercices Spirituels d'Ignace de Loyola*. *Communications*. Paris. 1996.

century – currently the responsible, following the perspective open by Jorge Bergoglio, Pope Francis, for introducing laymen in a paradise soaked with religious people to the point of supply exhaustion. The new case of Pascal is a significant illustration of the historiographical adventures of religious France in which I became involved during the 90s, in my attempt to understand what would have been radically new in the Ignatian foundation. We shall return to this question, I suppose.

What are the major challenges facing a historian and historiography today, within a world in restoration of national identities and a time of fast globalization?

A historian of the Society of Jesus, for this is how I have defined myself for 30 years (I suppose we shall return to this question too), is, first and foremost, the historian of a global enterprise, singular among others for its very strong Roman centralization, who raises the historiographical question of the conditions of possibility of a globalized history. This was the question that drew me, in 1995 – following the creation, with my colleague Bernard Vincent, of the research group on modern evangelization missions – to the history of the Jesuit missions. Our main inquiry was how can we avoid a biased perspective, always liable to remain captive of the Roman Catholic standpoint, without turning to a *minor* approach and run the opposite risk of neutralizing the force of the dominant pole? How to penetrate more

deeply into the multiple rationales that prevail in the institution, and, at the same time, into the plurality of its local and regional dynamics? How to reach the interplay of these spaces, from the standpoint of an effectively connected history? From this perspective, the world history of the Society of Jesus generates, both the process of the first globalization, and the process of a global division, in which the protagonists needed to be endlessly registered in specific, rooted and different spaces. The Portuguese poet Miguel Torga wrote «the universal is the local minus the walls»; this sentence can be a very appropriate formulation of what I've just said.

How do you understand the role of history or historical knowledge in our society, so overwhelmed with the almost absolute priority given to technological knowledge, to the so-called exact and economic sciences? Is there still a future for history?

I propose two possible answers, among many others, to this question, of course, mandatory for professional historians or readers of history books, who are still the most numerous within the wide audience of human and social sciences. Something which probably explains the fact that there's a certain serenity of the discipline when compared to the epistemological concerns of anthropology and sociology – also due to the fact that these concerns are, for historians, as old as their discipline: service to politics had already been practised

and exposed by Tacitus, Machiavelli, and the historiographers of Louis XIV, the ostentatious devices of erudition were present in the wise ironies of Kantorowicz, and so forth, but let's return to your question.

It seems to me, on the one hand, that the meaning of history studies is certainly not, or no longer is, the search for a reservoir of meaning for the contemporary age, offering it mirrors, models and points of comparison. It seems to me that, on the contrary, its role – and Michel de Certeau has shown it magnificently – is to manifest the strangeness of the past, to free the present from a buried past – although, and especially, if that past continues to haunt the present as a kind of fascinating nightmare. For example, as far as I'm concerned, and to put it with a certain brutality, why things have not gone very well since God died, and why does He continue to shine with a seemingly inexhaustible *aura* as a dead star? Why has not *glory* been eclipsed, overcome by *truth*?

On the other hand, as it's often been said, there are, in a more imperceptible or clearer way, elements of fiction in reviewing the past. I add here, and this could be a trait of our time, that we cannot split a certain impossibility of thinking about the future from a deep deflation or depression by the fiction existing in history, that is, from the moment it ceased to present itself as a factory of models, of exemplary figures, and so forth. I conclude, then, that the reactivation of an imagination of the

future can be fed or initiated only by a certain form of re-enchantment with writing the past, and that we must be very attentive to this thrill, for example, in contemporary literature in the broad sense.

In *Apologie de l'Histoire or le Métier de l'Historien*, Marc Bloch describes the work of the historian as follows:

I had gone with Henri Pirenne to Stockholm. As soon as we arrived, he asked me: «What shall we go to see first? It seems that there's a very recent borough here. Let's start there.» And then, as if predicting my astonishment, he added, «If I were an antiquarian, I would only have eyes for old things. But I'm a historian. Therefore, I love life.»

According to Bloch, the historian loves the present and is always in dialogue with the present. What's your opinion on this subject? How do you experience this dialogue with the present?

I've already answered this question at length. I'll add only the following: what is a new place? Are there any new places? I don't ask it in the essentialist sense, in the way of Mircea Eliade or the Jungian tradition in which he is inscribed, of discovering a primeval origin of all new places; but in the sense that, as a palimpsest, all places allow us to discover the former place on which they base their own entitlement, in a return that will never find an origin, but that will constantly interrogate itself about its potential roots, of which there must always be a tendency to free itself

through a *background knowledge*: this is the work of an historian.

Continuing with the previous question about the relation between the past and the present. H. I. Marrou, in his *De la Connaissance Historique*, said that historical research can and must become «friendship» between those who practice and those who are subjects of investigation (see quotation). What is your opinion?

Understanding the past requires a vast and deep fraternal communion between the subject and the object, between the historian and the document (or rather, between the historian and the man who reveals himself through that sign which is effectively the document). It is impossible to understand without this frame of mind that he becomes connatural with the «others», that he allows himself to feel the passions, to hold ideas from a standpoint not unlike theirs and – ultimately – to communicate with them. In this case, the term «affection» proves insufficient; the historian who truly intends to understand should seek to create a bond of friendship with his object because, according to the beautiful formulation by Saint Augustine, «nemo nisi per amicitiam cognoscitur [no one knows except by friendship].»

Yes, it seems to me that you mention a very important point, the question of *friendship*, by which, in effect, the exchange between characters of the past and us becomes fruitful. When we consider what friendship meant in the 16th century, we find in it a breadth of political, religious, and spiritual meanings,

which seem far removed from our definition of friendship, which is more psychological, more affective. But when we analyse things more closely, we feel the impact of friendship on our time and we think: for of course, if I am a friend, truly a friend, that is, willing to sacrifice, well, then there's more than a simple affective union; and, therefore, other layers resurface, which arise precisely from intellectual solidarity, also here and again, in all the breadth of their meanings. My current friends, such as Alain Cantillon and Patrick Goujon, to refer those who are closest on a daily basis, are effectively friends who come from this ancient tradition. And here, you're right, there's an empathy which reveals to me which contexts allow me to understand, for example, what binds Ignatius of Loyola to his first companions. There's something – being perhaps the only thing! – which, for me, goes beyond the distance between this world where I come across myself, and the world where my work makes me live – I say well: it makes me live, it helps me to live.

The world we live in is determined by the experience of globalization, thereby teasing classical perspectives and means of making history from a national standpoint. It is increasingly necessary, therefore, making history in a global perspective. How to rethink religious history from the perspective of the brand new global history?

In effect, it is undoubtedly one of the great challenges of contemporary religious history

tory. I'm currently working with José Eduardo Franco on a little book, which could be called *Contemptus Mundi*. To approach the subject very briefly, the religious question today can be seen as the one that raises more accurately the force of worldwide integration dynamics, as much as limits, crisis and critique of this force.

With regards to the first aspect, that of the religious question as a function or vector of worldwide integration, we can highlight the following topics:

- *the migratory movements and the role of diasporas in the development of contemporary fundamentalism*; in other words, the decontextualization of dogma, which is no longer embedded in its own historicity and can, therefore, be produced with an original purity. From this standpoint, and without breaking the principle of the strangeness of history in which contemporaneity has to discover new figures, the history of modern evangelization, which interests me, can be useful as point of comparison. The conquerors of «new worlds» leave as Catholics, but return as Christians; and are continuously discovering the trail of those who preceded them in the conquest of those worlds, of the early apostles, and even of Jewish tribes who didn't know the message of Revelation. We must pay close attention to these fictions which are often referred to the domain of tales, since they tell us how to articulate the invention of the past and the possibility of the future, in which I insisted above.

- *the salvation of the planet* and the religious contours of ecological ideology: this is the perspective from which I conceive my current work on the exegesis of the Flood Narrative and Noah's ark, an essential place of an extraordinarily fragile definition of the boundary that separates humanity from animality, a frontier whose redefinition is by all means one of the great questions of our time – the conclusion of which I will no longer see – but that is a projection of my long term work: upstream, how to handle the human with the non-human, pace of continuous discoveries about the relation between the *australopithecus* and the *homo habilis*; and, downstream, how to deal with the immense problem of animal consumption? The black box of Noah's ark, between the salvation of men and animals and the submission of the latter to the first, is, from this standpoint, an explosion of meaning.

- finally (although I am only defining the scope), the planetary difficulties of the *Republican idea*, with the retreat of the republic and current requirements of *democratic life*, and the discussion – especially virulent in France – on the issue of *secularism* as a republican principle.

But did you also mention a second aspect of the relationship between religious history and global history?

With regards to the second aspect, that of the religious question as the limit, crisis and cri-

tique of worldwide integration, we can state, also quite briefly:

- a historical perspective on the *limits of a universal religion*. Here again, the impasses of world evangelization in the long run of modernity come across a whole series of questions about the ambition of supposedly universal religions, in their relation with those that are not; and, in the foreground of the latter, we must be able to conceive, even in its most difficultly penetrable contemporary intricacies, the extraordinary paradox of Islam which is, at once, the crowning of the history of monotheism and an *unduly* expansionist religion. It seems to me that, in this area, one of the keys will be a serious consideration of the reasons why Hegel, in his immense construction of a history of religions whose ending would be the crowning and ending of Christianity as a State religion, had to maintain the impasse about the Islamic world. This is, for me, one of the great projects, still to be initiated, on the conceptual limits of worldwide integration.

We can make the same movement of reflection, albeit elsewhere, on the ultra-contemporary problem of the market of doctrines and religious or spiritual practices: the *bricolage* of these materials is never completely deterritorialized. It is lived as a loan to *other worlds*, even if completely transformed, deformed, altered, reinvented, and so forth. A loan to other worlds that does not coincide with the concept of single market.

But thinking about the global functioning of religion cannot lead us to forget the material belonging of religion, that is, its affiliation to a specific ground. How do you handle this problem?

It is also from the perspective that we must frame the relations between religion and *reterritorialization*, that is, the problem of religious mobilizations in great contemporary conflicts, from the Balkans to the Middle East; in other words, the relations between the *world* as the horizon of reception of these conflicts, and the *land* as the anchoring point of action, which is also the land of the dead. Strategic military debates place the problem of war on the ground; that is, they locate it, in an effective and irreducible way, at the height of man, and not at a deterritorialized height; the war is waged in *the very ground that is in dispute*, and not in heaven where there is no sharing. The deployment of religious boundaries, especially between Orthodoxy and Catholicism, or between Christianity and Islam, does not depend on a religious, subterranean, permanent (active or latent) major invariant. It is not the land that is religious, it is the religious that determines the land as men's land – bloody land, sacrificed land, venerated land.

Why is there a religious dimension in the definition of land? Because the religious experience, as an experience of being-in-the-world, is not related to the whole world, but to the «worldly» world, to worldliness; to being-thrown-into-the-world (to *Dasein*, in the Hei-

deggerian conception, and I emphasize here my reencounter with Heidegger, who was at the beginning of my work and, as I said before, of my conversion to history).

The confirmation of my thoughts, which refer to the conversation I had today with José Eduardo Franco, would be found – both among monotheistic religions and others, albeit in different forms – in the relation between the contemplation of the world, as the creation of divinity, and the contempt for the world, for its distance from divinity – the *contemptus mundi* of old times. It's instructive to articulate this «contempt for the world» with the «worldwide integration»: the contempt for the worldwide world and the feeling of contempt for this world, for these people, for «the real people», as it's often said in French political language.

Finally, we must summon (and in this regard, I recall all the work carried out at the European religious anthropology centre of the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales [EHESS] which I had the privilege of leading for ten years) the relation between religion and *re-location*: the religious as a contour of sacred *places* in the *space* of the world, that relocate the spatiality of displacements: pilgrimages, and so forth.

As established by Marcel Detienne in *Tracés de Fondation*, and I return now to the question you've raised before, a sacred place always reveals, in the great religious traditions,

a former place, an *ancient* place. Religion is a «chronotopy»: it condenses time into places and, symmetrically, provides the actuality of a place with the depth of duration. It's in this sense – and this is by all means one of the strongest determinations in my current connection to this field of study – that the topic of religion is one of the most direct ways of understanding our time.

As you mentioned, you've been dedicating yourself specially to the history of the Society of Jesus:

a. Could you explain better what draws you to the Society of Jesus and what message does it bring to the world today?

I've already presented a first element of my response when I mentioned that the Society of Jesus was and still is a global project and it contains, as a consequence, heuristic virtues for our own reflection on what you called globalization. This is a central response for me, as I've studied the question of the missionary fate of the Society from several perspectives; one of these standpoints was the missionary vocation and, more specifically, the letters of request for sending to India, a Jesuit singularity about which I'm preparing a general study, together with Girolamo Imbruglia, Guido Mongini and others.

I'll add two more reasons, the first concerning biography, and the second, historiography: More than 30 years ago, I made a strategic bet, which consisted of organizing all my work on

the Society of Jesus, or the essential aspects of it, around the problem, in my view a *foundational* one, of the «composition of a place» and the construction of a system of representations, including the creation of a government organization, etc. This bet was, of course, my way of continuing to be a philosopher, even though I became a historian, since, basically, and in the context of my interest in the Society, nothing that is human is alien to me: neither politics, nor the arts, nor international relations, nor the relationship with knowledge, nor education... And I could expect some kind of systematic elaboration. Have I succeeded?

On the other hand, my interest in the Society of Jesus since its birth in the middle of the 16th century as a new religious order, represented an interest in the Church in general. Since the Society had defined itself as opposed to previous monastic organizations, it stood on the side of the secular clergy. It was a kind of Church within the Church, something which explains why it was considered *unnecessary* by both the regular, and the secular clergy. In addition, it becomes clear why anti-Jesuitism was born at the same time as the Jesuits, who, as is well known, owe their name to the transformation of a negative designation. We're faced with an essential aspect that had an impact within the Church itself: the fact that the Society was a Church within the Church, a *constitutive negativity*, a foundational negativity, of which the first act was the death of God as Man on the cross. I believe it was the

intensity of this negativity that from the beginning I fell in love with in the history of the Society of Jesus, and that undoubtedly came across the amazement I felt with the Heideggerian reading and with what seemed, to me, to be his *anti-humanism*.

b. Do you think that there has been significant progress in the study of the past of this religious order, considering that the image that came to us is deeply affected by the construction of antagonistic and ideologically conditioned representations? To what extent has this apologetic view in history been superseded, and what remains to be done so that we may have a more global critical reading of the Jesuit legacy in the history of Europe and the world?

It seems to me that we find ourselves far from the ideological constructions you mention, particularly since, except for a small number of professionals Jesuit experts, if we may call them so, the essential aspects of research stand aside the Society of Jesus whose history belongs to the public sphere. In general, the concern is no longer to build a statement *about* the Society of Jesus, but to hold the statements and acts of this or that Jesuit, to better understand this or that historical situation. This is what happens with the vast majority of research being done today.

c. Jesuit studies are growing, and have become almost a branch of religious history. How do you see this progress? Which direction is it taking? What are the possible limits and risks of this investigation?

At the moment of our «written conversation», I can tell that it seems to me increasingly clear that we are at the beginning of a wave of new research on the Spiritual Exercises – works that are possible today, at a time when it became feasible to make a history of spiritual practices that is not refuted by theology, but includes instead theological knowledge as one of its motors. For my part, I keep looking for the answer to a simple question: how to understand the «fiery capacity» of the Exercises in such a long period – basically from the 1530s to the 1960s? How to understand the mean by which the Exercises touch the *real*? How to articulate the work of the imagination, its relation with *symbolization*, on the one hand, the *imaginary*, on the other, and with the *real* that reveals itself in these operations? Or, in other words, what are the abyss and the fine shroud that differentiate the spiritual orientation of the Ignatian tradition from the analytic cure? There is research material here, which concerns the Society of Jesus, both in its institutional compactness and in the multiple resurgences of its *contemporaneity*. A field spanning four centuries is open and, as is well known, cross-sectional research of the old and new Society of Jesus remains rare, even though they have been opened by the histor-

ical occasion of the celebration of the 1814 Restoration.

More than 200 years after the Age of Enlightenment and the modern process of secularization of Western societies, among others, gives the impression that the religious question, which seemed to be left out of the concerns of global politics, returned to order of the day, and begins to inhabit the centre of world's problems, to a large extent, due to the global phenomena of Islamic terrorism which seeks for religious legitimization. How do you assess the effects of secularization and secular policies, aimed at purifying references to the religious in public places (prohibiting Muslim women of wearing veils, banning Christian symbols, etc.)?

The current debate – which is differentiated according to national traditions but, as I said above, to a large extent, international – on the evolution of forms of secularity in the public management of religious affairs is fed, in Europe (to which I shall confine myself at the moment), by two specifically contemporary determinations: on the one hand, a very large proportion of European people have completely lost their references to a religious practice, culture, and tradition; on the other hand, this same continent never knew a religious plurality as evident as it is today – for example pluralistic Christianity, Islam, Judaism, not to mention the worldwide religious market to which I have quickly alluded. The relationship between these two points is unprecedented and destabilizes the old model, a model of confrontation between a dominant

religion (Catholicism) and a secularity which was defined in relation to it. One of the best indications of this destabilization is today's increasing interest by the religious sources of «republican secularism», particularly by its Protestant origins in France at the turn of the 20th century. How can we redefine what is called, in a very general way, secularity, that is, the autonomy of public authority, in its reaction to religious authority within this new context, and considering religious traditions whose historical evolution is immeasurable? How does this context produce interactions between these traditions, reactivating Catholic movements which were considered to be extinguished, and that almost elected, in France, the presidential candidate François Fillon?

This is, to me, a brief synopsis of the situation. It's certainly not easy to navigate safely in such confusing waters.

How could history contribute to knowledge of the religious within the global space in which we live, and to its most harmonious integration?

I answered this question to a large extent further back, by mentioning – quickly, of course – the range of topics, *by definition historical and contemporary*, for which the religious element can help to conceive a critique – in the Kantian sense of building a rational foundation – to worldwide integration. We don't necessarily exist – I'll now speak as a Christian apostle! – to underline the harmonies, but, instead, to

surface the dissonances heard in the globalization concert; to resurface the world on the globe. This is already a vast work program!

In a world where the dominant discourse presents the limits of human knowledge as continually decreasing, and man as being able to know ever more, historical research reminds us of the human inability to deeply understand reality. Having a huge number of documents does not mean we're able to identify the ones which are true. Marrou, who we have already mentioned, said that the historian was like Jacob struggling with the angel. How do you experience the limits of historical knowledge?

I think I've approached this question with the answer I gave to the 4th. My previous answer can be completed by the following: in addition to the fact that the development of positive historical sciences played a certain role in the paralysis of thinking the future as a necessary fiction, this paralysis also increased kind of vertigo for the vanishing point of thinking the past and the beginnings of something we called Man, which undergoes an aging of hundreds of thousands of years with every jaw or brushstroke that the earth reveals. I dabbled behind this vanishing point by referring to Noah's ark. I return here to the same question, to complete, because, now, we're faced with two threats: the catastrophic resolution of the whole vision of the future in the form of an apocalyptic ending; or an equally brutal resolution of this wonderful retreat to the emergence of humanity, in the form of

creationist movements whose effectiveness we'd be wrong to ignore. We must advance passionately over the abyss, as they've done in the past, balancing themselves, within the cassock, on rope ladders, audacious prehistoric scholars (such as the Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin); and we must also passionately rise the great founding myths of our civilizations: in front of us, the Flood!

I finish this conversation with a few questions related to the immediate present. You've recently participated in the great historiographic project entitled *Histoire Mondiale de la France*. It's an amazing and revolutionary book, which I am now reading. Can you tell us a bit about your experience in the team of historians who worked to publish this new history of global France, or of the global history of France? What were the challenges of this project and how does it initiate, both in France, and the world, a new way of looking at traditionally national histories? Was this work a breakthrough, truly initiating a global history in Europe?

The impact of Patrick Boucheron's project was due, on the one hand, to the political climate in which it was inscribed, the climate of French presidential elections. The debate about globalization and its various reactions, the question of the place of nations in liberal and bureaucratic history – all this was the immediate context of the book, whose aim was to produce a denationalized, all-inclusive, history of the French nation. It was, in a way, a response to the Sarkozy project of creating a museum of French history, which, fortunately,

never saw the light of day. I outlined above that one of the elements of the religious issue, nowadays, is the wide perspective it opens on the global world and, at the same time, on the most rooted sites; this was also the double focus of *Histoire Mondiale de la France*, which is, therefore, by no means, a history of worldwide France. But it seems to me that the book goes beyond context. I've got some difficulty in saying this as I'm one of the authors, but it's worth emphasizing the significance of this work as a collegial construction made by four organizers and a hundred collaborators, with the aim of opening the pages of a series of moments that are generally absent from national history and yet have contributed to weave what is called the French space. To paraphrase the title of a celebrated work, we can speak of a history made of layers, or sludge, of the French national sentiment – a history worked by the hidden layers of colonization and collaborationism, by the traumatic sinking of the communist horizon, and so forth. Returning to the Society of Jesus, Boucheron asked me to write a little-known page of the history of France, precisely because it was not French history, which was the first sketch of the Society's foundation by a group of Navarrese students and a Saboian priest, in 1534, in Paris, a multi-confessional capital... This history is both unknown to France, as well as an image of the whole book. Clearly a valuable story for the time we live in.

You are the first president of Société Internationale d'Etudes Jésuites [SIEJ] [International Society of Jesuit Studies], founded in Paris in 2015. What significance does the creation of this institution have, not only in the global plan of academic universe, but also for the current study of the Society of Jesus? Tell us about the goals and challenges of SIEJ and its scientific contribution renewing these studies.

Let me start by remembering that this Society was founded in close dialogue between us, and between French and Portuguese specialists in the history of the Society of Jesus. It had three main goals: first, to facilitate the partnership on a world scale among the many researchers who are interested, for one reason or another, in the history of the Society of Jesus (it's clear to me that this is a way of continuing to build this Society as a global social fact, in a historiographical moment of very strong specialization in research; I already approached this subject). Second, to open a workspace radically autonomous from the Society of Jesus itself, though, to a large extent, also available to Jesuit historians. And, finally, to welcome several working languages in the context of a very strong and rapidly growing predominance of English as the only international language. I must say, and I think you'll agree with me, that this initiative seeks to respond to a situation in which the major role played by the United States in the production of sources and research publication – following the loss of historical influence by Rome, despite considerable efforts made

by the Society in this sense² – also implied a certain return to clerical historiography, given the weight of American Jesuit institutions and, of course, the linguistic and cultural predominance of English. I'd remind that, in the 1980s, the Society's Roman institutions (ARSI and IHSI) were open to scientific research on a scale that is now worldwide, something which should absolutely be maintained – and we're not far from the concerns we've expressed at the beginning of our conversation.

But it's also clear that the cooperation between SIEJ and our colleagues from the United States, whose vitality is considerable, should be a priority for us. I stress this point as, for me – and from the beginning – the dialogue with Jesuit historians (to speak only of those! There are many American historians who are totally alien to the Society) has always been extremely valuable, since it was a unique access route, not only highly capable (I recall Adrien Demoustier and some distinguished members of the Roman Historical Institute, whom I regret not having known better, such as Mario

² In this context, I'd like to recall the work of Brian MacCuarta in the Roman archives (Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, ARSI), which promoted an immense numbering of ancient sources (an operation which, in turn, promoted the development of research far removed from Rome and the Italian media); the work of Martin Morales at the head of the Pontifical Gregorian University (APUG) archives, which allowed us to discover the other great Roman archive, largely ignored and where there are numerous sources farther away from the institutional history of the Order; and finally, the work of Camilla Russell, at the head of the Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu (IHSI) and its publications.

Scaduto, Mario Zanardi, Pietro Pirri and many others – and, today, Patrick Goujon, from Paris, an indispensable companion), but also with a certain relation to the history itself. And, once more, we find the relationship to the distance and contemporaneity of the past we referred to – precisely when we spoke of the Jesuit Michel de Certeau! What does it mean for a Jesuit to say «we» when he evokes figures, situations and actions that took place four centuries ago? This is a question we need to ask! It was this cooperation between Jesuit historians and those who aren't (whether Catholic or not) we wanted to empathize when we organized the first meeting of SIEJ at Boston College, the headquarters of the Advanced Historical Jesuit Studies (directed by Casey Beaumier, SJ, and Robert Maryks, two men of strong personality) in June 2017. It seems to me that it was important to specify the conditions for the foundation of SIEJ.

And what are the main projects for SIEJ? How do you intend to develop its activity?

Within this context, I cannot say much about the work program of the Society; I'll mention only two aspects. On the one hand, it seeks to promote the flow of information of works and project of members (about 200 researchers) within in their fields of expertise. We can publish unpublished works, little known sources, documents of all kinds. That would be very important. The website of SIEJ is essential for

this purpose, and I'm very grateful to Vanda Figueiredo, from Lisbon, for the time she dedicated to it. On the other hand, we launched a major publication project on the global history of the Society of Jesus, following the Boston assembly, which might be considered a work in progress, federating a series of initiatives, of projects and research, that would come within the framework of this structure. The visibility of these works can be increased, and the coherence of a strategic scientific orientation on the Society of Jesus as an observatory and as a field of observation world history between the 16th and 17th centuries would be concretely put to the test and into practice. I strongly believe in this great undertaking, that will be launched in the fall of 2017.

Finally, in 2017, we opened a post-doc competition for a Global Studies Prize, which seeks to reward innovative projects on the history of the Society of Jesus in a worldwide context. This prize will be awarded by the EHESS Endowment Fund, with the crucial contribution of the European Institute of Cultural Science Father Manuel Antunes, in Portugal. I am very pleased with the initiative of providing financial support to young doctors in the period between ending their PhD and their first long-term employment contract, something which is, as we know, essential today. But elaborating on these aspects would take us very far!

You are also the new director of the Center d'Études in Sciences Sociales du Religieux [CéSor]. What is the scientific mission of this important EHESS research centre, and what will be your research policy in this mandate at the head of CéSor?

In effect, I've succeeded (with Nathalie Luca, an anthropologist) Dominique Iogna-Prat, who is well known for his work, among others, on the history of the Church both as a monument, and as an institution, and who will continue to collaborate with CéSor. As you'll have noticed when I tried to explain what drew me to the history of the Society, the history of Church interests me as well! CéSor will have, once again, a leadership shared between history and anthropology, and, to put it briefly, between the history of old texts and religious practices and the attempt to think forms of belief in the contemporary world. This is the field of expertise of CéSor, that, today, brings together about 40 researchers from these two worlds of thought and culture. I've accepted the position precisely for this demanding openness (albeit EHESS has been inestimable to me for 25 years for this same openness, in the many responsibilities I assumed in the institution, as an editor and a president of the school, together with Danièle Hervieu-Leger). I've accepted this position, especially as we are today on the threshold of a vast re-composition of the religious social sciences landscape in great Parisian institutions, with the creation of Condorcet campus, and the close cooperation between CéSor and two great centres

of the École Pratique des Hautes Études (the motherhouse of EHESS, as you know): the Laboratory of Monotheistic Studies, which is oriented towards medievalism, studies of patristics, and so forth; and the Sociology of Religions and Laity Group, a very active group in the field of contemporary public religious policies. It seems to me that CéSor will have a major role to play in this group, and that the future begins today, as it's often said in France, without however drawing its consequences and trying to see beyond the tip of one's nose.

At this moment, and within the framework of CéSor's activities, I'm particularly involved in a project that brings us back to historiographical reflections we've spoke about at the beginning of our conversation: a project for a historical anthropology of votive objects, usually designated by *ex voto*, well known in Portugal, as it owns important collections of them! It's a project I'm guiding on a very long-term basis, with EHESS medievalist colleagues, other colleagues, specialists in ancient, pagan and Christian epigraphy, and Egyptologists, among others. What interests me, in particular, is the relation between votive paintings known as such (marine paintings, for example) and religious painting as votive painting, that is, the painting as an offer: who, for whom, why? And why do these questions lead us to the beginning of our conversation? Because they pose the problem of what's called modernity, when one considers that the period of the Council of Trent draws a border line between a properly

cultural image and an image from which no miracle is expected.

The votive picture, with its many possible forms, allows us to discuss this border line: now, the Society of Jesus, with its artistic policy, has shuffled this frontier admirably, struggling alternately for a totally de-sacralised image, and

for an image as a divine field of force. Indeed, the history of the Society of Jesus contains the possibility of conceiving a non-linear history and, therefore, of questioning *the meaning of our modernity*.
