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On Giants' Shoulders: The 1961 Salzburg Meeting of the ISCSC

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“\textit{A dwarf on a giant's shoulders sees farther of the two.}”
George Herbert, \textit{Jacula Prudentum}, 1651.

\textit{“What Descartes did was a good step.... If I have seen a little further it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants.”}
Sir Isaac Newton, letter to Robert Hooke, February 5, 1676.

Preliminary

As Shakespeare wrote in \textit{The Tempest}, “what's past is prologue” (II.i.253). In 2011, the 50th anniversary of the founding of the ISCSC will be upon us. It may therefore be instructive to begin to think about both our past and our present as “prologue.” We have an extensively documented point of origin: an extraordinary meeting that took place in October 1961 in Salzburg, Austria, a city more usually identified with music and Mozart than with the comparative study of civilizations. What can we learn from this meeting? What resonance does it have with my own presidency of the ISCSC, which began 25 years after the Salzburg meeting, and with the present work of the Society, now almost 50 years later?\textsuperscript{1}

The tenor and progress of the discussions during those six days in October of 1961 reveal a \textit{Zeitgeist} which is useful to keep in mind as we consider that meeting. The participants in the 1961 meeting all had strong memories of the Second World War, of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and of the Holocaust. In 1961, they were living and working under that sword of Damocles we know as the Cold War, with the tension between the United States and the Soviet Union at a high point. Its attendant threat of instant annihilation either through an act of national hubris or revenge, or through a technological or human mistake, was on all the participants’ minds. Speaker after speaker referred to this historical context. The common experience of living on the brink lent an air of urgency to the meeting, a seriousness that—due as well to the subject itself, “civilizations,”—was deeper than that which normally obtains at scholarly conferences. But, then, theirs was no ordinary conference. It was a meeting of giants, on whose shoulders the ISCSC has stood for the past half century.

From the day I joined the ISCSC, I heard of that legendary meeting in Salzburg, where titans like Pitirim Sorokin and Arnold J. Toynbee clashed, where Roger Wescott and Rushton Coulborn roamed the halls, where Othmar Anderle held forth, where scholars from many parts of the world had come together to found and shape the Society which was to cross the Atlantic to be revived and reshaped by scholars like Roger Wescott, Benjamin Nelson, Vytautas Kavolis, David Wilkinson, and Matthew Melko. The main body of evidence for that 1961 meeting is in its proceedings, a volume entitled \textit{The Problems of Civilizations} (Anderle, O. F. and Sorokin, P. A. 1964). In some 460 tightly printed pages of position papers, speeches
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and conversations in three mostly untranslated languages—primarily German, followed by English and French—26 of the perhaps 200 attendees debated the main issues of our field. There is also some additional evidence about the conference in the archives of UNESCO, in William McNeill’s biography of Toynbee (McNeill 1989) and in Sorokin’s autobiography, A Long Journey (Sorokin, P. A. 1963).

The proceedings contain some surprises. The first is that Sorokin and Toynbee did not really clash—in fact, rather the opposite. They seemed to have been already familiar with each other’s work and respected it. In 1950, Sorokin had published a book on the comparative study of civilizations which included many pages on Toynbee (Sorokin, P. A. 1950). And in 1958, on a Pan-American flight from Boston to Nurnberg, they apparently met for the first time and had a long conversation. We have Sorokin’s account of that encounter. The impression from the transcripts of the 1961 Salzburg meeting is that Toynbee and Sorokin, who were both 72 at the time, conducted themselves like two venerable and confident lions of the savannah. They surveyed and protected their respective domains, returning repeatedly to their favorite formulations, “intelligible fields of study,” for example, in Toynbee’s case and “sensate culture” and “supersystems” in Sorokin’s. But they were careful to praise each other generously as they put forward their own observations. The second surprise is that even though ISCSC members generally believe Rushton Coulborn to have been there, he was not. Toynbee made that clear when, in praising his work, he lamented Coulborn’s absence at the Salzburg meeting (Anderle, O. F., et al. 1964, 118). Roger Wescott was not there, either. It seems that no future members of the American branch of the ISCSC were at that 1961 meeting.

The third surprise is that UNESCO sponsored and funded the meeting, just as UNESCO would contribute, more modestly, to the 2006 meeting of the ISCSC that we held in Paris under the primary sponsorship of the École Pratique des Hautes Études. The fourth surprise is one that should not have surprised me: I expected quality, but I did not expect such uniformly high quality in so many of the speeches and interventions. That quality extended to the extensive publication record of many participants: most were already heavyweights in their fields or clearly on the path toward that recognition. The fifth surprise is that luminaries like Albert Schweizer and Isaiah Berlin sent congratulatory messages (Anderle, O. F., et al. 1964, 46–48) and the international media provided extensive coverage. The sixth surprise was the general tone of the conference. Surely, I thought, such monstrously talented and learned individuals would be aggressive in defense of their own bailiwicks. But no. The tone throughout the conference among all the participants was gentle, mutually respectful, and constructive. The attitude toward the two lions, Toynbee and Sorokin, and the general secretary Anderle, was even reverential. All the participants seemed awed by the fact that such a conference was taking place at all, that it was unfolding in this particular manner of open dialogue and discussion, that “denken in Kulturen” (civilizational thinking) was being so consistently attempted, and that the conference itself was something unique in their professional experience.
The Conference

What contributed to the participants’ sense of uniqueness about the conference was the way it was organized. In six day-long sessions, interrupted by a rest day after the fourth session, the main issues of civilizational analysis were debated in open forum in face-to-face discussions. There were no formal papers. Instead, all the participants spoke extemporaneously or from position papers, many of which were delivered from hand-written notes, as participants’ comments attest. The conference was thoroughly interdisciplinary, with representatives from history, literature, sociology, the philosophy of history, archaeology, anthropology, biology, comparative religions, law, and the fine arts. In *A Long Journey*, Sorokin comments how grateful he was for this organization, for it facilitated the lively exchange of ideas and all participants had the chance to contribute. Moreover, Sorokin continues, this procedure “yielded a better knowledge of the problems of civilizations than could be given by a mere reading of a limited number of papers” (Sorokin, P. A. 1963, 307). The entire conference was taped, and the resulting published volume, *The Problems of Civilizations (Die Problematik der Hochkulturen)*, appears to be a rather complete transcript.

In an essay of some 24 printed pages, Othmar F. Anderle introduced the conference proceedings. He began by quoting Lao-tzu’s famous saying that the journey of a 1000 miles begins with a single step. Like all journeys, said Anderle, this one presented great risks to the civilizationist traveler. The first great risk is that the comparative study of civilizations as a field has been received with hostility by more traditional historians. Second, it is a field that attracts too many amateurs and dilettantes. Third, it encourages the synoptic view at too early a stage in research (Anderle, O. F., *et al.* 1964, 14). Fourth, he acknowledged that he had assumed a risk by organizing a conference dedicated to position presentations and dialogue, and so little concerned with formal papers. Fifth, he noted that the concepts of “civilization” and “culture” have a checkered history and that both concepts have been associated with western dominance historically and in scholarly research. Sixth, he returned to the questionable presence of outsiders and “charlatans” (Anderle, O. F., *et al.* 1964, 21) in “holistic history” and yet he admitted that outsiders could make substantial contributions. After all, it was the outsider Oswald Spengler (an erstwhile high-school teacher of history, math, and science) who inspired the likes of F.S.C. Northrop, Pitirim A. Sorokin and Arnold J. Toynbee. Holistic history was, he said, a necessary corrective to self-indulgent, over-specialized, and small-minded research. Seventh, he mentioned the Soviet Union as a particularly interesting problem for comparative civilizationists. Should it be considered a ‘pseudo-morphous’ high culture (*eine pseudomorph verformte Hochkultur*) in the process of being born (*in statu nascendi*, Spengler would say) or should it be viewed as a new branch from the tree of western civilization (Anderle, O. F., *et al.* 1964, 24–25)? In the remainder of the introduction, he previewed, with the benefit of hindsight, the discussions of the six main sessions of the conference.
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Day One treated “the reality of civilizations.” What is our field of study? Are civilizations “intelligible fields of study,” as Toynbee would have it, or are they something else? How are we to distinguish between culture, high culture, and civilization? Is a civilization primarily a highly organized and more systematized high culture or Hochkultur? If civilizations are real entities and not simply the products of our thinking about large cultural units, just how are they ‘real’? Are they primarily to be understood as structures and processes, as Sorokin would have it? How are civilizations to be differentiated both from each other and in relation to more primitive cultures? These questions drew a wide variety of responses; there was little agreement, as people struggled with definitions and used the same terms in different ways. The discussions rambled. Toynbee and Sorokin dominated the day, as they would on succeeding days, though other participants, in particular A. Hilckman, the director of an institute for the comparative study of cultures at the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, J. Vogt, a historian of antiquity from Tubingen, and Ignacio Olagüe, an independent scholar from Madrid, also contributed strong observations. Sorokin immediately introduced the concepts of “cultural super-systems” and Ganzheiten [integrated cultural or civilizational wholes] (Anderle, O. F., et al. 1964, 54–56), concepts that, little by little over the course of six days, became central to the conference. Thus, though Toynbee appeared to be the more revered figure at the beginning of the 1961 meeting, Sorokin seemed to possess the greater influence by the end. In fact, Sorokin commented slyly that Toynbee’s views came increasingly to resemble his own.

Day Two treated the actual study of civilizations, that is, how civilizational research was conducted and what problems that research presented to the scholar. People agreed that it was difficult enough to master the traditions of a single civilization, much less those of several. It was suggested that a partial solution was to study problems in teams, especially interdisciplinary teams. Toynbee admitted his ethnocentrism and said that if he had been raised in China as a specialist in the Chinese traditions of history, thought, and literature, he would have approached the comparative study of civilizations rather differently than he had as a westerner trained in the Classics and able to read both Latin and Greek. The consensus in the audience, made most forcefully by Ignacio Olagüe (Anderle, O. F., et al. 1964, 109–110), was that it was impossible to know everything but that we should not let that impossibility paralyze us. Indeed, we should take as our models the natural and physical sciences, in which scientists are very much aware of the limits of their competence and knowledge but nonetheless forge ahead, striving toward discovery. Sorokin was against reliance on teams, as the major insights into “truth” in both history and the social sciences are made by individuals in sudden, aha! moments and then are fleshed out by logic and study. Even Toynbee, said Sorokin, began his work with just such an aha! moment, experienced on the steps of the Parthenon in Athens. No, Toynbee replied. The aha! moment for A Study of History occurred at Sparta (Anderle, O. F., et al. 1964, 111).
P.J. Chu, living and working in Switzerland but originally from China, returned to Toynbee’s comment about ethnocentrism and national origin and emphasized that a major obstacle to the objective study of civilizations was one’s national origin and native language, both of which necessarily colored one’s interpretation. Perhaps research in teams was the only viable solution (Anderle, O. F., et al. 1964, 124–126).

Day Three, devoted to intercivilizational encounters, contained the most detailed commentary in the meeting thus far. The issues were both practical and theoretical. How do cultures or civilizations actually encounter one another? Is the encounter between whole civilizations, what the participants increasingly came to call Ganzheiten, or is it between and among parts of the civilizations in question? Are the dynamics of such encounters that of superposition, or miscegenation, or cross-fertilization? Olagüe argued for the importance of the concept of métissage, which is French for the Spanish term mestizaje and the English term miscegenation or hybridity. What kinds of barriers exist to intercivilizational encounters and are those barriers overcome by technology? For example, the oceans kept the pre-Columbian and the Australian aboriginal cultures isolated until new sailing technology enabled their integration into world history.

The example of ideas as agents of civilizational transformation, or as obstacles to transformation, was brought up, especially ideas in relation to an existing context. For example, Islam was able to take root in Spain because it arrived into a context in which the Christian heresy of Arianism, which was anti-Trinitarian and pro-monotheist, already existed. The same ideas from Islam hit a wall with Byzantine civilization, which maintained a Trinitarian conception of divinity (Anderle, O. F., et al. 1964, 187). Toynbee agreed with a number of participants that specific intercivilizational encounters are among the most important objects of study for comparative civilizationists. Civilizations are not “windowless monads” but have windows open to other cultures. And the fact that civilizations do disintegrate and fall apart empirically proves, said Toynbee, that they are not Ganzheiten or “closed systems.” The participants brought up many examples of encounters: Buddhism’s encounter with China, India being changed by Islam, the impact of the West on China’s development from the 19th century onwards, the West’s relationship to Japan in the 16th, 19th, and 20th centuries, Russia as a peculiar case situated between the West and the East. Then the concept of East versus West was criticized as oversimple, for the participants said that they could consider parts of Latin America and Africa to be Eastern or at least non-western, and that the Soviet Union would not easily fit into either category. Many participants spoke on this day: Anderle, Schachermeyr, Schmid, Sarkisyanz, Balekjian, Chu, Yajima, Hsiao, Goldammer, and Romein.

Day Four concerned the problem of universal history. Is universal history merely the sum of all particular histories of the world? Alternatively, is it something qualitatively different, existing above all particular histories, as a kind of metahistory? It was the comparative history of religion, said Kurt Goldammer, a historian of religion and religious art from Marburg, that was the first to be viewed from the perspective of
universal history. Yet the notion of “universality” in religion may be misleading, for monotheism means different things in different religious traditions, as do mysticism, the concept of sin, salvation, and so on (Anderle, O. F., et al. 1964, 258–262). Yet religion can be potentially a unifying factor in the history of mankind. Toynbee agreed with that statement and added that other “forces” such as technology and economics also play a role in breaking down barriers between civilizations. E. Füter, of Switzerland, insisted that there is no such thing as universal history, though there may possibly be something like that in the future. That observation was largely ignored. J. Vogt, of Tubingen, commented that it is a mistake to place religion at the center of a “universal history” and to focus on the Axial Age as the key to a harmonious and unified world in the future. Karl Jaspers did so, said J. Vogt, and he was wrong (Anderle, O. F., et al. 1964, 274–278). Day four, therefore, revealed a number of serious disagreements on the nature of history and universal history, and even Sorokin’s attempt at the end of the day to mitigate differences did not placate everyone. Toward the end of the day’s discussion, participants also disagreed as to whether or not God was present in history and if that issue should be an object of study.

Day Five focused on the future of civilizations, on whether prognostication is possible, on whether civilizations are open or closed systems, on how global forces like economy and ideologies can move history in certain directions. It was clear from the beginning of the fifth day that the notion of civilizations as Ganzheiten or integrated cultural wholes was critical. The question was whether civilizations are closed totalities or open totalities. If civilizations are closed totalities, then predicting the future was logically possible. If they are open totalities, then predicting the future was impossible. Toynbee fudged the issue by insisting that civilizations “are imperfectly closed systems” (Anderle, O. F., et al. 1964, 314), and therefore he permitted the possibility of predictability to some extent. In any case, Toynbee insisted, he is not as determinist as Spengler is. Toynbee’s view turned out to be rather closer to Sorokin’s than to Spengler’s on this issue. Sorokin insisted that some kinds of predictions are possible and not others: accurate predictions with unique phenomena are impossible; accurate predictions with regard to repeated patterns of behavior are more likely; accurate predictions concerning Ganzheiten are possible on the level of the Ganzheiten themselves. I take this to mean that the general course of civilizations can be predicted though not any particular path or series of events at this macro level.

The debate went back and forth, centering on the question of openness versus closedness, with Anderle finally saying that the matter cannot be decided by this kind of argumentation; one had to study specific cases. S.Y. Hsiao pointed out that prediction was always part of Chinese history, since every emperor had prophets who served on their courts (Anderle, O. F., et al. 1964, 360). As was the case with the fourth day, there was substantial disagreement, much of it centering on terminology. This concern for terminological precision was, in my view, an advance over the
dialogues that took place on the first couple of days, when few participants challenged the imprecision of other participants. Sorokin, again, tried to sum up the day's discussion and at the same time to move the members' attention away from closed versus open systems—a formulation that he considered "not quite fortunate" (Anderle, O. F., et al. 1964, 375). He tried to clarify the matter by replacing that formulation "by the term selectivity and absorption by either a personality system or by organized social groups of the integrated cultural Ganzheiten, all the external, incessant influences to which any personality, any integrated cultural system, any organized group, are incessantly subjected" (Anderle, O. F., et al. 1964, 375). I found Sorokin's attempt at clarity to be unclear.

The sixth and final day dealt with the question of "one world," that is, with the contribution of the human sciences to the peaceful union of humanity. The optimism implied in the topic itself was borne out by the commentary. Without any real disagreement, all the participants stated that the era of separate civilizations was nearing an end and that the question now was, what kind of world we were to have in the future.

My Approach to the Presidency of the ISCSC and to Civilizational Studies

Each generation of ISCSC leaders, in attempting to develop the field in vital ways, grapples with important civilizational issues. I did not know much about the 1961 conference when I assumed the presidency of the ISCSC in 1986. Yet, as I have discovered, I instinctively led the Society in ways that have turned out to be consonant with those of the founders' concerns and ideals. This leadership style is attributable to Vytautas Kavolis and Matthew Melko, who were my immediate predecessors in the presidency. It is attributable also to the members of the ISCSC who, both individually and as a group, were remarkable teachers, especially for someone like me, a literary comparatist.

Immediately after attending my first meeting in 1978, inspired by several sessions on "sacred places," by the work of E.V. Walter on what he called "topistics," by conversations with Vytautas Kavolis, Edmund Leites and others, I began to read: I read the work of Benjamin Nelson (the first American president of the ISCSC), Vytautas Kavolis, Carroll Quigley, and Matt Melko. I read more deeply in Toynbee and Spengler, the latter more intensively because of my specialization in Germanics. Indeed, I soon presented on Spengler at an annual meeting of the Society. I began to read Sorokin, though mostly through the prisms of Joseph Ford and Palmer Talbutt. I also began to read in a more disciplined way those thinkers who produced works at the interface of history, literature, psychoanalysis and cultural psychology, anthropology, comparative religions, the sociology of knowledge, cartography, and art history. At the same time, I re-oriented myself in what was becoming my specialization within my professional field of Comparative Literature: Latin America's colonial period and 20th-century literature. All of this I did in the eight years between "discovering" the Society and assuming its presidency. I mention these autobiographical details because they influenced my leadership and civilizational approach during the six years of my presidency and beyond.
I tried to contribute to the field and the Society through my presidential addresses, through shaping and organizing the annual meetings and through internationalizing the Society, which had become somewhat insular in its membership. I tried to raise the standards of the *Comparative Civilizations Review* and, with the help of the editors Vytautas Kavolis and Wayne Bledsoe, succeeded to the point that, without my being even aware that the journal was being vetted, the Educational Ministry of the Government of Spain designated it one of the top twenty comparative journals in the world. Throughout my presidency and after, I have attempted to nurture the younger and newer members, to seek more international venues for the Society’s meetings, and to increase the participation from scholars in those parts of the world that had been underrepresented in our Society: Latin America, Africa, India, China, Japan, and Russia (or the Soviet Union).

In my presidential addresses and other interventions, I continually advocated the principle of investigating historical issues and topics that arise out of concrete historical situations, such as the contacts between and among cultures, long-term encounters whether for economic or cultural reasons, and of course the usual stuff of history like wars, invasions, conquests, and colonizations. In my view, general observations should be based, wherever possible, on a command of the primary materials and not depend exclusively on the reorganization of the “theories” or speculations of the classical civilizationists like Spengler, Toynbee, Sorokin, Kroeber, Quigley or Coulborn.

I also defended the principle that if one is going to analyze a particular civilization or a culture in any detail at all, one needs to know its major language or languages as well as its major cultural artifacts from its literature to its religion and political tradition. The further back in time that one goes, the more difficult this becomes. At some point, it will make little sense to speak of civilizational issues at all, though one may still speak of rudimentary social organization or of human activity that, in time, may contribute to the origins and growth of a particular civilization. Naturally, if one follows this principle, one finds oneself restricted in the range of one’s analyses as well as in the details summoned in support of one’s speculations or arguments. That restriction is not necessarily a flaw. My training as a literary comparatist and my experiences with the kinds of mistakes that can occur because of one’s ignorance of primary sources taught me the danger of generalizing beyond one’s competence.

My commitment to these two principles naturally led to reservations about the final utility of the occasional obsession in the Society with the taxonomy of civilizations, with categorizing, defining and numbering civilizations, with trying to establish—for the last time—boundaries, origins, and endings. I witnessed the repetitive nature of many of these attempts over a number of meetings and came to the conclusion that closure and consensus on such issues are impossible to achieve. Similarly, I became skeptical about trying to predict the future except in the most general terms. Having been asked to participate (at the Dublin meeting of the Society) on a panel about “civilizational futurology,” I voiced my skepticism at the beginning of the...
discussions. As a historian, I said, I have enough difficulty predicting the past, much less the future. Unperturbed by my difficulties and reservations, the participants in the panel debated the future with great vigor.

When I began researching what had happened during the 1961 Salzburg meeting, I discovered that, as President and as a contributing member of the ISCSC, I had wrestled with issues remarkably similar to those confronted by the giants on whose shoulders we stand. So have other presidents of our Society, as have many members. One interpretation of this state of affairs might be that the ISCSC has made little or no progress in the almost 50 years of its existence. We have not "evolved." A more charitable and accurate view is simply that these issues are perennial and unlikely ever to be resolved conclusively. The comparative study of civilizations, therefore, resembles more a comparative history of philosophy than it does a comparative history of science.

Everyone who engages in the comparative study of civilizations works from a definition of the field itself, whether acknowledged or not. The older members of the ISCSC know that I have resisted defining "civilization" or "culture"; further, that I have resisted classifying civilizations or writing theoretical papers that pretend to cover all human history. My preference has been to favor the concrete and the practical over the abstract and the theoretical. Nevertheless, despite the fact that any definition of our field is problematic and can be contested, it is probably long overdue for me to acknowledge a conception or notion of "civilization" that I have found useful in framing my own work. I understand such a conception to point towards an integrated ideological system with a historical past, with sustained agriculture as well as with an urban and economic organization, with the ability to transmit its heritage to the future, and with the ability and tendency to interact with other similarly defined systems. By an "integrated ideological system" I mean one that is both a knowledge and belief system. Because such a system is "integrated," it is centripetal in the tendency to unify its cultural and symbolic artifacts; because it is subject to change from both internal and external forces, it is centrifugal and tends to lose its internal coherence. I prefer civilizational analyses that keep something like this conception in mind as specific issues or topics are explored. Further, such explorations should simultaneously keep in mind both the whole and the part, that is, on one hand the worldview, essence, large cultural patterns or structure of the civilization or culture as a whole, and on the other hand the specific issue or problem being analyzed. In my own research and writing, I have preferred to work along axes of specific cross-cultural contacts or intercivilizational encounters, attempting, as I do so, to interpret the encounters from multiple perspectives: Europe and the New World, Europe and India, Europe and Japan, the resonance of the Greek and Roman worlds in other cultures and historical eras, the history of imperialism, colonization and anti-colonization. These axes of contact and encounter produce documentary evidence that can be analyzed. Such evidence need not be textual, but it must be concrete enough so that another scholar, viewing the same evidence and following one's argument, could reach similar conclusions. Absent such evidence, I prefer silence to speculation.
Conclusions

Toward the end of the 1961 conference, despite the horrifying legacies of the immediate past and the uncertainties concerning the present and the future, despite also the overwhelming evidence of humanity’s continual self-destructiveness, the speakers advanced guardedly optimistic statements about the future of humankind.

Toynbee spoke of the urgent need of all humanity to come together and beat swords into ploughshares, of the West to become less dominant in the world, of the need for an integrated study of human affairs such as that offered by comparative civilizational analysis. We need to cease being strangers to one another, Toynbee insisted, for that is the best protection against a doomsday scenario.

Sorokin took up the same issues. Anyone at the meeting familiar with Sorokin’s biography would have known how deeply informed his views were by his imprisonment (six times, both under the Czar and after the revolution), by his condemnation to death, by the commutation of that sentence and his subsequent condition of permanent exile. Those experiences, in addition to the worldwide tensions caused by the Cold War, lent a special poignancy to his statements advocating cross-cultural altruism in international affairs. He spoke also of the transition from Ideational to Sensate culture, which has been the largely materialist culture that has dominated in world history for the past 500 years. Sensate culture is necessarily yielding, he said, to a “new Integral socio-cultural order” (Anderle, O. F., et al. 1964, 411). At the same time, the creative centers of the world are shifting from Europe and North America to Central and South America, to India, China, and Japan, and perhaps Russia, a shift which is the legacy of the death of colonialism.

Also at the same time, the view of “man” is shifting from that of a biological being to one that is more complex, more fashioned from the “coincidentia oppositorum” (Anderle, O. F., et al. 1964, 412) or the “union of contraries” which is human experience itself. We human beings are not merely biological and not merely rational; we are also—the best of us—acquiring a super-rational dimension, a kind of knowledge and wisdom that the Chinese call a “tao-no Knowledge.” The main danger facing the world is the misuse of non-sensate values (which are the values of the great religions in their purest manifestations) for sensate purposes (Anderle, O. F., et al. 1964, 413). Yet even there we see an attempt by such masters of sensate cultures like scientists to lead humankind “into a new era of creative history.” Sorokin said that he hopes for the unification of all humankind in “one Integral system” in the service of the “great creative spirit of man” (414). Prolonged applause followed his comments.

Shortly after Sorokin’s comments, S.Y. Hsiao took the floor to state that he was representing many at the conference not only in recommending that a full conference report be transmitted to UNESCO but also that the following resolution be adopted and transmitted to UNESCO as well:

“We would like to draw the attention of UNESCO to the meritorious activity of the INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
CIVILIZATIONS, undertaken in the interest of fostering an understanding among peoples and the kind of interdisciplinary cooperation that has occurred all during the first ‘Synopsis Congress’ which has just finished on ‘The Problems of Civilizations’ and which has left all the participants deeply satisfied. In addition, we would like to request that [UNESCO] encourage the continuation of this work by granting the corresponding financial support for the establishment of ‘THE INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND INFORMATION ABOUT THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CIVILIZATIONS’ (C.I.E.C.C.), to be located in Salzburg” (Anderle, O. F., et al. 1964, 427–428).

Sorokin closed the conference with some remarks that were autobiographical, ceremonial, and congratulatory (Anderle, O. F., et al. 1964, 450–454). He noted his initial reluctance to attend the conference as well as his pessimism concerning its quality. But, happily, he was surprised by the excellence and focus of the discussions. Day by day, the quality improved. He is now leaving the conference convinced of the necessity and importance of civilizational analysis, of the need for congresses like this one, which he considers to have been unique. He characterizes the study of civilizations as a mission. Finally, he hopes for a good and well-funded future for the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations.

The current ISCSC is that future, whether we have been well-funded or not. Let us take stock of where we have been, where we are now, and what we might become. In that spirit, let me propose the following to the current leadership of the ISCSC. Let us plan the 50th anniversary meeting of the Society to ensure that a portion of it will consist of a consideration of each of the six great themes debated during the six substantive days of the 1961 meeting. Let us take up the issues now that they took up then, in a series of roundtables or panel discussions or position papers. And let us publish the results of our reflections in a special issue of the Comparative Civilizations Review. Let us imagine what we might become, remembering that we stand on the shoulders of giants.

References


Keynote Lectures


Endnotes

1 “On Giants’ Shoulders” is a revised version of my banquet address at the 39th Meeting of the ISCSC (June 3-7, 2009), at Western Michigan University.

2 See appendix 1 for a list of the 26 participants in the 1961 Salzburg meeting.

3 Sorokin had been invited to the 18th International Congress of Sociology in Nurnberg in 1958, and though he had initially decided not to go, his mind was changed by a series of letters and telegrams telling him how indispensable he was and that all expenses would be fully paid. The organizers (headed by Prof. Zimmerman) facilitated getting him a passport and a smallpox vaccination four days before the scheduled start of the conference. “As a result, on the eve of the Congress I found myself flying to Nurnberg on a Pan-American plane in company with C.C. Zimmerman. Dr. A. J. Toynbee happened to be on the same plane. An informal chat with this distinguished scholar greatly enlivened the boring hours of flight from Boston to London where he left the plane” (Sorokin, P. A. 1963, 301).

4 On February 24, 1961, the Austrian National Commission for UNESCO, in a letter signed by the President of the Commission Dr. H. Zeiss, wrote UNESCO’s “Department for Education and Participation Programme,” requesting financial support for the Salzburg meeting. Several possible attendees were mentioned by name: Sorokin, Northrop, Toynbee. The international diversity of the participants was emphasized. The application emphasized also the relevance of the conference to UNESCO’s “Major Project on the Mutual Appreciation of Eastern and Western Civilizations.” The letter also states that, according to Professor Anderle, Mr Ignacio Olagüe, the vice-president of the ISCSC, has already discussed the matter with members of UNESCO’s secretariat. After correspondence among UNESCO, the Austrian National Commission, and the conference organizers concerning “the relevance” of the conference and other requested “clarifications,” funding in the amount of $3,000 (USD) was granted. The Salzburg conference thus became part of the above-named project by UNESCO, which ran from 1957 to 1966. The relevant file in the UNESCO archives is identified as “<East-West Major Project—Participation—Austria>; code: 008 (436) MP 03.” For their help in researching the UNESCO archives, I would like to thank Mr. Jens Boel, Head Archivist,
and Ms. Katérina Stenou, Director, Division of Cultural Policies and Intercultural Dialogue, Culture Section, UNESCO (UNESCO 1961).

In Sorokin’s own words, “the proceedings of the Congress were widely reported by the European press, radio, and television. The New York Times also published a report of a clash of Toynbee’s and my views on the Russian and the German civilizations with those of some of the German historians” (Sorokin, P. A. 1963, 307).

It is clear that Othmar Anderle had the main responsibility for organizing the conference and setting the agenda, but I cannot ascertain if he had sole responsibility.

See appendix 2, which gives an overview of the Table of Contents of The Problems of Civilizations and of the topics treated day by day.

Probably unbeknownst to Sorokin, Toynbee was the first to have been invited, by Othmar Anderle, to become the first president of the ISCSC (McNeill 1989, 251–252). Toynbee had refused, for, on the basis of some prior experience from another conference, he considered Anderle to be dogmatic in his approach to the comparative study of civilizations. In fact, after the 1961 Salzburg conference, Toynbee politely distanced himself from the ISCSC. After Toynbee’s refusal, Anderle then approached Sorokin. Here is Sorokin’s account of that overture: “A group of distinguished European scholars met and organized this society [the ISCSC] in 1960. I was neither invited to nor did I participate in this meeting. I learned about the establishment of the Society from the letter of its secretary-general, Dr. Othmar Anderle. He informed me that the founding group had unanimously elected me the first president of the Society and hoped I would accept this office. As an inducement to my acceptance the letter stressed that the presidency would impose almost no burdensome duties upon me. I accepted the honor with the clear reservation that no work should be expected from me, not even attendance of the meetings of the Society” (Sorokin, P. A. 1963, 306). Of course Sorokin was invited to attend the 1961 congress. After much protestation, he accepted the invitation.

In the reprint of his 1950 study, Social Philosophies of an Age of Crisis, Sorokin remarks in a new preface that Toynbee himself has evolved in his view of civilizations to the point that his theories are now (by 1963) “in greater agreement” with Sorokin’s own (Sorokin, P. A. 1963, preface).

Toynbee tended to equate Ganzheit with the concept of a “closed system.” Sorokin did not. This difference was minimized for the most part in the Salzburg meeting but it became a matter of contention in Toynbee’s essay on Sorokin in Pitirim A. Sorokin in Review (Toynbee 1963) and in Sorokin’s response in the same volume (Sorokin 1963)—not only to Toynbee but to others like Spengler and Othmar Anderle who considered civilizations be be completely integrated totalities, top to bottom. Sorokin preferred the term “cultural supersystem” to “civilization.” A supersystem, for him, contains “congeries” or components that are not part of the causal-meaningful-systematicity of the supersystem. “Congeries” are connected to each other and to a supersystem only by spatial contiguity.

Three of my five presidential addresses were published in the Comparative Civilizations Review (Palencia-Roth 1989) (Palencia-Roth 1990) (Palencia-Roth 1992).

With the generous support of The Eli Lilly Foundation, Sorokin established the “Harvard Research Center in Creative Altruism” and remained its director until he retired in 1959, after which the Center was abolished at Harvard and was transferred to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, where it continued to function for a while with rather limited funding (Sorokin, P. A. 1963, 271–292).
CIVILISATIONS dans l’intérêt d’une entente entre les peuples et d’une coopération interdisciplinaire, ce qui a été exprimé au courant de 1er Congrès de Synopsis qui vient d’être terminé sur ‘Les Problemes des Civilisations’ et qui a donné satisfaction à tous les participants. On lui demande, en outre, de permettre à la Société la continuation de cette activité en lui accordant des ressources correspondantes et en particulier le développement de son CENTRE INTERNATIONAL DE RECHERCHES ET D’INFORMATION POUR LES ETUDES COMPAREES DE CIVILISATIONS (C.I.E.C.C.) à Salzbourg.” [Emphasis given in the original]

It was the lack of funding, coupled with the advancing age of the central members, which doomed the ISCSC in Europe and compelled Anderle in 1968 to seek to transfer the Society to America. Roger Wescott initially helped in that regard. The American incarnation of the ISCSC was thus founded in 1971 by Roger Wescott, Benjamin Nelson, Vytautas Kavolis, Matthew Melko, David Wilkinson, Robert Park, and C.P. Wolf. Benjamin Nelson was elected President, first of the Ruling Council and then of the ISCSC itself. On July 12, 1974, Anderle sent a letter to Matthew Melko and the Comparative Civilizations Bulletin, informing the American ISCSC that “last spring the curtain finally fell” on the European ISCSC, which was declared “dissolved” by the “Salzburg society authority.” All this, says Anderle, has been very painful to him personally, as the ISCSC was largely his creation. But interest in civilizational studies has been declining in Europe for some years, despite the importance of the subject, and he hopes that the interest can be revived and maintained by the American ISCSC, especially if it becomes increasingly international in its membership and its leadership (Anderle, O. 1974). The early history of the American ISCSC may be followed in the first four newsletters of the ISCSC, from June 1971 though Fall 1972, but especially in the first two newsletters.

Appendix 1: Participants, Inaugural Meeting of the ISCSC [SIECC], Salzburg 1961

Othmar F. Anderle, Hon. Prof. Universitat Salzburg, Director of Institute for the Theory of History, Salzburg, General Sec of SIECC

Wahé H. Balekjian, Lecturer, Universitat Wien, Simon Research Fellow, University of Manchester

Emilio Betti, Prof. University of Rome, Director of the University’s Institute of Roman Law and the Institute of the Theory of Interpretation, University of Rome

Paul Bao-jen Chu, Principal, Workers’ Education Division, International Labor Office, Genf, Switzerland

Phyllis Shu-yuan Chu, Prof. Universitat Genf, Switzerland

Eduard Füter, Director, Swiss Institute for Research on Foreigners, Zurich, Switzerland

Edward T. Gargan, Prof History, Wesleyan University, CT

Kurt Goldammer, Prof. History of Religion and History of Religious Art, Philippsuniversitat, Marburg

Heinrich Herrfahr dt, Emeritus Prof of Law, Philippsuniversitat, Marburg
Appendix 2: Conference Schedule


Preface by Pitirim Sorokin, as President, pp. 5-6. Introduction by Othmar F. Anderle, pp. 15-42.

Evening inauguration, Sunday 8 October

Day 1: Monday, 9 October: The ‘reality’ of civilizations, chaired by Othmar F. Anderle, pp. 45-96.

Topics:

1) Civilizations as ‘intelligible fields of study’ (Toynbee)

2) The definition of the phenomenon of ‘civilization’

3) An inventory of civilizations

4) Questions and responses

Day 2: Tuesday, 10 October. The study of civilizations, chaired by Ignacio Olagué, pp. 97-169.

Topics:

5) The problem of synopsis and of interdisciplinary synthesis

6) Summation and teamwork, induction and statistics

7) Wholistic integration (the analysis of structure)

8) The possibilities of international and interdisciplinary cooperation


Topics:

9) The problem of civilizational encounters in the past

10) The Indies, between the Islamic Orient and China

11) Orient and Occident [East and West]

12) The Soviet Union between the Orient and the Occident [The East and the West]

Topics:
13) The transcendent forces of culture: technology, economy, politics, ideology, science, religion.
14) Current theories of universal history: comparison and critique
15) The perspectives from philosophy on history and metahistory
16) Universal history as it is and as it should be

Day 5: Saturday, 14 October. The future of civilizations, chaired by Emilio Betti, pp. 315-397.

Topics:
17) The possibilities of the principle of a futuristic historiography
18) Are civilizations open or closed processes?
19) The role of global forces: economy, ideology, religion
20) Perspectives on the future of the species ‘civilization’ in general and on its actual representatives in particular


Topics:
21) The role of the human sciences in the process of global integration
22) The theory and practice of international cooperation in the domain of the human sciences