

The President's Welcome Note to the 2015 Erfurt IAHR World Congress

Mr. Bodo Ramelow, Ministerpräsident,
Professor Heike Grimm, Vice-president of the University of Erfurt,
Honorary Consul of France,
Congress directors,
IAHR Past-Presidents,
Congress participants and
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

it gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the charming medieval city of Erfurt for the XXI IAHR Quinquennial World Congress.

Every five years scholars of religion come from all parts of the globe to share their research on all aspects of the phenomenon of religion. These efforts result in research projects, publications, enhanced teaching, academic collaboration. Sometimes I've been asked 'Why only every five years?' Ask that question to the local organizers and to the academic program committee, as well as all those who have saved up and prepared for months if not years to participate in this major international gathering. As I stated in my welcome remarks in the abstract book, this is rather like our Olympics or our World Cup (that's important for Germany), but the difference is that this is not a knockout competition. We hope to see most of you here by the end of the week.

This is actually a nostalgic moment for me as I step down from twenty years of service on the IAHR executive. As you may imagine I have experienced and travelled a lot in the course of my various leadership duties. I've especially appreciated being able to learn so much about the academic study of religion in diverse regions of the world. In that regard I'm very pleased to have been asked to reflect on those last two decades in a piece in the new publication to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the journal *NVMEN* – Tim Jensen will be speaking about that. The progress we have made within the IAHR makes me optimistic about the future of the academic study of religion but clearly there is no room for complacency and in some quarters there's even cause for serious concern. I have become more aware of these challenges since I became vice-president last year of UNESCO's Humanities Council (CIPSH) and I hope that the knowledge and empowerment that I derive from that office will enable me to continue to support the IAHR in other capacities. But in that regard I'd also like to invite you to at-

tend the first ever World Conference on the Humanities that will take place in Liège, Belgium in August 2017.

Let me close with an expression of profound gratitude to our local hosts and congress directors Prof. Jörg Rüpke and Prof. Christoph Bochinger and to Dr. Elisabeth Begemann as the congress coordinator for their tireless efforts to lay on the finest congress for you.

I will also like to thank the members of the committees local and international as well as all the student volunteers who will work hard this week to point us in the right direction and to trouble-shoot our problems.

Now it just remains for me to wish you well for your deliberations this week and to declare the XXI IAHR World Congress in Erfurt officially open.

Rosalind Hackett, IAHR President