

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

Members of the IAHR, Congress participants
Congress directors Bochinger and Rüpke,
Honorable Ministerpräsident Ramelow,
Honorable Vice-President Grimm
Honorary Consul of France Grönegres

Memories (at least mine) from the 2010 Toronto World Congress are still so vivid that I cannot understand that five years have passed. However, I am extremely pleased to be back, so to speak, with all of you for this 2015 XXI IAHR World Congress in Erfurt.

It is a privilege to have the opportunity to bid you welcome and, in line with my duties as IAHR General Secretary, to make a few announcements.

The first announcement regards the *IAHR Bulletin 40, Erfurt Congress Edition, August 2015*. Here you find the key documents (agendas, minutes, reports, statements of candidacy, proposal for a change of name, IAHR Rules of Procedure and more) needed for the meetings Wednesday and Saturday of the IAHR International Committee and General Assembly. While the International Committee is constituted by up to two appointed delegates, the General Assembly is constituted by *all* IAHR members, that is all the Congress participants who are members of an IAHR national or regional member association or affiliate. All paid up members also have voting rights.

It is my hope, though, that you'll read this *IAHR Bulletin 40* to be found and freely downloaded from the IAHR website (and you are welcome to approach me later for a print copy), not just with an eye to the business meetings, but because the documents enclosed speak of important developments and discussions within the IAHR; within its elected leadership, within its constituency and thus within the IAHR linked academic study of religions around the world.

The minutes as well as the reports enclosed, in my opinion, speak their own clear language of continuous developments and improvements within the IAHR: The IAHR has, also over the past five years, developed in positive ways in terms of e.g. membership, cultural diversity, and gender equality.

The IAHR has, so to speak, become even more 'global'. What's more: It has improved its finances significantly and can therefore put 'globalization' to work, not least by granting substantial funds to secure participation, by scholars from all over the world, in the IAHR business meetings and conferences.

This Congress, the first one by the way, held in a European country for 25 years, is a proof thereof. Even if the number of participants from out-of-Europe is not (almost) 50 %, as first estimated by the German hosts, and even if efforts to secure an even higher number of non-European participants must be continued.

However: not all that has happened since Toronto has been positive. During these five years, the IAHR has suffered severe losses: IAHR honorary Life Members Jean Leclant, Julien Ries, Noriyoshi Tamaru, Jacques Waardenburg, and, most recently, R.J. Zwi Werblowsky have all passed away.

Allow me to propose that we take the opportunity of this Erfurt 2015 World Congress Opening Ceremony to honor the memory of these outstanding scholars, colleagues, friends and dedicated IAHR Honorary Life Members by way of a minute's silence.

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The outgoing Executive Committee has, as Executive Committees before it, done its best to expand the IAHR while, at the same time, trying to secure that the 'identity' of the IAHR continues to reflect what was arguably first formulated more explicitly by the now late Zwi Werblowsky, in his famous Marburg 1960 statement:

If the IAHR has any *raison d'être* it is by reason of a division of labor which makes the Organization the responsible organ and international meeting ground for those scholars who wish to serve the cause of Religionswissenschaft in its strict sense. (*NVMEN* 7, 220)

I quote these words to honor Werblowsky, former IAHR General Secretary and *NVMEN* editor. I also quote them because I agree, and because I, with many others, consider the Marburg 1960 Congress and Werblowsky's statement a cornerstone in the building of an institutional and lasting consensus as to the perspective and ethos of the IAHR.

Mentioning the IAHR flagship journal *NVMEN* brings me to this publication: *NVMEN, the Academic Study of Religion, and the IAHR – Past, Present and Prospects*, a volume edited by Armin Geertz and Tim Jensen on behalf of Brill and the IAHR Executive Committee, a volume meant to celebrate the 60th anniversary of *NVMEN*.

In 2000 in Durban, South Africa, Prof. Michael Pye, then IAHR President, in his Opening Address, named "Memories of the Future. Looking Back and Looking forward in the History of Religions" said, inter alia:

Memories of the IAHR are part of the history of our discipline, and so I conclude by expressing the hope that these memories, selected, contested, and always reflected, will turn out to be not only memories of the past but also constituents of the future. (Pye 2009, 297)

It is the hope that this publication, with reprints of seminal articles as well as freshly commissioned contributions by prominent past and present IAHR officers and scholars, will serve a similar purpose.

So, please pass by the Brill booth to pre-order this book (still a dummy, expected to be published this November) at the special IAHR Congress price of € 25. The volume, by the way, has been dedicated to the memory of Werblowsky who also served as *NVMEN* editor.

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As is clear from both this publication and the *IAHR Bulletin 40*, the IAHR, proudly, and I think, rightly, claims to be the “preeminent international forum for the critical, analytical, and cross-cultural study of religions, past and present”. And, as stated in the IAHR Constitution § 1: “The IAHR is not a forum for confessional, apologetical, or other similar concerns.”

Heartfelt thanks, consequently, are extended to Congress directors, Profs. Rüpke and Bochinger, to Congress Coordinator Dr. Begemann, to the members of the Organizing Committee, to each and every member of the Academic Program Committee, including, of course, the co-chairs, Profs. Bochinger and Marcos, for their meticulous and hard work to try their very best to align the academic program with the general aims of the IAHR and with the ongoing efforts of the IAHR leadership to improve, secure and tighten up the IAHR academic profile.

Thanks also to the IAHR Honorary Life Members for once again serving the IAHR as members of the Congress Advisory Committee, and thanks to all the officers of the IAHR member associations and affiliates. Thanks to the Deutsche Vereinigung für Religionswissenschaft, to Religionswissenschaft at the Max Weber Center, to the Research School “Religion”, and to the University of Erfurt.

Last but not least, thanks to all Congress participants and members of the IAHR, who have prepared and submitted proposals for panels and papers. Thanks to your dedication to the academic study of religion(s) and to the IAHR, the IAHR 2015 World Congress no doubt will prove to also be a “preeminent international forum for the critical, analytical, and cross-cultural study of religions, past and present”.

I look forward with enthusiasm to the academic program as well as to the IAHR business meetings. The outgoing IAHR Executive has already held its last meeting this morning, but still to come is the International Committee meeting Wednesday, the meeting of the incoming Executive Committee Thursday and the General Assembly, closing the Congress, on Saturday morning.

On the agenda of the International Committee is the election of the 2015–2020 Executive Committee, a proposal for a change of name, and recommenda-

tions for the adoption of new members and affiliates. The results, proposals and recommendations from this meeting will be put before the General Assembly.

Finally, before handing over to IAHR World Congress Co-Director and President of the Deutsche Vereinigung für Religionswissenschaft, Prof. Bochinger, for him to introduce the opening keynote lecturer, Prof. Hubert Seiwert, heartfelt thanks are extended to Dorothea Ditchfield who generously sponsored this lecture, also the 2015 Gary Lease IAHR Memorial Lecture.

Gary Lease, who passed away in 2008 while serving as IAHR Treasurer, was a staunch supporter of the IAHR and its aims. Having Prof. Seiwert deliver the opening keynote and the 2015 Gary Lease Memorial Lecture bodes well for this XXI IAHR World Congress and for the IAHR future.

Tim Jensen, IAHR General Secretary

References

- Pye, Michael 2009. 'Memories of the Future. Looking Back and Looking Forward in the History of Religions.' *Durban 2000 Proceedings*. 185–193.