

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS
ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE POUR L'HISTOIRE DES RELIGIONS

I A H R

IAHR BULLETIN 20
MAY 1992

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Letter from the Secretary-general

Dear fellow-members of the IAHR,

It is a great pleasure to report that the regional conference in China took place in Beijing last month as planned and was generally regarded as having been a great success. This bulletin contains a short report filed by the Chinese news agency Xinhua. A longer report with more details of the academic content will be given later. It is expected that the proceedings will be published in due course, both in Chinese and in English. This was only the second IAHR conference ever to be held in Asia and the first to be held in China, co-sponsored by the recently affiliated Chinese Association for the Study of Religion and the Institute for the Study of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The long-term significance of this event can therefore scarcely be overestimated. The main organisational burden was carried by the Institute for the Study of World Religions, to whom many thanks are due.

Looking ahead, there will be a similar regional conference in Harare next September, the first IAHR conference ever to be held in Africa. The planning for this is well advanced. The Harare conference will provide the context for the annual meeting of the Executive Committee, so please forward any matters for discussion at this meeting to the undersigned.

Preliminary arrangements are just now being made for the inter-Congress meeting of the International Committee, whose membership includes two representatives of each national affiliated association. These representatives are usually the president and secretary, but another person may be designated instead. The meeting will be held in Paris, or somewhere nearby, in summer 1993. Unfortunately there are no travel funds available for participation at this meeting. In some cases there may be a suitable representative staying in France for other reasons such as research, and this will save expense for your association. I hope to hear soon, from the secretaries, who the representatives are likely to be.

With all best wishes
Michael Pye

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IAHR Discussion paper on the proposed changes of name

The following discussion paper has been prepared after extended discussion by the Executive Committee at Burlington (1991) as a basis for further discussion. Colleagues Peter Antes and Don Wiebe are to be thanked for drafting it.

Serious question has been raised in recent years regarding the appropriateness of the name of the International Association for the History of Religions. Many have argued that the name of the Association does not adequately represent the work of its member scholars and that it, consequently, will not be able to attract new scholars from a wide range of approaches to the study of religions to its ranks. Little of the discussion and debate of this topic has ever appeared in print, but that is not a true indication of the importance of the issue, both at the meetings of national member associations and at the various meetings of congresses of the International Association. Although the question was raised in the Bulletin of the IAHR, the Executive Committee received no further communication on this topic from the national member organisations, or from individual members of those organisations, and did not, therefore, consider this a matter of priority concern. That situation changed, however, at the XVIth International Congress of the IAHR in Rome with a motion by the British Association requesting the Executive Committee to consider changing the name of the International Association for the History of Religions to the International Association for the Study of Religions.

Change of Name Proposal:

Though no member organisation of the IAHR has yet put forward a set of formal arguments justifying a change of name for the international association, the arguments for a change in name of the Association appear to be of two kinds - practical and theoretical (methodological). The list below suggests the kind of arguments that might well be presented.

On the practical side it might well be argued:

1. that many of the member organisations of the IAHR do not use the locution "history of religions" in the name of their organisations and it might well be argued that some degree of uniformity here is necessary if confusion is to be avoided. Furthermore, it could be argued that that locution is not used to designate university departments for the study of religions but rather locutions such as "Religious Studies" or "Study of Religion" and that the name of the International Association ought to reflect that fact.

2. that the phrase "history of religions" does not adequately reflect the breadth of scholarship in the field, or the variety of approaches taken to the study of religion by university professors inside and outside the departments established for the study of religions or even of those who are members of the IAHR through membership in national member organisations.

3. that, furthermore, this inadequacy jeopardizes the work of the International Association in promoting its own work which is to promote the world-wide academic study of religions; the name of the Association, that is, seems to restrict its appeal to historians and so makes it difficult to draw the best scholars from other disciplines who have devoted their attention to understanding and explaining the religious phenomena.

4. that such exclusivity could also present serious difficulty in fundraising activities of the Association; defined more broadly as an association for the academic/scientific study of religions and therefore involving a broader range of scholars, the Associate broadens its base for fundraising activities.

On the theoretical side, the pro-change of name position includes the following concerns:

5. It could be argued that the name "International Association for the History of Religions" was inappropriate from the beginning because its members were originally committed to the historical and phenomenological study of religions.

6. If "history of religions" is not used as a technical term with its own specific meaning (scholarly agenda) it can only refer, simply put, to historical analysis and explanation of religious phenomena. That kind of designation of the field, however, is methodologically unacceptable for it fails to recognise not only that significant contributions have been made to the understanding of religions by other (social-scientific) disciplines but also that few theorists, or practitioners, of the history of religions would deny that proper historical study requires augmentation, so to speak, from the social sciences. If the phrase is used as a technical term, on the other hand, there is the methodologically problematic suggestion that the Association is the home of a new autonomous academic or scientific discipline with its own peculiar mode of explanation rather than of a field of studies that involves the work of scholars from many different academic disciplines.

7. There are religio-theological overtones (undertones?) to the phrase "history of religions" and particularly so in Anglo-American circles. This is so largely in connection with the work of Eliade which is seen to be crypto-theological if not outrightly theological in intent. His influence in North America, therefore, is seen largely to be that of having provided a religious agenda for the 'scholarly' study of religions.

8. There are Eurocentric overtones to the phrase "history of Religions". That phrase, it appears, reflects the peculiar circumstances of the emergence of the study of Religions - as distinct from doing theology - in the European context which

reflected a concern for careful scientific work to distinguish it from the speculative character of theology. Consequently only work that was empirical - that is, philological/historical - was considered acceptable which prevented proper attention being paid to non-literate religious traditions.

Status quo Position:

Change for the sake of change of the name of the Association is, obviously, unwarranted. It could also be reasonably argued, moreover, that a change in the name of the Association that does not clearly improve upon the present designation would in the short and the long run be detrimental to the Association. A change, that is, must clearly retain the primary objectives of the original Association. The retention of a name that is not wholly appropriate to the intention of the Association would still be preferable to the adoption of a more ambiguous designation, even though more inclusive, because of the threat such ambiguity presents for the erosion of its original goal.

Arguments here, like those in favour of a change in name of the Association, are of both a practical and theoretical kind.

Practical objections to the change of name of the Association include:

1. The international identity of the Association is well established in the use of the acronym IAHR. Though the Association was only founded in 1950, it emerged as the result of the international congresses for the study of religion held since 1900. Consequently, the current name has an extended life and carries with it the history of the activities of scholars since 1900 since no permanent organisation ever preceded it. Although the original name of the Association was the International Association for the Study of the History of Religions (IASHR) the change of name to the IAHR occurred sufficiently early that only the latter designation has ever been widely associated with this group of scholars. To change that name now, it could be argued, would be to lose visibility in the same way that coca-cola would lose visibility by changing its name to "brown cola".

2. The loss of recognizability as the IAHR would create difficulties in the various activities of the Association in its relations to other institutions and in such matters as fundraising, etc.

3. There would be serious difficulties for the Association in relation to its member organisations in changing its name - i.e., there are difficulties in translation of alternative names that would be considered appropriate in the official languages of the Association.

Theoretical problems that would be involved in a name change include:

4. Some would argue that 'religious studies' is not simply a field of studies but a discipline and that the designation of "history of religions" alone can capture that fact. That is a contentious matter, however, and would need lengthy argumentation.

5. Some maintain that a change of name could lead to the loss of the academic/scientific character of the Association. A too "inclusivist" designation of the Association, that is, could lead to a decline in academic standards. A too vague characterization of the Association, for example, could well permit the acceptance of all kinds of "talk" about religion, even to 'journalistic studies' of religious phenomena. Similarly, a vague designator like "International Association for the Study of Religion" could eventually provide room for the justification of theological studies of religious phenomena as one kind of approach to the subject matter and that would undermine the original intent of the Association which was to ground a non-religious and non-theological study of religions. (Some would argue that the very inclusion of approaches like philosophy, sociology or psychology would introduce crypto-theological agendas. The history of methodological debates show that this concern is particularly widespread in Europe and especially so with respect to the discipline of philosophy.)

PA/DW

Note on further procedure

It is expected that the above paper will be discussed by the various affiliated associations, whose views can then also be made known in this bulletin within the next twelve months. The subject will then be on the agenda for the next meeting of the International Committee at Paris in August 1993. The International Committee will then have the opportunity to formulate a proposal, if it so wishes, for the General Assembly at Mexico City in 1995. Should it fail to do so, the subject will probably have to be shelved until the next five year period. In the meantime please send further brief statements or position papers to the Secretary-General.

China hosts seminar on religion and culture

An international seminar on religion, the first of its kind held in China, last week focused on the relationship between foreign religions and Chinese culture.

The meeting, attended by more than 40 scholars from 13 countries, was co-sponsored by the International Association for the History of Religion and the Institute of World Religion under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

During the seminar, scholars touched on a wide range of topics, including fundamental theories of religion, religious history, the comparative study of religion, and religion, related philosophy, ethics, sociology and anthropology.

In spite of their varied backgrounds, the scholars agreed that religion is a cultural phenomenon apart from traditional culture.

According to the scholars, Chinese culture enriches itself through contacts with many aspects of foreign culture, including foreign religions, and the process is part of worldwide cultural exchanges.

Chinese religious culture, according to the scholars, not only absorbs the key elements of various foreign cultures and religions, but also, in turn, influences the cultures of other nations.

French Sinologist Kristofer Schipper stressed that Chinese traditional culture has an innate ability to absorb the useful element of other cultures. He noted that this is a major reason for the continuous development of Chinese culture.

Citing the example of Buddhism in China, Chinese scholar Li Shenzhi, noted that all the foreign ideologies entered China only after they were adapted to suit the country's needs.

He stressed that in a world which is becoming increasingly interdependent, both the Chinese and foreign cultures must adapt to one another, which he said will result in common development.

The scholars also discussed possible changes in religion in the face of world-wide modernization.

(Xinhua)

IAHR Congress in Mexico City 1995

In recent months there has been some consideration of the location of the forthcoming IAHR Congress in 1995. In particular, questions have been raised about the level of pollution in Mexico City, and some people have suggested that the congress be held in a different city.

This question was discussed at considerable length by members of the Executive Committee meeting at Beijing. This was an informal meeting of those members present, without any other formal agenda. It was significant however that Dr. Yolotl Gonzales, from Mexico, was present and able to speak in detail about the precise circumstances.

The conclusion of the discussion was that the location of the Congress should remain at Mexico City itself.

The main considerations in reaching this conclusion were as follows:

- 1) Most of the colleagues hosting and organising the Congress themselves live in Mexico City, so that organisational questions can be more easily solved by them on the spot.
- 2) Our colleagues in Mexico City have to live there all the year round, and therefore it seems reasonable for foreign colleagues to spend five days there.
- 3) One of the five days will be used for an excursion outside the city itself, to a major historical site.
- 4) The last day of the Congress (the Saturday) may be designated as the day for visiting the great Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City, so that many colleagues will be able to talk with each other there, enjoying its pleasant amenities. Yet people would not be bound to the city on this day.
- 5) The time of year of the Congress is not the time when pollution is at its worst.
- 6) It is expected that between 1992 and 1995 further steps will have been taken to alleviate the problem of pollution. It is good for the IAHR that the question has become serious now, rather than arising for the first time in 1995.
- 7) Many other major cities, suitable for congresses for other reasons, have a comparable problem.
- 8) Participants wishing to see other parts of Mexico will have every opportunity to do so before, or after the Congress. They may wish to have pre-conference meetings, for example, on the sunny beaches of Apaculpo.

THE LOCATION OF THE 1995 CONGRESS REMAINS MEXICO CITY (MP)

World's Parliament of Religions

The following schedule of celebratory events has been received from the organisers and may be of interest to IAHR members for historical or other reasons.

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION OF THE WORLD'S PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS

INDIA - AUGUST 1993

Peace in our time will require greater understanding and cooperation among religious communities. The vision of a world community of communities proclaimed by religious leaders from around the world, who gathered in 1893 at the World's Fair in Chicago, needs to be renewed and restated today.

A centennial observance in India is being coordinated by the four interreligious, international organizations which seek to further the spirit of the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions: the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), the World Congress of Faiths (WCF), the Temple of Understanding (ToU), and the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP). The International Interfaith Organizations Coordinating Committee (IIOCC) was formed by these groups to prepare these celebrations, together with our Indian members and partners.

The tentative schedule of events is as follows, to which anyone who is interested may apply:

I. Pre-Celebration Events (August 9-14, 1993)

- Retreat: Kaniyakumari, at Cape Comorin in South India
(organized by the World Fellowship of Inter-Religious Councils)
- Tour: Visiting religious communities and historic sites in South India (organized by IARF)
- Women's Meeting in Bangalore
(organized by the International Association of Liberal Religious Women)
- Tree Planting in South India (Youth event organized by WCRP)

- IARF World Congress (August 15-18, 1993)
 - focus: faith in action in India
 - home and project visits
 - General Assembly

II. Centennial Celebration in Bangalore (August 19-22, 1993)

(organized by the International Interfaith Organizations Coordinating Committee)

Registration: August 18, 1993

Theme: "Interfaith Cooperation in the 21st Century: Our Vision"

III. Concluding Centennial Events (August 23-27, 1993)

- (WCRP Council meeting in Bangalore (provisional), August 23-25)
- Tour: Visiting religious communities and historic sites in New Delhi and Agra (August 23-27)
(organized by IARF and the IIOCC Local Committee, Delhi, incl. festival on 27, see below)
- IIOCC Centennial Festival (New Delhi, August 27)
(organized by the IIOCC Local Committee, Delhi)

IV. Post-Delhi Events

- Retreat: Rishikesh, north of New Delhi (August 28-September 4)
(organized by WCF and the Hindu Heritage Foundation)
- Retreat: Mt. Abu, near Udaipur, Rajasthan (August 28-September 4)
(organized by WCF and the Brahma Kumaris)
- Japanese Visit and Symposium: Ise Grand Shrine, East of Osaka (August 28-September 1)
(organized by the Japanese IARF Groups)

For more information write the Secretary, IIOCC, Rawmere, Rew Lane, Chichester, W. Sussex PO19 4QH, United Kingdom. Or contact:

International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF)
Dreieichstrasse 59, D-6000 Frankfurt 70, Germany
Phone (49) (69) 62 87 72 Fax (49) (69) 62 18 20

Constitution of the IAHR

THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS L'ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE POUR L'HISTOIRE DES RELIGIONS

CONSTITUTION

As accepted and confirmed by the General Assembly of the IAHR at its XVth International Congress held in Stockholm on August 22nd 1970 and amended by the General Assembly at the XVIIth International Congress held in Lancaster on August 22nd 1975 and the XVth International Congress held in Rome on September 3rd 1990.

ARTICLE 1

The International Association for the History of Religions (abbreviated, from its English title, to IAHR), founded in September 1950 on the occasion of the Vth International History of Religions Congress, is a worldwide organization which has as its object the promotion of the academic study of the history of religions through the international collaboration of all scholars whose research has a bearing on the subject.

ARTICLE 2

The IAHR seeks to achieve this object:

- (a) by holding regular international congresses and occasional symposia and colloquia;
- (b) by publishing the proceedings of such congresses and meetings;
- (c) by assisting the formation of national and regional associations of historians of religions;
- (d) by encouraging and sponsoring publications of general interest to the study of the history of religions: e.g. an international review, bibliographical bulletins, monograph series;
- (e) by taking all appropriate steps to encourage and further the academic study of the history of religions.

ARTICLE 3A

The IAHR is constituted by national or multinational (regional) societies for the academic study of religions. These are such

societies as are now members and such societies as apply for membership and, on recommendation of the Executive and International Committees (see below), may be admitted by the General Assembly at future International Congresses.

ARTICLE 3B

To the IAHR may be affiliated.

(a) International associations for the academic study of particular areas within the history of religions;

(b) Individual scholars for whom there is no appropriate national or regional society. Affiliation is effected by the application to the Executive and International Committees and by approval of the General Assembly.

ARTICLE 4

The work of the IAHR is carried out through (a) the General Assembly; (b) the International Committee; and (c) the Executive Committee

(a) The General Assembly of the Association meets at each international congress and is composed of all members of constituent societies of the association present at that congress. The General Assembly may take action only on matters referred to it from the International Committee, and it may refer any matter to the International or Executive Committees for consideration and report.

(b) The International Committee is composed of:

- (i) Two representatives each of the constituent national and regional societies, except that there shall not be more than two representatives from any one country;
 - (ii) The Executive Committee (see below);
 - (iii) Up to four individual members co-opted by the International Committee on the recommendation of the Executive Committee;
- (c) The Executive Committee is composed of a President, two Vice-Presidents, a General Secretary, a Deputy General Secretary, a Treasurer, and six other members. The officers in particular, and the members of the Executive Committee in general, shall be chosen in such a way as reasonably to reflect various parts of the world where academic study of religion is pursued in its various disciplines. A Nominating Committee, appointed in its various committees, shall submit nominations for the next Executive Committee to the members of the International Committee by mail not more than twelve months and not less than nine months prior to each international congress. Members of the International Committee may propose alternative nominations not less than one month prior to each international congress. The International Committee at its meeting just preceding the General Assembly, shall elect the Executive Committee and shall report this to the General Assembly.

The members of the Executive Committee shall hold office for one quinquennial term each and be subject to re-election, but not more than two-thirds of the Committee shall be carried on from one term to the next, and no one member shall serve in the same office more than two terms. In the event of the death or resignation of any serving officer of the Association, a suitable replacement may be nominated after consultation among the remaining officials, and shall serve, subject to the written approval of a majority of members of the Executive Committee, until the next quinquennial congress.

ARTICLE 5

The Executive Committee, or at least the President, General Secretary and Treasurer of the Association shall, if possible, meet at least once a year for the transaction of such necessary business as may arise between congresses. The General Secretary shall circulate the minutes of such meetings to all members of the Executive Committee. A meeting of the Executive Committee requires a minimum attendance of five of its members.

ARTICLE 6

The International Committee shall meet on the occasion of each congress, between the meeting of the Executive Committee and that of the General Assembly, and more often if necessary. It reports to the General Assembly. A meeting of the International Committee requires a minimum attendance of ten members from a minimum of seven national associations.

ARTICLE 7

The resources of the IAHR consist of:

- (a) annual contributions paid by the constituent societies, affiliated societies and individual members, the amount of which is assessed by the Executive Committee; and
- (b) grants, donations and other sources of revenue. An audited report will be submitted to the International Committee at every international congress.

ARTICLE 8

The Constitution may be modified only by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the International Committee.

Member associations of the IAHR

Updating of and amendments to the list of National Officers:

UNITED KINGDOM

British Association for the Study of Religions

President

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POLAND

Polskie Towarzystwo Religioznawcze

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