



Joint statement on the European Academy of Religion by the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR) and the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR)

The EASR and the IAHR wish to state that they are not in support of the newly established “European Academy of Religion.”

As an association whose objective is “to promote the academic study of religions through the international collaboration of all scholars normally resident in Europe whose research has a bearing on the subject” (Constitution of the EASR, §3), the EASR is of the opinion that the creation of another association for the academic study of religion in Europe is superfluous and represents an objectionable disregard of existing organizational structures in the field. The IAHR, of which the EASR is the largest regional member, is in full agreement with this position.

The EASR has been in existence since 2000. It has as members 24 national European associations for the study of religion, each of which is also a member of the IAHR. It organises an annual conference, the most recent of which drew more than 500 attendants.

The EASR and the IAHR have a shared perspective on religion as an object of scientific research and scholarship. Our perspective is global and embraces historical studies as well as research on contemporary developments. As stated in their respective constitutions, the EASR and the IAHR promote and welcome in their conferences all forms of research on religion that are carried out in an impartial and non-confessionally motivated manner.

The EASR is a grassroots association that is entirely dependent on the contributions of its members and exists to serve their needs by offering a European platform on which to present their research and form networks.

The European Academy of Religion is based at the Fondazione per le scienze religiose Giovanni XXIII, an institute located in Bologna supported by private donations and the Italian state. Despite its name, we regard this Academy as not representing the non-confessionally based and globally oriented approach that is essential to the study of religions as an academic discipline.

This impression is reinforced by the published programme of the Academy’s first conference, to be held in Bologna on June 18-22 this year on the theme “Research in the Religious Fields,” which is strongly dominated by themes relating to Christian theology and aspirations concerning inter-religious dialogue, and which hardly addresses the world of religions outside Europe and its fringes.

The pursuit of normative theology and engagement in interreligious conversation are legitimate activities in their proper context, but they fall outside the generally accepted definition of the study of religions as a field of evidence-based research. (The empirical study of such activities is, naturally, a valid topic of research in the study of religions.).

In conclusion, the EASR and the IAHR see this new organisation, which pretends to be a comprehensive European association for religious studies, as an unfortunate initiative, taken, as it seems to us, with the intent of displacing an existing organisation for the academic study of religion in Europe. We regard this enterprise as an attempt to divert the perception of the study of religion in the public sphere, as well as its sources of funding, in a direction that is detrimental to the study of

religions as an academically rigorous field of research, as well as to the pursuit of unbiased knowledge about religions which is needed if the challenges of contemporary societies as well as their historical roots are to be correctly understood.

Einar Thomassen

President of the European Association for the Study of Religions

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Einar Thomassen".

Tim Jensen

President of the International Association for the History of Religions

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "TJ".

24 May 2017