

Cambridge conference 2001

EASR President's Report 2001

Before handing over to our Secretary Tim Jensen for his detailed report on the work carried out by the EASR in this, its first year, I would like to offer you some brief considerations on our common scientific project and on my personal experience in the period in which I have been given the task of starting to organise it.

Since May, when many of us met in Krakow to establish the general outlines of that project, our Association has reached its first goal. The aim was to get the various national European Associations for the study of religions to agree to the constitution of a forum for the discussion of the fundamental problems and themes of our discipline, both from a methodological and substantial perspective, and from a European “point of view”.

I would like to remind you that a successful start in this direction was made in Messina, on the occasion of the first meeting of the Committee, with the International Conference “Themes and problems of the History of Religions in Contemporary Europe” (30-31 March 2001). The scientific contributions from P. Antes, M. Pye, H. Kippenberg, W. Hofstee, Ph. Borgeaud, G. Benavides, P. Pachis, H. Grzymala-Moszczyńska, Ch. Guittard, M. Abumalham and G. Casadio and the resultant discussions between the participants at the meeting led us to start reflecting on important historico-religious themes in the framework of the tradition of European studies, following a proposal already made in Krakow.

Almost all the National European Associations agreed to the proposal and it is now possible to plan future EASR programmes with prospects of complete success.

We are all grateful to the Colleagues of the Committee who spend a great deal of time and energy in coordinating the various tasks necessary for achieving this aim. In particular, we are indebted to the hard work and care of our Secretary Tim Jensen, who permitted the complete success of our project by tirelessly liaising between the members of the Committee and of the Various national Associations. I believe we should acknowledge the importance of the work he has done and thank him for having helped our “baby” EASR grow into a healthy “child”.

I would also like to express personal and heartfelt thanks to all the Colleagues of the National Associations and in particular to their representatives who, with a great spirit of collaboration and with genuine interest in the project's scientific aims, responded to our invitation to build this sort of “European common house”, as our Association could be defined. I want to give particular thanks to the intelligent and lively contribution made to the planning and creation of this “common house” by the two Colleagues who, also due to their position in the international panorama of our discipline, have exercised a great influence in the definition and completion of the common project. I am naturally referring to M. Pye and P. Antes, one previously President of the IAHR and the other the present incumbent of this position. They perceived the potential role of an organisation like the EASR as a mediator and link between the individual European national communities of scholars of religious

phenomena and the wider international community, expressed and represented by the same IAHR.

I would also like to thank all those Colleagues who chose to entrust me with such a difficult yet at the same time prestigious role as that of President of the new Association in the year of its creation – the most important and delicate period in its life. I accepted this role not only and not so much as a personal acknowledgement (since many other Colleagues would be more suited than me to hold the position), but rather as an act of homage to the Italian tradition of historico-religious studies, and in particular to the school represented by the teaching of Ugo Bianchi, in turn influenced by the teaching of the great Master Raffaele Pettazzoni.

It is not necessary here to stress the authoritativeness and scientific importance of the contributions made to the progress of historico-religious research by these great scholars. I would only like to recall the dedication and tenacity with which my Master Ugo Bianchi wanted to maintain and strengthen the links between the Società Italiana di Storia delle Religioni, as a national organisation with a specific tradition of studies, and the vast and varied international panorama expressed in and represented by the IAHR. He always maintained that a fundamental duty of the scholar of religious phenomena was dialectic comparison with other scholars, also those with different methodological perspectives, defending tenaciously one's own position, but always interested in and respectful of those of others, with the aim of achieving real progress in the historical knowledge of these phenomena. His great dedication led him to be intensely involved in the scientific activities of the IAHR, culminating in the organisation of the 16th IAHR Congress in Rome in 1990 on the central theme of our discipline (The notion of “Religion” in Comparative Research) and in his election as the Association's President.

I believe my present position in the EASR can justifiably be considered as a continuance of this tradition. In this perspective I would like also to express to you all heartfelt thanks for having honoured me with this role. I hereby return it to you so that it can be entrusted to a new President of our association, to which I will continue to give my modest contribution, in the hope of ever greater scientific successes.

Giulia Gasparro (Messina)