

The Idea of the 4th International Religious Studies Congress
“Religion and the Socio-political Transformations of Contemporary World”

The congress organisers are aware that religious studies comprise an academic discipline that has always demonstrated a high level of diversity of worldviews, ideas, methodologies and research objects. Indeed, it could not have been otherwise as religious studies – just as all the other social sciences and humanities – have always relied on many different traditions of reflection upon religion and religiosity, while attempting to address the questions stemming from the highly diverse human desires to understand oneself, as well as the close and general environment. This diversity has been responsible for the emergence of different research orientations and schools. The problem is, however, not in somehow limiting such emergence, but rather in ensuring that the representatives of these different schools and orientations can and want to engage in discussions, and to explore not only their differences but also those elements that they share, while demonstrating the understanding for the different ways which may lead to the common aim of objective knowledge as well as respect for those who pursue it.

Let the following quotation from a great Polish philosopher prof. Kazimierz Twardowski serve as the motto for this meeting: “(...) He who decides to serve under the banner of science must renounce all that which might turn him away from the path indicated by it. Hence he must first of all work strenuously to discard all prejudices that might block his path to objective knowledge, prejudices which originate from traditions, habits, the influence of one's milieu, and personal likes and dislikes. (...)”.

We may have encountered some problems with such understanding, mutual respect and renunciation of prejudice. Yet, such congress meetings as have previously taken place in Tyczyn, Poznań and Toruń facilitated a great opportunity to give up on the bad practises and discuss all topics – including also the controversial ones. We remain assured that the meeting in Gdynia shall fit in with this tradition. We would like to invite the participation of researchers from all backgrounds, who are involved in religious studies. This invitation is extended not only to established religion scholars but also to those who may yet be taking their first steps in the field. We do also invite those who may specialise in other disciplines, and for whom the questions concerning religion and religiosity are only complementary aspects of their research. Our assumption is that the higher the diversity of participants in this meeting, the larger would

be the possibility to get to know something new, interesting and inspiring for further explorations.

As the main theme of the congress we propose the reflection on religion and religiosity in the context of the present socio-political change. This refers to the discussions of the problems generated by such processes as globalisation, liberalisation of social life, secularisation and pluralisation. While they may not appear in Poland with an intensity comparable to that of other western countries, there are ample reasons to think that we are on the way to take over their dominant cultural patterns – patterns which are frequently treated and presented as a chance for Polish society. We hope that the congress meeting is going to be a great opportunity to discuss whether this view is indeed a correct one. It goes without saying that neither this leading theme nor the fundamental question should limit the field of debate taking place on the congress. The organisers remain hopeful that those debates will prove much more varied, and that their content is going to demonstrate the variety and diversity of the explorations undertaken by the participants of this meeting.

On behalf of the Executive Board of the Polish Society for the Study of Religions, I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation for the Polish Naval Academy in Gdynia, which undertook the effort of organising the 4th International Religious Studies Congress. We are certain that the experience this university has in organising such congresses, combined with the exquisite infrastructure, would make this congress an intellectual success and a great place to be.

Chairman of the Program Council
4th International Religious Studies Congress
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