

FOREWORD

Students of religion in present-day Russia are obliged to solve a number of difficult problems. Among these problems, the isolation of the majority of Russian researchers from their colleagues in other countries seems to be most pressing. Thus the main task of *Researches in Religious Studies* is to bridge the gap between Russian and foreign scholars. It is evident that this goal can be attained only by means of serious engagement with the achievements of the world's leading students and scholars of religion. For this reason, a significant section of the journal consists of Russian translations of the most valuable, challenging and up-to-date investigations made by contemporary Western scholars.

Since the middle of the twentieth century, the importance of methodological and meta-theoretical questions in the field of Religious Studies has been increasing. In contrast to scholars of the classical period of Religious Studies, modern scholars are deeply concerned with the problems inherent in the definition of "religion", the significance of the student of religion's presuppositions and unchallenged assumptions, and the possibility of the elaboration of the genuinely scientific language of Religious Studies. The maturity of a scholarly discipline begins when questions of its foundations and its history are raised. Thus *Researches in Religious Studies* focuses on the study of religion rather than on religion itself.

The majority of academic journals on Religious Studies (in Russia as well as abroad) are either widely ranging periodicals or periodicals with a strictly specified subject field. The editorial board of *Researches in Religious Studies* tries to find a middle way. Each issue has its special theme, and the theme changes from one issue to another. On the one hand, this principle provides a means to consider a number of the most important problems with a certain scrutiny and profundity. On the other hand, it gives a reader the possibility to survey a wide variety of academic traditions in contemporary Religious Studies.

The theme of the first issue of *Researches in Religious Studies* is "Contemporary Religious Studies". (This choice seems to be reasonable if the tasks of the journal are taken into account.) Thus, in the section called "The Theme of the Issue" we propose a distinct, although not complete sketch of the modern state of Religious Studies. For the first issue we have chosen three articles by Russian scholars on the meta-theory of Religious Studies (Alexey Y. Rakhmanin), sociological theories of religion (Roman O. Safronov) and up-to-date problems of philosophical phenomenology of religion (Tatiana G. Chelovenko). Works by Western scholars are represented by very interesting articles from *New Approaches to the Study of Religion*, namely works on Religious Studies in North America (Randi Warne) and Europe (Peter Antes). The section "Portrait of a Scholar" is closely connected with the first section. We plan to publish here some materials about contemporary scholars of religion whose works are considered to be classic. Kurt Rudolph is a scholar we chose for the first issue. In addition, there is an important section entitled "Academic Life" that explains current developments and tendencies within the Religious Studies community. In the first issue this section is divided into four subsections: "Works", "Conferences", "Book Reviews", and "Discussion".

Both Russian and foreign researchers of religion are welcomed to take an active part in the work of *Researches in Religious Studies*.

The second issue of the journal will focus on two similar and interrelated themes. The first theme will be “Theoretical Problems of the History of Religions”. It will deal with complicated questions of theory and methodology of the History of Religions approach and a range of problems connected with the study of certain religious traditions. The second theme will be “Unknown Pages of the History of Religions”. It will concern the studies of the “blank spots” in the history of different religions. In other words, we are interested both in new methods in the History of Religions and new knowledge which is derived from the use of those methods on the basis of critical revision of the foundations of traditional historic study of world religions.

The Editorial Board