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Patrick CLAFFEY, President of the Society

## Welcome

As President of the Irish Society of the Academic Study of Religions it is my privilege to welcome on behalf of the society the launch of our new online journal. This marks an important step in the development of the society and I am sure that it will be a significant contribution to the study of religions both in Ireland and internationally.

The study of religions as an academic discipline has a long history with its own perspectives and methodologies. While it continues to develop and evolve, both in the theoretical and in the practical sense, it has an established place in the academy in many parts of the world. For largely historical reasons, the study of religions in Ireland has heretofore been done largely through a confessional theological prism and latterly perhaps from a sociological perspective. This left a significant lacuna in the study of religions in Ireland and at a time when this kind of study was becoming increasingly rewarding and necessary with the advent of a wider religious pluralism and the emergence of a variety of interesting religious phenomena and movements in Ireland both north and south of the border.

The Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions (ISASR) was founded just over three years ago with the purpose promoting the critical, analytical and cross-cultural academic study of religions, past and present, and seeking to provide a space for scholarly activity across different disciplines and fields. To date the society has held two very successful conferences; the first at University College Cork on the 25-26<sup>th</sup> May 2012, while the second with the theme *Ireland, America and Transnationalism: Studying Religions in a Globalised World*, was held at University College Dublin on the 10-12<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

The decision to launch an online journal was taken in 2012 and we are very happy to see it launched at the third annual conference of the society at Queens University, Belfast this year. ISASR is very grateful to James Kapalo, who as Publications Officer took this project forward, and to Yafa Shanneik and Colin Duggan who have given invaluable assistance over the past months. We look forward to the journal establishing its place as one of the preeminent forums for academic research and debate in Ireland and beyond.

While the place of religion in many places, including Ireland, has changed, it has not gone away and questions and developments requiring attentive study by specialists in the discipline continue to emerge. Within the various religions themselves there is a vast area of investigation while the social implications of religion remain a widely debated area which also offers an open field for research.

I wish the journal well and, once again, thank all those who have contributed to this important initiative.

Patrick Claffey