

# PSYCHE AND SPIRIT: connecting psychiatry and spirituality

Newsletter of the Section on Religion, Spirituality & Psychiatry Special Edition May 2020

## LAUDATION

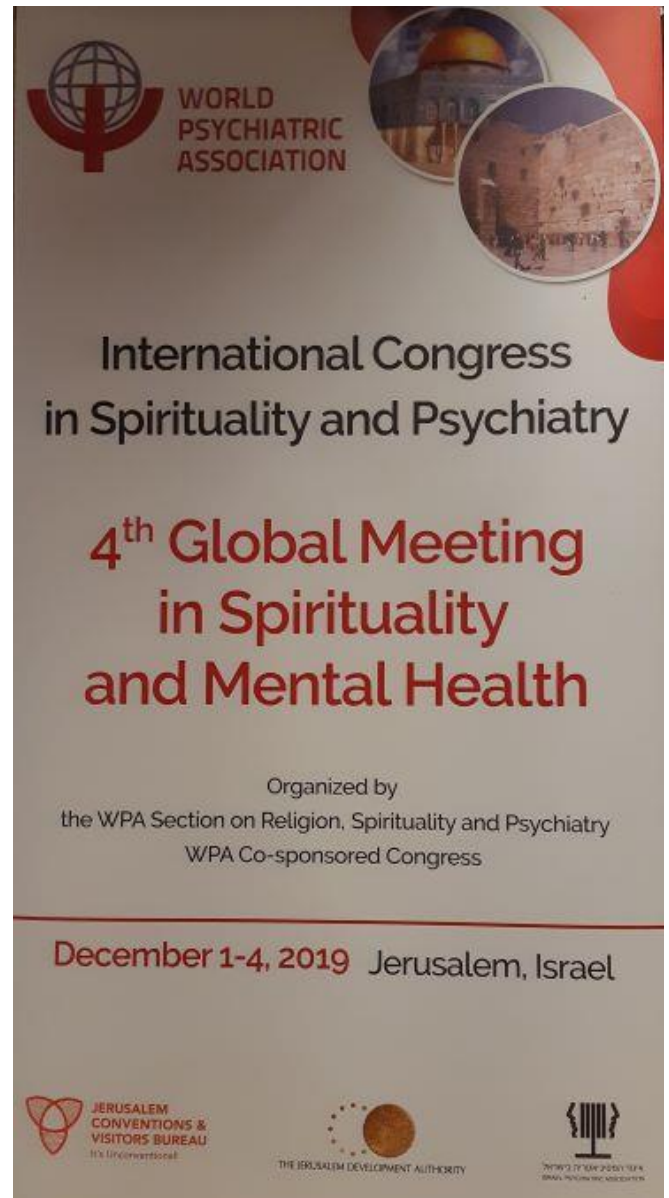
Editorial Board: Peter J. Verhagen

[www.religionandpsychiatry.org](http://www.religionandpsychiatry.org)



WORLD PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION

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## Editorial

Dear readers,

In December (1-4) last year the World Psychiatric Association Section on Religion, Spirituality and Psychiatry supported by the Israeli Psychiatric Association organized its 4<sup>th</sup> Global Meeting in Spirituality and Mental Health in Jerusalem. Of course it would have been impossible to do this without the strong effort and boundless energy if the local organizing committee chaired by Prof Haim Belmaker. The congress venue was at a wonderful location just outside the wall but with a splendid view in the direction of the old city.

The Congress drew 348 participants from 35 countries. There were 24 speakers invited by the

Scientific Committee. Additional plenary speakers were chosen by a quantitative rating process. In addition, there were 27 posters presentations. The meeting had a large number of quantitative empirical studies of the role and importance of religion and spirituality in psychiatry, illness and treatment. In addition, lectures from all over the

world from the Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, Jewish and other traditions exposed the participants to the varied yet somehow similar manifestations of religion in human psychic life throughout the world. Many participants wrote in nice compliments about the conference.

Every international meeting has its special moments. One of these moments was the Founders Award Ceremony on Wednesday, December 4. Initiated by Haim Belmaker the Section wanted to honor its founding chair and Peter J. Verhagen delivered the laudation in honor of Herman M. van Praag, who was the very first chair of the Section.

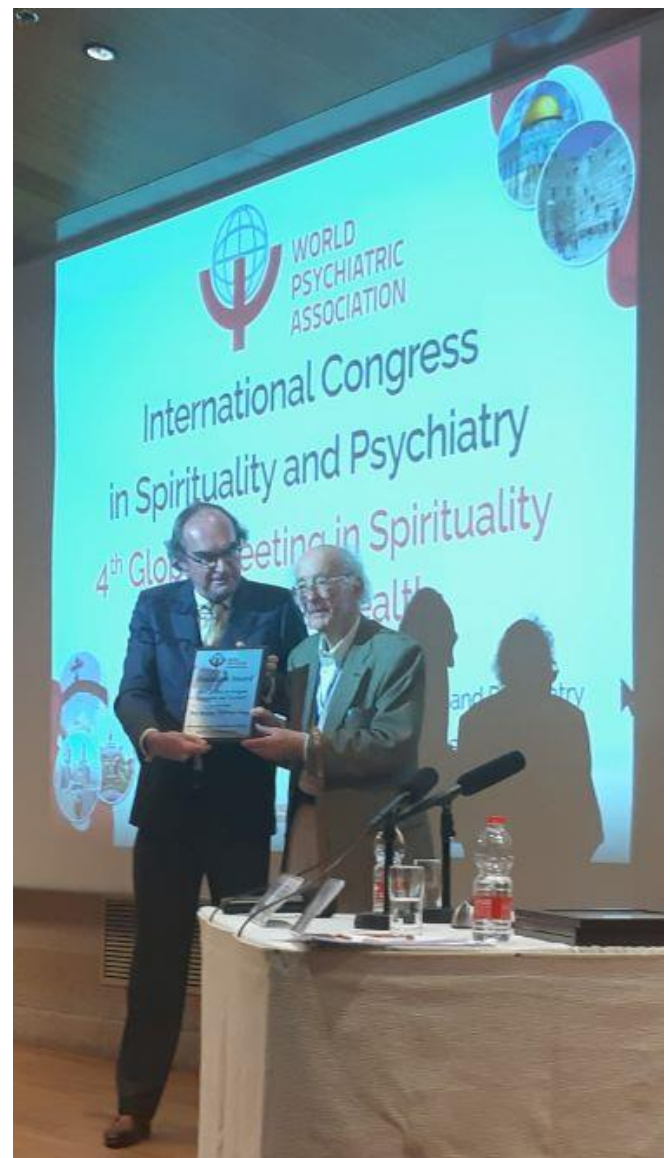
### Laudation Founders Award

Today we have a special moment in honor of the founding chair of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA) Section on Religion, Spirituality and Psychiatry Prof Herman M. van Praag, emeritus professor of psychiatry<sup>1</sup>.

The WPA Section was founded in 2003, but as one can imagine before that was a fact a lot had to be done. As Section-in-formation the first meeting and symposium was held during a WPA European Congress in Madrid in 2001<sup>2</sup>. And even before that conference the idea to set up a Section on Religion, Spirituality and Psychiatry had been considered by WPA officials. However, Prof Van Praag took the initiative to work out the idea in concrete terms, for which we are very grateful up to this very day. And that is why we want to honor you with the founders award, designed by Haim Belmaker.

Let me very briefly sketch the situation in those early years. In a certain way it was apparently the time to take the step. For instance, Ahmed Okasha, Egyptian professor of psychiatry, declared in 1999 'that religion

has remained an important factor in most patients' lives, no matter where in the world they live'. And he argued trainees and practitioners to become more familiar with the vocabulary and concepts of religion. At that time he was the WPA president-elect, and he was WPA president from 2002 to 2005. So the section was founded under his presidency and he was one of the supporters of the idea of the section. In that period there was also that remarkable meeting, I think it was in 2003, at the St. Catharine monastery on Mount Sinai, organized by Greek and Arab WPA officials.



Of course I want to mention the name of the late Juan J. López-Ibor, who invited us to come to Madrid in 2001, and who supported the work of the section from the beginning; he had been WPA president (1999-2001). Together with the López-Ibor

<sup>1</sup> Universities of Groningen, Utrecht, and Maastricht, the Netherlands and the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, New York, USA.

<sup>2</sup> Madrid, September 30-October 3, 2001: *New Commitments for Psychiatrists*.

The first symposium as a Section was held during the WPA international thematic conference in Vienna, June 19-22, 2003: *The importance of religious variables in psychiatric diagnosis*; contributors: Herman van Praag (NL), Driss Moussaoui (MA), Peter J. Verhagen (NL), Michael King (UK).

Foundation the Section managed to organize its first international symposium in Ávila, in 2010<sup>3</sup>. In other words, backed up by the leadership of Okasha and López-Ibor and many others apparently WPA was ready for it. And Prof Van Praag took up the challenge!

That is how it got started. He invited Driss Moussaoui, professor of Psychiatry in Casablanca to become the co-chair and he asked Peter J. Verhagen, psychiatrist, to become the secretary. Srinivasa Murthy from India was also involved and became member of the first Section committee<sup>4</sup>. There have always been strong connections with our colleagues from India, as it is today.

We started our work. We wrote a Section action plan, published in WPA volumes with George Christodoulou and Juan Mezzich as editors (*Advances in Psychiatry Second Volume* [2005], *Third Volume* [2009]). I mention these names because it never was the work of the three of us only. However, it could not have happened if not somebody with an internationally outstanding and renowned reputation would have taken the lead. Herman van Praag did! Especially since his reputation came from an unexpected side: biological psychiatry. That was at the same time his mission: To bring together the divided field of clinical and academic psychiatry, including religion and spirituality. And the day before the award session his book *'Deference to Doubt. A Young Man's Quest for Religious Identity in First Century Judea'*<sup>5</sup> was launched at the conference, and we learned again what moved him in the first place.

'And see where we are now, at this special conference, the fourth global meeting of the WPA Section on Religion, Spirituality and Psychiatry, in your beloved city, Jerusalem, at your age, according to the Scriptures, Psalm 90, the age of very strong! It is really a great honor and privilege for me to hand over this plaque, which reads:

<sup>3</sup> Ávila, November 4-6, 2010. The proceedings of the international symposium on *Psychiatry and Religious Experience* were published in *Actas Españolas de Psiquiatría* (2012) Suppl. 2.

<sup>4</sup> The other members of the Section committee at that time were: H.G Koenig (USA), A. Mohit (IR), A. Okasha (EG).

<sup>5</sup> Foreword by Robert Haim Belmaker MD. Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2020.



## *Founders Award*

*WPA Section on Religion,  
Spirituality and Psychiatry*

*bestowed upon*

*Prof Herman Meir van Praag*

*International Congress on Spirituality and Psychiatry*

*December 4, 2019 Jerusalem, Israel*

**From left to right Haim Belmaker, Avdesh Sharma, Herman van Praag, Peter Verhagen, Alexander Moreira-Almeida, Alan Fung**



## The Section has an informative website!

The website of the WPA Section on Religion and Spirituality and Psychiatry is online

[www.religionandpsychiatry.org](http://www.religionandpsychiatry.org)

It informs about news, events, resources (papers, books, videos, groups, research tools, university groups) on spirituality and mental health.

In addition, it contains all issues of Psyche & Spirit (Section's newsletter) and the WPA Position Statement on Religion and Spirituality in Psychiatry. The Position Statement Is translated in Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and Hindi. More translations are in preparation.

If you have any suggestions to improve the website, please just let us know!

would allow you to be in touch with peers that share your interests. Some benefits:

- You will be kept posted on the latest developments in Spirituality and Psychiatry around the globe!
- Possibility of contributing to the discussion and improvement of the understanding, scientific research, and clinical integration of spirituality in mental health care
- Networking with researchers and clinicians from all over the world

To join us it is free and easy, you just need to fill out the form [here](#).

([www.wpanet.org/joinSection.php?section\\_id=11](http://www.wpanet.org/joinSection.php?section_id=11))

## Interesting Websites

Crossroads is the newsletter published by the Center for Spirituality, Theology and Health, Duke University: <http://www.spiritualityandhealth.duke.edu/index.php/publications/crossroads>

Institute for the Bio-Cultural Study of Religion: membership includes the Journal Religion, Brain & Behavior. <https://www.ibcsr.org/>

The European Network for the Research of Religion, Spirituality and health. The research institute promotes research, training and networking in the field of religion, spirituality and health, both in Switzerland and across Europe. <http://www.fig.ch/en/home>.

## Join the Section

### Join the WPA Section on Religion, Spirituality and Psychiatry!

If you are a clinician or researcher working with mental health and have an interest in spirituality, you can become a member of our section. It is free and