

# International Society for Heresy Studies

## Bylaws

### Article I: Name and Legal Status

#### Section 1

The name of this organization shall be the International Society for Heresy Studies (henceforth referred to as Society).

### Article II: Purpose

The purpose of the Society shall be to study the meanings, the functions, and the histories of heretical belief systems, especially their expression in literature and art. Further, the Society aims to illuminate the legal, artistic, social, and moral ramifications of blasphemy and iconoclasm, as manifested in literary and artistic works. The Society also encourages scholarship on non-God centric secular visions, and it fosters inquiries into atheist critiques of theism. Finally, the Society supports work that tries to determine what happens to blasphemy and heresy when religion is conceived in more material terms such as ethnicity, tradition, ritual, or lifestyle.

The Society does not promote the study of heresy in order to advance Christian (or other theistic) apologetics, nor does it seek to explore heretical, blasphemous, or atheist views in order to condemn them. The Society equally does not agitate against religion but invites contributions to the understanding of heresy, blasphemy, and unbelief from both believers and unbelievers.

A programmatic appendix to these by-laws gives definitions of key terms and lays out in greater detail the vision and scope of this Society.

### Article III: Membership

#### Section 1

Any individual, corporation, educational institution, library, or special collection, interested in the aims of the Society may join it.

#### Section 2

Every member, including institutions, has one vote to be used in ballots, polls, and elections.

#### Section 3

General membership in this Society shall be through payment of annual dues, according to schedules determined by the General Meeting of the Society.

#### Section 4

4.1. Any individual who made outstanding scholarly contributions to the aims of the Society or who has acted as a benefactor of the Society, shall be eligible to become an honorary member of the Society.

4.2. Honorary members shall be elected by the General Meeting of the Society.

4.3. Honorary members are not required to pay membership dues in perpetuity.

4.4. Honorary membership ends only with death of the honorary member or after revocation of the honorary membership for pressing reasons by a two-thirds majority of the General Meeting.

#### Section 5

Membership in the Society shall include access to Society resources (bibliography, meetings, networking opportunities, etc.), reception of Society information and communication via newsletter, and all other privileges outlined under Article IV, Section 1.

#### Section 6

A general member who has not paid dues for two years shall be classified as not in good standing.

### Article IV: Privileges

#### Section 1

All members in good standing, as well as honorary members, shall have the right to stand for office, to vote for officers of the Society, to propose papers and other contributions for inclusion in any conference organized by the Society, to propose and vote on topics for sessions sponsored by the Society at other conferences, and to receive all publications issued by the Society.

#### Section 2

If eligibility rules permit, the Society may seek status as an Affiliate Organization at the Modern Language Association of America (MLA) and at other literary, secularist, and religious studies associations.

### Article V: The Board

#### Section 1

The officers of the society are the President, Vice-President, Secretary-Treasurer, and Webmaster. The President and Vice President of the Society shall be elected by the Society membership to serve four-year terms. The Secretary-Treasurer and the Webmaster are to be elected by the Society membership to serve two-year terms. All members of the Board can be re-elected without term limits.

#### Section 2

The officers shall perform the following duties:

2.1. The President shall serve as the Society's chief ambassador. The President shall call, arrange the agenda for, and preside at the General Meeting, to be held every one or two years, and he/she shall call and preside at all other Society meetings unless unable to do so, in which case the Vice President shall preside. The President shall be responsible for organizing future Society conferences, every one or two years, and for seeking membership status as an allied organization at other organizations. The President shall consult closely with the other officers throughout the term on dues, budgetary, and other issues and perform miscellaneous tasks as required. The President shall be responsible for election procedures, including the call for nominations and the voting process; for presenting proposals for, and conducting the balloting on, any changes to the bylaws; and for ensuring that the Society's procedures are in accordance with these bylaws. Finally, the President shall lead efforts to liaison with other societies of secular-humanist, literary, and religious studies orientation.

2.2. The Vice President shall write and/or solicit copy for, edit, and distribute a Society newsletter. The Vice-President shall maintain the mailing list for members and liaison with the webmaster. The Vice President shall handle correspondence with Society members and others, promote and publicize the Society. The Vice President shall lead efforts to build a comprehensive bibliography of titles relevant to the Society's objectives. Finally, the Vice President shall preside at Society meetings in case the President is unable to attend.

2.3. The Secretary-Treasurer shall take minutes at the membership and board meetings and keep records of other important Society business. He/she shall distribute the minutes to the Board and other constituents of the Society, as needed. He/she shall further receive and disburse monies on behalf of the Society, maintain the bank account in good standing, keep records of all monies received and disbursed, and prepare and publish an annual report of the Society's finances. The Treasurer will also file appropriate US federal tax forms and state forms to maintain the Society's nonprofit status (once obtained).

2.4. The Webmaster is in charge of building and maintaining the Society website and its various features, including uploading and updating content, preparing graphic designs, operating forms and calendars, coordinating social media activities via the website, and troubleshooting technical or software glitches. The webmaster is also in charge of maintaining and managing the hosting and backup capabilities of the website.

### Section 3

An Advisory Board, consisting of five to nine elected members, shall represent the interests of specific constituencies, including the following: a) scholars and academic professionals in historical and literary fields; b) scholars and academics in theological studies; c) clergy and people of faith; d) representatives of atheist and secular orientation; e) literary authors and artists; f) graduate students. These Advisory Board members shall be elected by the same process as the Officers and shall serve two-year terms. The primary responsibilities of the Advisory Board members shall be to publicize the Society, to develop outreach programs, to facilitate interaction between the Society's different constituencies, and to broaden the appeal and membership of the Society.

### Section 4

All officers and members of the Advisory Board shall serve without compensation. They shall be entitled to reimbursement for legitimate Society expenses.

### Section 5

A vacancy in any of these offices occurring during the incumbent's term of office because of illness, death, resignation, or any other reason shall be filled by a volunteer chosen by the remaining officers of the Society until such time as a new election can be held.

### Section 6

The President, Vice-President shall be elected (or re-elected) for four year terms by the Society membership, by mail, e-mail, or vote at the general meeting, from a slate of nominees. The election shall be conducted during the same month of the year (to be determined), and results shall be reported within two weeks. Names of nominees may be submitted by any member of the Society. Terms of elected officers shall be four years, beginning at the date of election. The terms of the Secretary-Treasurer and the Webmaster, as well as the Advisory Board members, is two years, also beginning at the time of election.

## Article VI: Meetings

### Section 1

A general meeting of the Society shall be held annually or biennially, whenever possible in conjunction with a Society sponsored conference.

A Board Meeting shall take place every year, at a time and place to be determined.

## Article VII: Legal Status, Funds, and Liabilities

### Section 1

1.1. The Society is organized exclusively for charitable, religious, educational, and/or scientific purposes and seeks tax-exempt status under section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

1.2. No part of the net earnings of the Society shall inure to the benefit of, or be distributable to its members, trustees, officers, or other private persons, except that the organization shall be authorized and empowered to pay reasonable compensations for services rendered and to make payments and distributions in furtherance of the purposes set forth in the purpose clause hereof. No substantial part of the activities of the Society shall be the carrying on of propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation, and the Society shall not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distribution of statements) any political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office. Notwithstanding any other provision of this document, the Society shall not carry on any other activities not permitted to be carried on (a) by an organization exempt from federal income tax under section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or (b) by an organization, contributions to which are deductible under section 170 (c) (2) of the Internal Revenue Code, or corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

1.3. Upon dissolution of the organization, assets shall be distributed for one or more exempt purposes within the meaning of section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or shall be distributed to the federal government, or to a state or local government, for a public purpose.

#### Section 2

The funds of this Society shall be collected and dispersed by the Secretary-Treasurer, for the Society's needs and lawful expenditures.

#### Section 3

No member of the Society shall be liable except for the payment of dues.

#### Section 4

The fiscal year of the Society runs from May 1 to April 30 of the following year. At the end of the fiscal year, the Treasurer shall present a written financial report to the Board and the members of the Society.

### Article VIII: Procedures

#### Section 1

Amendments to these by-laws shall be voted upon, by mail, email, or vote at the general meetings, to which the full membership is invited; approval shall require a two-thirds majority of those voting. Amendments may be proposed by the officers of the Society, or by petition signed by twenty or more Society members in good standing. Amendments to these by-laws are subject to a three-month open discussion period in public forums prior to the vote.

#### Section 2

##### Officers of the Society

President: TBD

Vice-President: TBD

Secretary-Treasurer: TBD

Webmaster: TBD

##### Advisory Board Members

Artist representative: TBD

Faith representative: TBD

Secularism representative: TBD

Creative Writing Program representative: TBD

Literary Criticism representative: TBD  
History representative: TBD  
Theology Representative: TBD  
Graduate Student representative: TBD

### Section 3

#### Memberships Fees

Regular: \$30 per year per person

Reduced fee: \$10 per year for graduate students, retired and part-time employed persons

Honorary members: free for life

### Section 4

#### Society Address

TBD

### Section 5

#### How to join the Society

Send in a check or money order made out to the International Society for Heresy Studies together with your address, or pay via the website for the appropriate membership fee (see schedule).

## Appendix

#### Programmatic Statement:

The Society is interested in what troubles religion, i.e. what disturbs the hermetic placidity of creeds and disrupts the normative discourses of doctrine. Against T.S. Eliot, the Society does *not* hold that a literary text will inevitably validate the central tenets of the dominant religious culture from which it emerged. The Society instead promotes the view that the most meaningful theologies are forged in the hinterland of heresy and at the boundary between heresy and orthodoxy, and that literature which addresses honestly matters of faith, unbelief, and non-conformist practice can be a bearer of truth.

#### Definitions:

The term **heresy** shall be used in a value-neutral way, neither celebrating nor condemning it, but rather making it a central object of critical inquiry and sober analysis. Heresies can be understood as specific doctrinal deviations from normative articles of faith (including classical heresies such as Pelagianism, Gnosticism, Universalism, Deism, etc.), as subversive belief systems such as Satanism, as various nontraditional conceptions of the deity, as contemporary radical theologies which stretch the boundaries of orthodox theologies, and as intuitive nonconformist stances like misotheism or neo-paganism.

**Blasphemy** is not seen as a punishable offence or a form of hate speech directed against a specific group of believers. Instead, blasphemy properly denotes the insult and attack against a deity or deities. Since no deity worthy of that designation can suffer harm from human speech or action, blasphemy is properly a "victimless crime." The worst harm it can cause is offence to followers of the deity. Sacrilege constitutes a sub-category of blasphemy since it, too, mocks or otherwise desecrates other people's objects of worship. Where blasphemy and sacrilege are concerned, literature and art highlight the nobility of unfettered expression while at the same time confronting us with the controversial and at times uncomfortable results of free thought.

**Unbelief** is the skeptical, rationalist stance that holds no faith in supernatural entities, spirits, or gods. Unbelief is not the same as hatred of religion or hatred of God (gods), although the study of

unbelievers who are also antitheists, as well as the study of believers who happen to hate God (gods) falls under the purview of this Society as well.

Relationship between Heresy, Blasphemy, and Unbelief:

The Society is keenly interested in sharpening conceptual distinctions regarding religious non-conformisms and in clarifying the relationship between heresy, blasphemy, and unbelief. Heresy is often comprised of theological and conceptual belief systems of various degrees of abstraction and complexity. Heretics, therefore, are always believers. Blasphemy, on the other hand, is often an affective, emotional, and un-theorized expression of religious subversion; it is a polemic against divinity that may be uttered by both believers and unbelievers. Finally, unbelief covers a gamut from personal, quiet secularism to the vocal public arguments against religion by the New Atheists. Despite the significant differences between these stances, all three forms of critique are, to various degrees, subversive of established religious dogma, critical of ecclesiastical power, and unsettling of theological doctrine. This subversion, critique and disturbance is the subject of the Society's study.

(Last amended on 05/20/2014)