

**PANEL PRESENTATION – THE CTSA AT 75:
LOOKING BACK, AROUND, AND FORWARD**

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**PAPER ONE –
CTSA: GROWTH, DIVERSITY, TENSIONS**

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This paper celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA) will develop in two parts. The first part will discuss the primary characteristic of the growth and diversity of the membership of the society. The second part will explore the primary tension in the life of the society—the relationship between the society and the hierarchical magisterium.

GROWTH AND DIVERSITY OF MEMBERSHIP

There were 104 charter members of the CTSA at the beginning in 1946. All were priests. The constitution did not explicitly limit membership to priests but assumed that only priests were theologians. The constitutions were changed to admit qualified religious brothers in 1953. In 1964, membership was open to all who are professionally qualified, and in 1965, two laywomen (Elizabeth Jane Farians and Cathleen M. Going) and three laymen (Albert F. Corbo, Petro B. T. Belaniuck, and Hamilton Hess) joined. The numbers of women and laymen grew dramatically in the ensuing decades. The growth reflected the need for qualified teachers of undergraduate theology in Catholic colleges and the growth of doctoral degree-granting institutions to prepare such teachers.¹

Women members—in the beginning, most were religious but then mostly lay—grew rapidly in the second twenty-five years of the CTSA. A women’s seminar began meeting in 1987 and has continued to the present, now scheduled on Thursday afternoon before the start of the regular meeting. In the second twenty-five-year period, women began to fill leadership roles. Agnes Cunningham was the first woman president (1978), followed by Monika Hellwig (1987), Anne Patrick (1990), and Lisa Sowle Cahill (1993). Early women John Courtney Murray Award winners were

¹ Charles E. Curran, *The Catholic Theological Society of America: A Story of Seventy-Five Years* (New York: Paulist, 2021), 24-27.

Monika Hellwig (1984), Margaret Farley (1992), and John T. and Denise Carmody—the first and only married couple Murray Award winners (1995).² Thus, by the fiftieth anniversary of the CTSA, women theologians were no longer a minority but a vital part of the society.

Papers given at the conventions illustrate the particular concerns of women. In 1969, Agnes Cunningham was the first woman to give a plenary address: “The Ministry of Women in the Church” in which she maintained that the church should ordain women but recognized that this might not happen immediately. She appeals to the complementarity of male and female to make her case. Today, most feminists would reject complementarity because it inevitably involves subordination.³ In a 1975 paper, Sarah Butler called for all Americans to liberate women from oppression and to bring about equality of the sexes. We theologians should call on church leaders to end official sexism in the church by removing the sexual barriers to ordination (1975, 203-20). At the 1979 convention, Mary Buckley of St. John’s University in New York gave the first plenary address dealing with feminism. Feminism insists on overcoming the gender and subordinate roles of women in personal and public life. The so-called feminine virtues of patience, support, and caring are virtues for all and not just for women (1979, 48-63). Lisa Sowle Cahill’s presidential address in 1993 was the first presidential address to discuss feminism, which is particular in its origins but universal in its agenda. Cahill here brought together feminism and an Aristotelian-Thomistic moral approach (1993, 65-83).

The Hispanic Catholic community in the United States has suffered poverty and oppression, even though in 1965 it constituted 30 percent of the Catholic population in this country. In a 1975 paper, Virgilio Elizondo, recognized as the Father of Hispanic Theology in the United States, points out that the white church looked down on the poor, uneducated Hispanics while proposing a bureaucratic, rationalistic, and legalistic understanding of the church, which was foreign to the Hispanic understanding (1975, 163-76). Elizondo also addressed the society in 1981 and 1993.

In 1993, the first steps were taken by the CTSA board to improve the presence of underrepresented groups in the society. The committee which became known as CUERG—the Committee for Underrepresented Ethnic and Racial Groups—had the mission to recruit members and retain members of underrepresented groups and to promote awareness and engagement with theological scholarship. From that time forward, CUERG held annual meetings, including luncheons partly funded by the board, and after a while reported annually to the business meetings. The success of CUERG became very evident. In 2005, 4 percent of the names on the program were from underrepresented groups. In 2016, forty-one of the one hundred twenty-three presentations came from members of underrepresented groups. CUERG also insisted that such members should be incorporated in all the convention sessions to avoid ghettoizing underrepresented groups. Since 2000, five members from underrepresented

² Curran, *CTSA*, 54-55.

³ Agnes Cunningham, “The Ministry of Women in the Church,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 24 (1969), 124-31. Subsequent references to the *Proceedings* of the annual meetings will occur in the text, simply giving the year of the *Proceedings* followed by the pages—e.g. (1969, 124-31). The archives of the *Proceedings* can be found at <https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ctsa/issue/archive>.

groups have been elected president and four received the John Courtney Murray Award.⁴

After Elizondo, other Hispanic speakers, such as Orlando Espin, Sixto Garcia, and Roberto Goizueta, gave papers. In 2008, M. T. (Maria Theresa) Davila gave a paper calling for a second generation Latinx approach. The first generation emphasized the cultural over the political and economic. There is need for a more radical approach centering on the political and the economic, emphasizing the liberation theology approach with the preferential option for the poor and criticizing the system that keeps most of the world's population in oppressive and inhumane conditions (2008, 28-48).

Hispanics constituted a large segment of the US Catholic Church, but Blacks were a comparatively small minority in the church. On the other hand, Protestant Black theology had been very present in this country. In 1975, Joseph Nearon, the only Black member in the society, gave a long paper on Black theology, pointing out that Black people look at the Catholic Church as a white person's church and cannot feel at home in it. The US emphasis on the melting pot makes it difficult for Blacks to be at home in the Catholic community (1975, 177-202). In 1989, Jaime Phelps insisted on a Black liberationist understanding of providence (1989, 12-19). At the 1991 convention, M. Shawn Copeland proposed a critical mediation of the Christian Gospel that takes into full account racism, sexism, classism, exploitation, and human objectification in a capitalistic system (1991, 49-57). Copeland would go on to become the first Black woman to be president of the CTSA (2004) and the recipient of the John Courtney Murray Award (2018).

In his 2010 presidential address, Bryan Massingale dialogued with Malcolm X, who once proudly described himself not as an American but as a victim of Americanism. Massingale sees Malcolm in light of the adage that the voice of victims is the voice of God (2010, 63-68).

In the 1995-2020 timeframe, the society made efforts to attract and support new members. In 2004, the society initiated a best article award by new scholars (2004, 192). At the 2010 meeting, the board voted to contribute \$12,000 annually to defray convention costs for Catholic graduate students, junior scholars, and members whose institutions do not provide funding to attend the conventions (2010, 193; 2011, 199).

There can be no doubt that the growth and diversity of the membership is the most prominent characteristic of the membership in the first seventy-five years of the existence of the CTSA. Recall that the CTSA began in 1946 and its members were white, male Catholic priests. A new aspect of diversity occurs at this seventy-fifth anniversary convention when Christine Firer Hinze becomes president. She and her husband, Bradford Hinze, are the first married couple to both serve as president of the CTSA.

TENSIONS WITH THE HIERARCHICAL MAGISTERIUM

The primary tension in the last fifty years of the CTSA was between the society and the hierarchical magisterium. This section does not pretend to list all these tensions but simply point out the most significant ones. The first occasion of this tension was

⁴ Curran, *CTSA*, 57-58, 120-21.

the theological response to the July 1968 papal encyclical *Humanae vitae* condemning artificial contraception in marriage. The two Catholic moral theologians in the United States most associated with supporting the legitimacy of dissent on this teaching were Richard McCormick and myself. In 1969, McCormick was awarded the Cardinal Spellman Award and in 1971 he served as president. I was elected president in 1969. In 1972, I was awarded the first John Courtney Murray Award. Behind this lies a story that is not told in the *Proceedings*. I was selected for the Spellman Award; but, when as a matter of courtesy Spellman's successor, Cardinal Terrence Cooke, was informed of this, he declined to give the award. The officers and board then decided they would change the name from the Cardinal Spellman Award to the John Courtney Murray Award, and I became the first recipient. The CTSA publicly honored the two moral theologians most identified with the possibility of dissent from noninfallible hierarchical teaching.

In 1970, the CTSA began sponsoring research projects to study significant issues. The committee report on sexuality was ultimately published in a book by Paulist Press with the title *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought*, with the subtitle *A Study Commissioned by the Catholic Theological Society of America*. A foreword from the board of directors indicated that the board received the report but this reception implied neither approval or disapproval of the content.⁵ *Human Sexuality* proposed guidelines for sexual activity that differed somewhat from hierarchical teaching. No other work of the CTSA has generated as much publicity. The Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a strong critique and expressed concern that the CTSA would arrange for publication of such a book.⁶ This book was also the final reason why some Catholic theologians and scholars formed a new society—The Fellowship of Catholic Scholars—whose members do not accept such dissent from the ordinary teaching of the pope.⁷

The CTSA strongly supported me (1986, 177), Roger Haight,⁸ and Margaret Farley (2012, 171-2), when the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith negatively critiqued our writings and took serious actions against us. A major source of tension arose when Pope John Paul II in his apostolic constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* called for those teaching theological disciplines in higher education to have a mandate from the competent ecclesiastical authority, usually the bishop. The CTSA together with the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities and other Catholic academic societies strongly objected to the mandate. The US bishops themselves originally tried to avoid the mandate issue, but ultimately, nine years later in 1999 called for the

⁵ Anthony Kosnik, et al., *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought: A Study Commissioned by the CTSA* (New York: Paulist, 1977).

⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Observations about the Book *Human Sexuality: A Study Commissioned by the CTSA*, Rev. Anthony Kosnik, Editor, July 13, 1979," http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/re_con_cfaith_doc_19790713_mons-quinn_en.html.

⁷ James Hitchcock, "The Fellowship of Catholic Scholars," in *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America*, eds. Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 190.

⁸ Board of Directors Statement on Rev. Roger Haight, S.J., posted 2005 at Catholic Theological Society of America Board Statements at Board Statement, <http://www.ctsa-online.org>.

mandate in the US. The CTSA, the ACCU, and many others feared this would result in serious actions against some theologians.⁹

After more discussion, the requirement of the mandate took effect in May 2002, but there were no reports of the mandate being denied or reversed.¹⁰ It seems that for a number of different reasons, the bishops apparently decided not to make an issue over the mandate. Thus, perhaps the most controversial issue involving tensions between theologians and the hierarchical magisterium ended with nothing happening.

There is more to the story. The CTSA also worked very hard to have a good relationship with the US bishops: The local bishop was always asked to address the opening session of the convention; the CTSA and other Catholic societies met regularly with the Bishops' Committee on Doctrine; in October 2012, the board approved giving \$500 dollars to ten groups of theologians to have dinner with the local bishop (2013, 178). The CTSA thus reaffirmed its commitment to the role of the hierarchical magisterium but disagreed with some of its actions. But the bishops themselves also encouraged dialogue and discussion with the CTSA and others despite the criticism coming from the CTSA on specific issues. Thus, both the CTSA and the US bishops recognized the need to cooperate and work together despite these tensions and differences.

PERSONAL CONCLUSION

My comments here today have been heavily based on my new book, *The Catholic Theological Society of America: A Story of Seventy-Five Years*. I am grateful to the officers and board of the CTSA for providing a subvention to make this publication possible. Since I am eighty-seven, this will be my last book. The action of the officers and board have confirmed my judgment that this is my last book. They concluded that even most members would not buy the book, so they had to give it away free!

On a more serious note, writing the book has been what is often called a labor of love. I am most appreciative of my many years participating in the CTSA. I have learned much from the papers and the discussions at our meetings. Through participation in the CTSA, I have found new friendships and strengthened old ones. As the society begins the next seventy-five years, I hope that future Catholic theologians will be active members in the CTSA and find their participation as helpful and stimulating as I have.

⁹ Curran, *CTSA*, 130-32.

¹⁰ Curran, *CTSA*, 133-36.