

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF THE CTSA? – SPECIAL SESSION  
OF THE CENTENNIAL COMMITTEE

- Topic: What is the Future of the CTSA?  
 Convener: Frank Clooney, Harvard University  
 CTSA President  
 Moderator: Christine Firer Hinze, Fordham University  
 CTSA Past-President and Chair of the Centennial Committee  
 Presenters: Linh Hoang, O.F.M., Siena College  
 Craig A. Ford, Jr., St. Norbert College  
 Kevin Burke, S.J., Regis College.

Sponsored by the newly-created Centennial Committee (CC), this special session on the evening of Friday, June 9th featured panel and discussion on “What is the Future of the CTSA?” It drew close to 90 attendees. The evening’s dual aim was to introduce members to the work being done by the CC, and to solicit member input to assist the CC in its charge 1) to consult widely, then 2) to draft, seek member feedback on, and propose to the CTSA Board a “Vision Statement” for the CTSA at 100, as well as a three-to-five year “Phase I Strategic Plan” for advancing that vision in the next three to five years.

Following a welcome and synopsis of the CC’s genesis and charge by President Frank Clooney, S.J., a panel of three members very briefly summarized work to date in three key areas. Linh Hoang, O.F.M., spoke on “Context, Mission & History”, noting that in its more than seventy-five years, the CTSA had undergone several significant waves of change: Its primary membership had shifted from male clerics to laity, including women and members of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. Its relationship to bishops shifted from a focus on the magisterium to greater focus, in line with the impulses of Vatican II, on engaging the people and concerns of the contemporary world. And its institutional center of gravity has undergone several key shifts—from an early focus on seminaries, to a focus on theologians teaching in colleges and universities, to an as yet unclear new phase where the institutional security of academic theology and theologians is in a time of flux and uncertainty.

Craig A. Ford, Jr. spoke on “Critical Issues Facing the Society,” outlining areas that CC has surfaced. Among them are Accessibility and Affordability (e.g., managing costs of attendance for scholars with limited or no institutional support; negotiating virtual and in-person meeting formats; enabling full participation for members living with disabilities; and better accommodating persons with young or dependent family members), cultivating external relationships (e.g., with other scholarly societies of Catholic theology and religious studies; with local churches, bishops and dioceses; with the global church and those it serves; with and societies), membership composition, and fundraising and financial stability.

Kevin Burke, S.J., elaborated briefly on the key area of Fundraising and Financial Sustainability, stressing that attention to funding and financial sustainability was not an end in itself, but must be approached in light of the Society’s mission, vision, and goals for itself over the next twenty-five years. Here issues to consider include, e.g.,

cultivating non-traditional revenue streams, exploring creative funding models, and developing optimal policies for dues payment with payment flexibility options.

Attendees were then asked to join one of a dozen small discussion groups, each with a scribe from the CC, to discuss two questions: First, “What has motivated/motivates your involvement in the CTSA?” Second, “What do you hope and desire that the CTSA will be doing for its members, and for the field of theology in North America, when we celebrate our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2045?” Lively group discussions ensued. A compilation, report, and synopsis of attendees’ responses prepared by CC member Craig Ford (to be available to the membership) noted, “By far, the most frequently mentioned reason explaining why we come to the CTSA is the community of colleagues gathered here as well as the exciting work of seeing theology happen in real time.” With respect to hopes and desires for the CTSA at 100, responses clustered around three major axes of concern and envisaged opportunity: 1) How the CTSA positions itself within an ecology of US professional theological societies, with Universities, and with other professionals more broadly; 2) The CTSA’s relationship to the larger mission of the Catholic Church in the United States, both at a local level as well as at a national level; and 3) The relationship between the CTSA and regional as well as global realities. Following a short plenary sharing time, CC Chair and CTSA Past-President Christine Firer Hinze thanked the assembly, and outlined the 2023-24 Centennial Committee’s agenda (with timeline subject to adjustment): “Drawing on both wide and targeted consultation with CTSA membership, to create a draft Vision Statement and a draft Phase I Strategic Plan; to present these to the Board for initial discussion & input; to revise, circulate for members’ input, and present a proposed ‘CTSA at 100’ Vision Statement and ‘Phase I Strategic Plan’ for Board review, and ultimately Board and member approval at the June 2024 convention.”

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