

## REPORT ON THE 2022-2023 MID-YEAR GATHERINGS

*Ad Hoc* Board Committee on Virtual Events:

Elyse Raby (Chair), Mary Kate Holman, Christina Astorga

Fall Topic: Synodality and Listening Reports from the Field  
 Date: December 5, 2022  
 Moderator: Elyse Raby, Santa Clara University  
 Presenters: Kristin Colberg, St. John’s School of Theology and Seminary  
 Stan Chu Ilo, DePaul University  
 Edmund Chia, Australian Catholic University

Spring Topic: Theology and Teaching in Light of ChatGPT  
 Date: April 4, 2023  
 Convener: Christina Astorga, University of Portland  
 Moderator: Mary Kate Holman, Benedictine University  
 Introductions: Elyse Raby, Santa Clara University  
 Presenters: Anne Carpenter, Saint Mary’s College of California  
 Stephen Okey, Saint Leo University  
 David Turnbloom, University of Portland

In the 2022-2023 academic year, the Society continued the practice of holding two online gatherings. The sessions were organized by a committee composed of Elyse Raby (Santa Clara University and Committee Chair), Mary Kate Holman (Benedictine University), and Christina Astorga (University of Portland and CTSA Board Member). Both meetings were well attended by members of the Society.

The theme of the first meeting was “Synodality and Listening Reports from the Field.” It met on December 5, 2022. The session sought to engage members of the Society on practices of synodality, with an eye toward the 2021-2024 Synod on Synodality. Elyse Raby moderated a panel discussion of three CTSA members—Kristin Colberg, Stan Chu Ilo, and Edmund Chia—who each drew on their disciplinary expertise and their experience in formal synodal processes. Kristin Colberg, drawing on her experience as a member of the Theological Commission assisting the Synod of Bishops, addressed the theological foundations and processes that are shaping the Synod on Synodality. Stan Chu Ilo addressed what he has learned as the head of the Doing Theology from the Existential Peripheries Project of the Vatican’s Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development. Edmund Chia drew on his earlier work as executive secretary of the Office Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs for the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference. Following the three presentations, participants broke out into small groups for discussions. When members returned from their breakout sessions a robust discussion ensued about the possibilities and challenges for a synodal church. There were sixty-nine attendees.

The theme of the second meeting was “Theology and Teaching in Light of ChatGPT.” It met on April 4, 2023. The session sought to provide an opportunity for members to engage in discussion about the effects of artificial intelligence (AI) and chat bots on theology and teaching theology after the release of the AI chat bot,

ChatGPT, in November 2022. It began with a demonstration of the capabilities of ChatGPT by Elyse Raby. Following Raby, three panelists addressed the challenges posed by ChatGPT and similar technologies. David Turnbloom spoke about the nature of artificial intelligence and encouraged members not to avoid assignments that might allow students to use ChatGPT (e.g., traditional essays and papers). Rather, he proposed assigning those traditional essays and papers in ways that reduce the pressure that leads students to use AI technologies (e.g., scaffolding assignments or contract grading). Stephen Okey drew on the developing conversation among academics from various disciplines as he highlighted the challenges of student and faculty use of AI (e.g., the threat to the development of critical thinking skills and originality in student work, the potential perpetuation of biases that AI models have learned and which would further harm already marginalized groups, the ability of students to easily use AI to fulfill basic course requirements in ways that seems like and may be cheating) as well as some opportunities (e.g., reimagining the types of assignments we develop and ask students to complete). Critically, he addressed these topics within a framing question about purpose of higher education—and Catholic higher education, in particular. Anne Carpenter used the work of Bernard Lonergan and John Henry Newman on the nature of belief and knowledge to frame the problem of not knowing whether students have completed their work or whether it was completed by an AI chat bot. In doing so, she pointed out that the dilemma is not merely a problem of morals (cheating or not cheating) but also a problem of the desire for learning, knowledge, and understanding. Following the three presentations, participants moved to small groups before coming back together for a larger conversation with the panelists. The conversation highlighted the limits of ChatGPT and what it gets incorrect, differences in responses to AI among various student populations, the importance of critical thinking, concerns about AI that are particular to the teaching of theology (e.g., biases and claims about the nature of the divine), possibilities for new types of assignments, and the pressures that lead students to turn to AI. The session was attended by forty-nine members.

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