

FALL 2023 VIRTUAL EVENT

Ad Hoc Board Committee on Virtual Events:

Mary Kate Holman (Chair), Susan Bigelow Reynolds, SimonMary Asese Ahiokhai

Fall Topic: The End of the Golden Era: Theology in the Age of Academic Precarity
 Date: October 30, 2023
 Convener: Kristin E. Heyer, CTSA President, Boston College
 Moderator: Mary Kate Holman, Fairfield University
 Presenters: Mary Beth Yount, Editor, *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*
 Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos, Seattle University
 Kate Ward, Marquette University
 Matthew Shadle, Divine Word College

In the 2023-2024 academic year, the Society continued the practice of holding two online gatherings. The sessions were organized by a committee composed of Mary Kate Holman (Fairfield University and Committee Chair), Susan Bigelow Reynolds (Emory University), and SimonMary Asese Ahiokhai (University of Portland and CTSA Board Member). Both meetings were well attended by members of the Society. The theme of the first meeting was “The End of the Golden Era: Theology in the Age of Academic Precarity.” It met on October 30, 2023. The session sought to engage members of the Society on the questions raised by what CTSA Past President, Francis Clooney, S.J., called “the end of a golden era” when theology thrived in Catholic colleges and universities in the United States in his 2023 presidential address. Each of the panelist spoke from their experience and disciplinary expertise.

Mary Beth Yount spoke as a previously tenured, full professor whose faculty position was eliminated by Neumann University. After describing how she learned that her position had been eliminated and what she knew of the university process that led to it, she drew on her experience teaching at a private Catholic high school academy and working as a chaplain in the time since that process had unfolded. In turn, Yount spoke of the importance of attending to practical theology in our work as Catholic theologians and bridging the gap between academic and practical theology. In particular, she noted the gifts of theologians being in engaged in practical theological work, such as chaplaincy and pastoral care.

Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos spoke as a theologian who has served as tenured, full professor, center director, and now chief mission officer at two universities. She drew attention to the importance of college and university board members and the presidents they hire having deep a understanding of not only the mission statement of a particular university but the distinctive mission of the church and Catholic higher education. Moreover, Punsalan-Manlimos spoke of the critical role that Catholic theologians play at Catholic universities in communicating and articulating a worldview informed by our tradition’s distinctive theological vision and imagination, which ought to shape work across the university. She noted that when such a distinctive mission does not animate a Catholic university or is not communicated, it is difficult to understand why

students would choose a more expensive private institution that is largely indistinguishable in its mission from less expensive public institution.

Kate Ward, who had proposed a resolution that was eventually passed by the CTSA at its seventy-seventh annual convention (2023) encouraging the Society to do all that it can to mitigate the effects of college closings and program eliminations on CTSA members, spoke from her experience as moral theologian and her experience as a tenure-track and now-tenured faculty member. She drew attention to the responsibilities of tenure-track and tenured theologians to include and advocate for theologians who are contingent faculty members at their institutions. Moreover, Ward spoke of the importance of adequately preparing doctoral students in theology for the precarity of the job market they are about to enter. She concluded by reflecting on the importance of Catholic colleges and universities embodying, in their own practices, the distinctive the mission they seek to advance.

Matthew Shadle drew on his experience as at theologian and former tenured, full professor whose program in theology (at Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia was eliminated) and his recent work reflecting on the vocation of the theologian outside the walls of the academy. Drawing on the kenotic ecclesiology Tomáš Halík he noted that theology is in a moment of transition when it has to be willing to recognize places of death and places of new life emerging amidst the death of past forms of the theological vocation. Moreover, Shadle called upon members of the Society to become more aware of the ways theology is being done in places traditionally overlooked by the academy and/or treated with hostility by the institutional church.

Discussion proceeded in two ways. Following the presentations, participants met in self-selected small group discussions, each facilitated by one of the four presenters for approximately twenty-minutes. A robust discussion among all participants took place as participants returned to the large group.

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