

## THE FOUNDATION AND PROGRESS OF THE SOCIETY

*The Board of Directors of The Catholic Theological Society of America, meeting at Holy Redeemer College, in Washington, on January 15, 1947, ordered that the following account of the origin and early activities of the Society be included in the first published volume of the Society's Proceedings.*

The advisability of a society for professors of sacred theology and for other priests interested in the sacred science had been discussed frequently and at considerable length for some time before steps were actually taken to organize our group. On at least one occasion, at the time of the banquet for the theological students at Catholic University in the spring of 1941, with the support of the late Bishop Joseph Moran Corrigan, such a project was nearly actualized. I believe that most of the members will recall similar occasions, when the formation of a theological society was considered, and effective plans might well have been set in motion.

The decision which really resulted in the formation of this Society was made, however, in the course of a discussion that took place immediately after a meeting of the Board of Editors of *The American Ecclesiastical Review* one night in October, 1945. The Rev. Dr. Eugene M. Burke, C.S.P. insisted upon the need of such a society. The only other members of the board then present in the editorial office, the Rev. Dr. Edmond Darvil Benard and the Rev. Dr. Joseph Clifford Fenton, both priests of the Diocese of Springfield, and both, like Dr. Burke, members of the faculty of Sacred Theology at The Catholic University of America, agreed wholeheartedly with their confrere. All three were convinced that the Rev. Dr. Francis J. Connell, C.S.S.R., also a member of the Catholic University theological faculty, was particularly well fitted to take the lead in preparing the formation of an American Catholic theological association.

As a result of this discussion, the present Secretary contacted

Dr. Connell the following morning. Dr. Connell's enthusiasm for the project resulted in a series of preparatory meetings, held at Holy Redeemer College in Washington during the last three months of 1945. The Rev. Dr. Alfred C. Rush, C.S.S.R. and the Rev. Dr. Thomas Owen Martin, a priest of the Grand Rapids diocese, took part in these conferences along with Fathers Connell, Burke, Benard, and Fenton. All six were members of the Catholic University's Faculty of Sacred Theology and all belonged to the editorial board of *The American Ecclesiastical Review*. At the unanimous request of the other conferees, Dr. Connell acted as chairman and leader in all of these preliminary discussions.

The American hierarchy holds its annual meeting each November at The Catholic University of America. Dr. Connell took advantage of the 1945 assembly to petition Archbishop (now Cardinal) Francis Joseph Spellman for permission to hold a preparatory meeting in his archdiocese and to ask him and Archbishop (now Cardinal) Edward Mooney, then head of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, for his approval of the project. Both of these eminent prelates gave their blessing to the work, and Cardinal Spellman graciously invited Dr. Connell to call the preparatory meeting in New York.

Dr. Burke's Paulist confrere, The Rev. William A. Michell, Rector of St. Paul's, generously offered the use of a hall in his Parish House on West 59th Street, New York, for the preparatory gathering. Dr. Connell and his co-workers gratefully accepted this invitation, and communicated with as many as possible of the theological seminaries within a convenient radius of New York, asking professors of theology interested in the formation of an American theological society to meet at St. Paul's at two o'clock in the afternoon of January 27, 1946. Thirty-eight priests were present at this preparatory meeting. They were the Reverend Fathers

Edmond Darvil Benard, of Catholic University.

J. Joseph Bluett, S.J., of Woodstock College, Woodstock, Md.

John H. Boccella, T.O.R., of St. Francis Seminary, Loretto, Pa.

Eugene M. Burke, C.S.P., of Catholic University.

John F. Carvlin, C.S.P., of St. Paul's College, Washington, D. C.

James E. Coleran, S.J., of Weston College, Weston, Mass.

- Francis J. Connell, C.S.S.R., of Catholic University.  
Francis R. Connerton, S.S., of St. Mary's Seminary, Baltimore, Md.  
Gentle Crowley, O.F.M., of Holy Name College, Washington, D. C.  
Philip J. Donnelly, S.J., of Weston College.  
Thomas A. Edwards, T.O.R., of St. Francis, Loretto.  
Walter Farrell, O.P., of The Dominican House of Studies, Washington,  
D. C.  
Joseph Clifford Fenton, of Catholic University.  
Francis Hannigan, S.M., of The Marist College, Washington, D. C.  
Kilian J. Healy, O. Carm., of Whitefriars Hall, Washington, D. C.  
Martin J. Healy, of Immaculate Conception Seminary, Huntington, L. I.  
G. Frederick Heinzmann, M.M., of Maryknoll Seminary, Maryknoll, N. Y.  
Thomas E. Henneberry, S.J., of Woodstock College.  
Edward J. Hogan, S.S., of St. Mary's, Baltimore.  
Kenneth B. Moore, O. Carm., of Whitefriars Hall.  
Francis J. Murphy, of St. Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie, Yonkers, N. Y.  
Msgr. Edward G. Murray, of St. John's Seminary, Brighton, Mass.  
John Courtney Murray, S.J., of Woodstock College.  
John F. Nitterl, O.C.D., of The Carmelite College, Washington, D. C.  
William R. O'Connor, of St. Joseph's, Dunwoodie.  
Adam J. Otterbein, C.S.S.R., of Mt. St. Alphonsus, Esopus, N. Y.  
James Edward Rea, of St. Joseph's, Dunwoodie.  
Robert E. Regan, O.S.A., of The Augustinian College, Washington, D. C.  
Francis F. Reh, of St. Joseph's, Dunwoodie.  
Thomas J. Riley, of St. John's, Brighton.  
Albert L. Schlitzer, C.S.C., of Holy Cross College, Washington, D. C.  
Jude Schmieder, O.F.M. Conv., of St. Anthony-on-Hudson, Rensselaer,  
N. Y.  
Thomas W. Smiddy, of Immaculate Conception, Huntington.  
John R. Sullivan, S.S., of St. Mary's, Baltimore.  
John F. Sweeney, S.J., of Woodstock.  
Sebastian P. Weber, O.F.M. Conv., of Rensselaer.  
Terence Wholihan, O.F.M. Conv., of Rensselaer.  
Edward A. Wuenschel, C.S.S.R., of Mt. St. Alphonsus, Esopus, N. Y.

Father Burke called the meeting to order and immediately moved the election of Father Connell as chairman. The assembly gave this position to Father Connell by unanimous vote, and then chose Father Fenton as secretary.

Father Burke then moved "That it is the sense of this meeting

that there be formed a Catholic theological association for America." Father Bluett seconded this motion, which was then passed without objection.

The society by a resolution offered by Father Benard, then empowered Father Connell to appoint a committee of seven members to draft a constitution and by-laws for this theological association. The committee was instructed to submit its report at the next meeting. Father Connell appointed Father Thomas Owen Martin of Catholic University as the chairman of the constitutional committee and named as his associates Msgr. Edward Murray, and Fathers William O'Connor, Walter Farrell, Joseph Bluett, John Sullivan, and Robert Regan.

The priests present then signified their wish to have their next meeting in New York during the week beginning June 23, 1946. Father Boccella moved that the chairman should be empowered to appoint a committee to arrange for this meeting. The assembly passed this motion, and Father Connell named as members of the arrangements committee Msgr. John Fearn, of Dunwoodie, and Fathers Thomas Smiddy, Francis Murphy, Edward Wuenschel, James Rea, Philip Donnelly, and Joseph Fenton.

The meeting adjourned after those present had expressed their thanks to the Archbishop of New York, to the Rector of St. Paul's House, and to all the rest who had aided in the furthering of the new society. The enthusiasm for the project shown at this preparatory meeting made it quite clear that the new society would fill a real need in the Catholic life of our country.

Those who participated in the preparatory meeting decided to invite all teachers of theology in all the theological faculties of the United States of America and of Canada to the first regular meeting. The committee on arrangements was charged with this responsibility. The committee held one plenary session in New York in April, but the lion's share of the work was done by the New York members of the group. The constitutional committee finished its deliberations, carried on during the spring and early summer of 1946, on June 24.

Those gathered for the first formal meeting of the new society met in New York on Tuesday, June 25, 1946. Their first corporate act was that of assistance at Mass of the Holy Ghost at ten that

morning in the Lady Chapel of St. Patrick's Cathedral. The Most Rev. William Tiburtus McCarty, C.S.S.R., Military Delegate, offered the Mass, and His Eminence Francis Cardinal Spellman presided. After the Mass Cardinal Spellman welcomed the priests who had come to organize the new association and told of the good which the projected society could do for the Church in the United States. His Eminence then met each one of the priests individually.

The sessions of the convention were held in the Hotel Commodore, on June 25 and 26. The meetings of Tuesday June 25 were devoted to the business of adopting the constitution and by-laws and to the election of the first officers. The formulae drawn up by the constitutional committee were adopted, with slight modifications. Those present then signed the new constitution, and the Catholic Theological Society of America was established as a fully organized society. Father John Courtney Murray made the motion to accept the constitution and the by-laws and this resolution was seconded by Father Terence Wholihan.

Father Connell, as temporary chairman, was empowered to appoint a nominating committee to present a slate of officers. The committee, which was comprised of Monsignors Fearn, O'Connell, and Murray and Fathers Bluett, and Regan presented its slate, and the society accepted it. All the nominees of the committee were elected unanimously. The following were chosen as officers:

*President*.....Father Connell, C.S.S.R.  
*Vice-President*.....Father Gerard Yelle, S.S.  
*Secretary* .....Father Fenton  
*Treasurer* .....Father Rea

*Board of Directors:*

For a two year term: Father Quigley, Father Murray, S.J., Father O'Connor. For a one year term: Father Baier, O.F.M., Father Martin, Father Doherty.

The meetings of Wednesday morning and afternoon were given over to the reading and the discussion of three papers, by Father O'Connor, Father Connell, and Father Bluett. The final session was

a business meeting. Father Connell, as president of the organization, appointed the following committees.

*The Committee on Admissions:*

Msgr. O'Connell, Father Egan, O.P., Father Smiddy, Father Bluett, S.J., Father Murphy, Father Caron, O.M.I., Father Curtis, Father Regan, O.S.A., Father Fenton.

*The Committee on Current Problems:*

Msgr. Murray, Father Benard, Father Burke, C.S.P., Father Nugent, C.M., Father Henneberry, S.J., Father Schumacher, C.S.C.

*The Committee on Research and Publications:*

Msgr. Fearn, Father Healy, O. Carm., Father McGinley, S.J., Father McDonough, C.P., Father Shea.

After the inaugural meeting, the society instructed its secretary to communicate with the Holy Father, telling him of the formation of the new organization, asking for his blessing on the members and on their work, and assuring him of the society's loyalty to him. The message was duly sent and the following reply was communicated to the society by the Cardinal Archbishop of New York:

AUGUSTUS PONTIFEX FELICITER INSTITUTAE  
SOCIETATI THEOLOGICAE AMERICAE DE OBSE-  
QUIO GRATIAS AGIT FLORIDA INCREMENTA  
DISCUPIT AMANTER BENEDICIT.

The cablegram, sent from the Vatican on July 9, was signed by the Most Rev. Msgr. Giovanni Battista Montini, of the Pontifical Secretariate of State.

The most important business transacted at the last session of the general meeting was the society's decision to petition the Holy Father for the definition of the doctrine of Our Lady's Assumption

into heaven as a dogma of divine faith. The society entrusted the composition of the petition to Father John Francis Sweeney, S.J., of Woodstock College. The formula written by Father Sweeney was printed on parchment and illuminated by the Sisters of St. Francis of Sylvania, Ohio. The petition was presented to His Excellency, the Most Reverend Apostolic Delegate, who transmitted it to the Holy Father. Archbishop Cicognani later gave Dr. Connell the cablegram expressing the Holy Father's thanks to the Society for this petition.

The Society, at the same business session on June 26, discussed the various types of corporate activity open to its members. The organization decided to give annual awards for theological writings of special excellence. It was decided that the purpose of such awards, the production of worth-while theological books and articles, would be better achieved if a member of the hierarchy would consent to sponsor them. His Eminence, Francis Cardinal Spellman, graciously consented to sponsor this work of the Society and he has generously given a sum of money to the Treasurer of the Society for this purpose. The first of the Cardinal Spellman Theological Awards will be given after the next annual meeting of the society.

A few of the professors who had attended the preparatory meeting at St. Paul's Parish House in January were unable to be present at the inaugural assembly. On a motion by Father Egan, O.P., the Society voted unanimously to number these priests among its charter members if they wished to enter the society. All these priests were contacted. All without exception wished to be counted as charter members of the Catholic Theological Society of America. Also, at the last session Dr. Martin was named parliamentarian of the Society.

The inaugural meeting of the Society voted to adjourn at 5:30 P. M. on June 26, 1946, after thanking His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop and all the others who had made this work possible.

The Committee on Current Problems, with Msgr. Murray of Brighton as chairman, held its first meeting at Catholic University in Washington on Dec. 11, 1946. It proposed the following topics for discussion by the Society:

- (1) "An Authoritative Church in a Democracy."

- (2) "Moral Problems of Total War."
- (3) "Is the Right to Strike Absolute?"
- (4) "Catholic Action in the United States."
- (5) "Natural Motives and the Supernatural Life."
- (6) "The Principles of Extra-Sacramental Justification."

The Board of Directors of the Catholic Theological Society of America held a meeting on the afternoon of January 15, 1947, at Holy Redeemer College in Washington. The Board voted to accept the generous invitation extended by His Excellency Richard J. Cushing, Archbishop of Boston, to hold the second annual convention at St. John's Seminary, Brighton, Massachusetts, and to hold this convention from the evening of June 30, 1947, until the afternoon of July 2. The Board asked Dr. John Courtney Murray, S.J., Dr. Thomas Owen Martin, and Dr. Edward Anthony Wuenschel, C.S.S.R. to read papers at the forthcoming meetings. It also asked Dr. Murray, S.J. "to initiate the writing of a publication or series of publications concerned with 'An Authoritative Church in a Democracy,' and to report progress at the next regular meeting of the Board of Directors." Similar requests were made to Dr. Martin with reference to writings on "Moral Problems of Total War," and to Dr. Fenton with reference to a Dictionary of Apologetics. Dr. James Rea was appointed to take charge of nominations for the Cardinal Spellman Theological Award.

J. C. F.