

## APPENDIX B

### A PERSONAL MEMOIR ON THE ORIGINS OF THE CTSA\*

After considerable reflection on how to go about my recollections of the early history of the Society I felt the most effective mode would be a personal memoir. Most of it would be from my memory since whatever written sources I had, long ago became dust in the strata of my room at St. Paul's. Also such a memoir would give some future doctoral candidate an opportunity to practice demythologization by some interpretative system as yet unformulated.

The genesis of the idea of some such society goes back to my seminary experience at the Catholic University in the Clerical Conference of the Catholic Students' Mission Crusade. It began I think during my first year at Washington (1932-33). Its general purpose was to serve the Archdiocesan Office for the Propagation of the Faith. Of this purpose all I remember is giving talks against communism, public parades in our religious habits and running an Archdiocesan oratorical contest. For most of us who were involved, the central contribution was that representatives (students) of most of the religious houses in Washington met regularly to cooperate on these projects. It was a real bridge over the moats that enclosed most of the seminaries of the day. Its most permanent influence was the formation of a Speakers' Bureau. Without any funds, but able to offer a unique audience that would and did ultimately spread across the U.S. and through the mission world, it was able to attract the very best of Catholic speakers and doers. Thus we had such speakers as Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin, Fulton Sheen, James Gillis, Henry Wallace, Bishop Kelly (of the Extension Society), Maisie Ward, Frank Sheed, Arnold Lunn, Christopher Hollis, Shane Leslie, Wilfred Parsons and others. Speaking for myself and, I am sure, most of my contemporaries, it was the dynamic element of our seminary education. To a seminarian such as myself whose secular reading was confined to the sports page and the comics (which I still read faithfully) this whole program was exhilarating. More importantly, immersed as we were in Latin text books of European origin, we received from speakers of this caliber a sense of pride in American Catholicism which was still pretty much under a cloud.

My experience as an officer of the group while a third theologian convinced me that such cooperation was not only achievable but had a

\*ED. NOTE: This is an edited version of the first part of a handwritten memoir by Eugene Burke, C.S.P., one of the founders and the third President of the CTSA. The remaining section, devoted to one theologian's personal journey through the recent developments in theology, may eventually appear in a subsequent volume of the *Proceedings*. The original manuscript will be deposited in the CTSA archives housed at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.—L.S., Ed.

real potential for the Church. (It is interesting to note that in Rome in 1949 one of the secretaries in the Holy Office told me that the only reason for cooperation, such as represented by the CTSA, was a conspiracy to form a national church—the same reason that was given for suppressing the NCWC years before.)

The second stage in this development was my experience as a graduate student at the Catholic University (1938-41). My seminary formation had been heavily moral and apologetic; dogmatic theology was a kind of Baltimore Catechism #6 in Latin. The only course I ever got 100% in was in Canon Law in the book *De Processibus*. This achievement certainly was not the result of understanding and I have never used it since (probably a natural legal deviousness derived from having to obey the student rule to the letter). At this point I had done a good deal of reading in men like Karl Adam, Newman, Chesterton and Dawson and felt secure enough as I entered the University. Imagine, therefore, my shock at falling into the hands of Doctor Arturo Landgraf, a committed German scholar, a renowned authority in medieval philosophy and theology and an admirer of Hitler's new Germany. As his only graduate student he let me know early on that I easily fitted into the category of all-American *dumkopft*. That same year the genial John Quasten opened up the world of the Fathers. Added to this was the moral theology taught out of Merkelbach by James O'Brien. The result of this exposure was an awareness that came from being judged by these men of how unprofessional my theological formation had been. For its time I believe it was pastorally sufficient but speculatively, philosophically and historically it was very impoverished.

Because of this graduate experience at Catholic University, when I began to teach there, as well as at the Paulist House, I resolved not to impose on my students my own seminary formation (obviously impossible, but how was I to know that?). As a first step, therefore, I refused to use a manual. Granted that I was starting with no teaching experience and teaching in two places at once (plus the ever present *fomes peccati*) I, of course, didn't always live up to my high resolve. (That year I taught *De Sacramentis, De Verbo Incarnato et Redemptore, De Deo Uno et Trino* plus Oriental Theology—none so happy as an ignorant teacher!) Yet looking back I feel I really did strive to bring to bear scholarship, personal reflection and openness to questions in my classes as part of my effort to be a theological professional.

Very helpful in all this was the appearance of *Theological Studies* in 1940. In retrospect I see that event as marking a turning of the theological tide that had been moving away from us ever since the condemnation of "Americanism" and the intellectual bleakness produced by the specter of Integrisism. The articles in *Theological Studies* and particularly the book reviews gave, at least to me, a sense of renewed vitality in American Catholic theology.

I bring this in because most younger theologians are, at best, only vaguely aware of what the pressures on a seminary teacher used to be. If you add to this the fact that most of us had to help out in parishes over the weekend it explains why it was so easy to opt for translating a manual. I

believe that the CTSA did much to create a professional pride that helped to confront these problems.

In trying to live up to my high resolve there was an awareness of a worrying lacuna. I wanted to venture into areas that theologically touched American Catholic life. But whom could I discuss it with? At the time I had two dissertations in process: James Rea's study of the common priesthood and Theodore Hesburgh's work on the theology of Catholic Action. Both, it seemed to me, were important to what the American scene then was, both had difficulty in getting faculty approval. As a young and unproven theologian I was a little frightened. I suppose I could have written letters but that was never my forte and I had no idea who was behind the opposition.

What finally focussed this very unstructured corpus of experience and thought was a controversy over what was called "intercredal cooperation" that opened in 1941. The general climate of the debate had been created by the uneasiness, suspicion and outright hostility of many Catholics toward *The National Conference of Christians and Jews* that had been founded in the aftermath of the Al Smith campaign of 1928. Giving particular acuteness to the issue was the British movement known as "The Sword of the Spirit" inspired by Christopher Dawson during World War II. Launched by Cardinal Hinsley for Catholics as a movement to unite all men of good will to seek a human and Christian peace, it only took root when the Church of England, the Church of Scotland and the Free Churches pledged to join the Sword of the Spirit in common action. In the religious field this action was to be "parallel"; joint action was envisioned in the sphere of social ethics. The whole idea was given immediacy in the United States by our entrance into the war, though the original article that opened the discussion was written by Francis Connell before that event ("Catholics and Interfaith Groups," in the *American Ecclesiastical Review* [AER] of September, 1941).

This debate was both widened and intensified in the September 1942 issue of *Theological Studies* with an article on "Intercredal Cooperation" and a long treatment of the whole problem and the various approaches to it by John Courtney Murray in his notes on current theology. I saw the whole problematic as having crucial significance for the American Catholic, set as it was into our very special American situation and having, as well, direct implications for our own Church-State issue. I suppose, too, it had a personal meaning for me as a Paulist since our community had frequently been the object of an often vociferous whispering campaign that we favored religious indifference. At that time, too, I had begun to feel that these constant warnings about indifferentism were negating the mission of the Church in the world. However it would be some years before that became a conviction. I certainly found it difficult and argued over Connell's calm assumption that if a person were truly Catholic "the charge of being narrow, intolerant and illiberal must be accepted" (see the article cited above).

The debate continued through to 1945. A significant contribution came from the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York in an article entitled, "The Achievement of Cooperation between Men of Different

Creeds" (*Journal of Religious Studies* 21). In 1943 Wilfred Parsons published an article in *Theological Studies* entitled "Intercredal Cooperation in the Papal Documents" (*TS* 4 [1943]). Father Parsons sought to widen the interpretation of these documents in the light of the contemporary situation. This was followed up by Murray's "Intercredal Cooperation Its Theory and Organization" (*TS* [1943], 257-86). The whole position being developed in *Theological Studies* was challenged by Paul Furfey in an article in *AER*, "Intercredal Cooperation: Its Limitations" (September, 1944). Murray responded in the *AER* (March, 1945) with "On the Problem of Cooperation: Some Clarification." To this Furfey responded with, "Why does Rome Discourage Socio-Religious Intercredalism" (*AER* [May, 1945]). After rejecting Murray's whole effort to press the papal statement beyond mere tolerance to a kind of implicit permission in view of the contemporary circumstances, Furfey concluded:

If Father Murray still feels that Rome encourages the specific form of intercredal cooperation he advocated then let him cite one papal document which not merely tolerates but encourages Catholics to work out with heretics a partly religious set of common principles on which to base their joint action. When Father Murray can find one such document the present writer will be glad to resume the discussion. Until then it may best be regarded as closed.

Already frustrated by the slow, cumbersome and often tangential character of this periodical form of debate, the passage just quoted was, to coin a phrase, the last straw. To end a debate so cavalierly on a critical issue that in the post-war world would be more and more pressing had made the whole debate a major achievement in futility. So what had been the subject of casual conversations and wishful thinking became a project to be realized. I kept my own counsel, but all during the summer, teaching at Catholic University, I jotted notes about the intercredal debate and its organization. When classes resumed in October I was pretty well prepared and totally convinced. For it seemed to me that a whole body of crucial issues needed discussion that could only be constructively debated in a common forum, person to person, in the presence of one's theological peers. Amongst such issues I saw: Church and State, the Mystical Body, and two of my own particular concerns, the scientific teaching of theology and the development of doctrine.

With this in mind I drew up a memorandum to present to the group of editors after a staff meeting of the *American Ecclesiastical Review*. I remember the points but not the exact order. The first point, once I explained the idea, was the reason for my belief in its viability vis-à-vis my experience with the Catholic Students Mission Crusade and the fact that a number of the men I knew from this were now faculty members in the various religious houses in Washington. To these could be added the graduates of Catholic University teaching in Middle Atlantic seminaries and other personal acquaintances. Out of these men could be formed a core group around which to form a national organization. We had, of course, the very good reputation of Francis Connell who, out of the



whole group, was the only one with a truly national reputation. His extensive writing, his textbook on the sacraments, his participation in many meetings over the years, had given him a broad spectrum of recognition and friendships. As I saw it, and so presented it, if he were to be chairman it would give to an enterprise of young men the authority of a genuinely respected older theologian. We had the further advantage of having a recent graduate of Catholic University, a personal friend, in James Rea, who was then on the faculty of the Major Seminary of the New York Archdiocese at Dunwoodie. Through him we were able to contact the faculty personnel in the New York metropolitan area. In the early history of the Society this proved to be a very important plus.

To my mind, the emphasis on the *AER* in the account given in Volume One of the *CTSA Proceedings* is misleading. The Society was conceived of in terms of a person-to-person approach. We purposely put no emphasis on either Catholic University or the *AER* to avoid any suspicion of a power play that would make either or both dominating.

My second major point was that the Society should be oriented to the Church in the United States. We in America had our proper needs and challenges. We were now *the* world power and had a right to some real degree of autonomy. (This, of course, was chauvinism but at the time it was very heady.) My proposal therefore was that it be called The American Catholic Theological Society to give full emphasis to this factor. As I recall now, Frank Connell demurred at a later meeting because of possible unfavorable reactions. I think, too, that Edmond Benard wanted the present title so as to include Canadian theologians. But these recollections are not sharp ones.

The other reasons for establishing the new Society I have already indicated. One that seemed particularly cogent at the time was the opportunity to present papers on critical issues in order to have them discussed informally in seminars. The whole idea was to do this without publicity or recourse to the press. The purpose, of course, was to have frank and critical discussions which would not be interpreted as opposed to accepted magisterial positions. It was the era in which theologians accepted the idea that they could discuss change but only in order to present it privately to church authority for public decision. It was a procedure that worked, however slowly, at times in moral theology but, in my judgment, hardly ever in dogmatic theology. Another proposal in the memorandum concerned the need to raise the professional standards of seminary teaching. It was hoped that this might be achieved through the prepared papers and the criteria that would be set up for membership in the Society. (In the early years this last was a kind of eschatological ideal).

The preparatory organizational meeting was held at the Paulist Church on 59th Street in New York City on the occasion of the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, January 27, 1946. It is an interesting coincidence that on the same feast in 1885(?) the University Committee of the American Bishops met informally after the dedication of the same Paulist Church and decided informally to begin the Catholic University in Washington.

I was surprised at the number and the quality of the theologians who came to the 1946 planning meeting and particularly the strong Jesuit representation. Two elements were symbolized in this beginning that continued to be a permanent part of the life of the Society. The first is that older men like Frank Connell, Bill O'Connor and Gentle Crowley supported the Society and gave much encouragement to the younger members. Certainly to be remembered in this group were: John Fearn, Thomas Hennenbery, Edward Kaiser, John Murray, Phil Donnelly, Paul Palmer, Joseph Quigley, Al Schlizter, Thomas Smiddy, Martin Healy, John Sweeny, Cyril Vollert, Gustave Weigel, Gerard Yelle, Gerald Kelly and John Ford. I single them out of memory as playing a crucial role in developing the continuity and stability of the Society but I am sure to have missed some and I apologize.

The second element I should like to put on the record here is my very high personal esteem and appreciation for the work of the Jesuits throughout the life of the Society. As a community they not only had the largest single group of members but also the widest range of trained and talented men. Again and again, when there was need for expertise in particular areas, it was only to the Jesuits we could turn. I am sure that a listing of the papers delivered and seminars conducted by a variety of Jesuit theologians could demonstrate this. What remains particularly impressive to me is that despite the quantitative and qualitative strength they possessed as a group they never tried to dominate or control the Society or its policies. The warm and continuing cooperation of the Jesuits has been an integral and irreplaceable element in the successful growth of the Society.

Looking back now (and I was deeply worried about it then) the one point at which the Society was in a position of cliffhanging was at the end of our second annual meeting which was held in Boston. A number of things contributed to the situation. First we met in the archdiocesan seminary and the individual rooms were small and extremely hot. Hence the kind of informal get-togethers that were to play so decisive a role in the development of the Society ("bombs bursting in the air til the dawn's early light") were practically impossible. Secondly, there was the informal talk given to us by Archbishop Cushing. We were meeting only for the second time and while our hopes were strong we were quite aware of our shaky situation. It was therefore very discouraging to hear Cushing tell us in so many words that we would do better to explain the Catechism rather than worry about abstract theological issues.

Thirdly, the main paper as far as I was concerned was one I had pressed for; I had insisted that it be given by John Murray. Joseph Fenton had strongly opposed Murray because of the earlier controversy on Church and State. Murray accepted the invitation but about three months before the convention became ill and asked to be excused. At this point, and without any consultation, Fenton appointed himself to the task. At Boston his presentation was less than what we were looking for. The paper printed in the *Proceedings* is an improved version of the one he actually delivered. Finally, as I recall it, there was a tense

discussion at the business meeting led by Juniper Carol on some Mariological issue (I think it was coredemption) that left a bitter taste. The question of what to do with Mariology was a persistent problem in programming until the Mariological Society was founded.

The effects of Boston were overcome through the administrative skill of James O'Connell of Little Rock, Arkansas, and the work of Augustine Hennessey, the new secretary. They combined to bring about an excellent meeting in Chicago. Central to this meeting was a paper that initiated one of the most significant contributions of the American Church to the Church Universal. It was, of course, John Courtney Murray's paper entitled "Governmental Repression of Heresy." I re-read this paper a few years ago and I see it as the American Church bespeaking its own history and heritage and finding a worthy spokesman for that maturation. Frank Connell responded to the paper from a strongly traditional standpoint but the interchange was marked by that *civilitas* so essential to constructive debate. Indeed, despite harsh criticism of his view, Murray maintained this level of *civilitas* until he was silenced in 1953.

In his articles in *Theological Studies* and in his replies to criticism and attacks, Murray developed what he had begun in his paper. His full achievement is permanently enshrined in the document, so important for American Catholics, that came out of Vatican II, the Declaration on Religious Liberty. One of the contributions Murray made to me as a theologian was his article on *Immortale Dei* of Leo XIII entitled "Contemporary Orientations of Church and State in the Light of History" (*TS*, 1949). Here he opened for me the historical limitations of a papal document and the inescapable dimension of relativity. While it took me a few years to extend this concept beyond the Church and State question, ultimately it opened for me the way to accept Vatican II and its consequences.

The Cincinnati meeting in 1949, for which I was President, offered several interesting developments. The first is personal but also part of what I had envisaged as a reason for having the Society. This was my own paper, "The Scientific Teaching of Theology." Reading it now, I do so with a kind of wry smile but, as Kojak said on television the other night, "It's charity when you forgive others but it's wisdom when you forgive yourself." Still, looking at my paper in the light of American Catholic theology in the late forties it was constructive. For what it attempted was to make "positive theology" a significant and integral part of theology. Difficult as it is to recreate a session that took place almost thirty years ago, I yet remember that I missed the thrust of John Murray's formal and critical response to my paper as well as Bernard Lonergan's questions from the floor. I think it was at least a couple years before I really caught their point, viz., that while I was using historical and positive sources I was not using them in a genuinely historical fashion; and secondly that my understanding of tradition was too inflexible because I read everything in the light of the contemporary magisterium. The first criticism I dealt with once I understood it. In this I

was considerably helped by Luke Salm's dissertation on positive theology. The second criticism, however, took a long time for me to break through because of my own understanding of doctrinal development in the limited framework of implicit to explicit. What I find of particular interest now, however, is that at the end of the paper I noted the problems for which I had no answer:

It has also been necessary to by-pass or simply touch upon problems of controversy that call for extensive discussion. To mention a few: practical details of a harmonious relation between the work of Scripture and theology [I didn't get a hold on that until 1959]; the relations between dogmatic definition and the deposit of revelation [not only more complex now but a much more profound issue than I imagined then]; the homogeneity of theology and dogma [since I thought there was only one theology I saw no real problem]; the exact place of the theological conclusion in this homogeneity both in itself and its relation to dogmatic development [idem as above—what a simple world we left behind us when we stepped up to the bar and began to drink historical consciousness!]. All these I felt it necessary to put aside since it seemed to me that they called for a discussion and study beyond the limits of this paper" (*CTSA Proceedings* 4 [1949], 172-73).

Another point that I think should be recorded is that it was at my suggestion that Bernard Lonergan was given the Cardinal Spellman Award. I had struggled through his articles on *Gratia Operans* and the *Verbum* in St. Thomas and had been forced to see that this was quite a new horizon for people like myself who were teaching *De gratia* and *De Deo Trino*. As it turned out the choice was quite prophetic.

Two important innovations took place at this meeting that played important roles in the development of the Society. One was the kind of para-constitutional proposal that the Secretary and Treasurer by agreement retain their offices permanently. Thus, at some point, it is essential to highlight the work of Aloysius McDonough and James Rea in any history of the Society. Their collaboration insured the continuity of the Society as nothing else could have. The other achievement of the Cincinnati meeting was to initiate the tradition of a presidential suite as a hospitality room. Many of us early members feel that this really helped to jell the Society into a community. It was in these informal discussions that the idea of regional meetings took shape. Greater note should be taken of these regional meetings, in particular those of the Washington-Baltimore region that were so valuable in the debates relative to dogma and Scripture studies.

A final point of our early history concerns the crisis created by the combination of having a hospitality suite and the fact that a number of our theologians did not take personally the tract *De justitia* and so did not pay for the buffet dinner. I had to get the money from St. Paul's College to bail us out.

As long as I am an old man passing out free advice I will conclude with a suggestion that has struck me as I was preparing and writing this memoir. Might it not be a good idea to appoint a committee to select several seminal papers drawn from the volumes of the *Proceedings*?



They could show both the development and contribution of the Society to American Catholic theology.

EUGENE BURKE, C.S.P.  
*La Jolla, California*

St. Joseph's Seminary  
Dunwoodie, N. Y.

April 25, 1948

Reverend and dear Father:

The first meeting of what it is hoped will develop into a "Theological Society" for the United States and Canada is to be held in New York City, on June 25th and 26th, with headquarters at the Commodore Hotel. This inaugural session is under the sponsorship of His Eminence Francis Cardinal Spellman. We cordially invite you to attend this foundation meeting. The general response to this invitation will, of course, determine the fate of the society.

Although some of the sessions will be organizational in nature, it is planned to have at least three papers. The papers will be read by Dr. J. Joseph Bluett, S. J., of Woodstock College, Md., Dr. William R. O'Connor, of St. Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie, N. Y., and Dr. Francis J. Connell, C.S.S.R., of Catholic University, Washington, D.C. It is planned also to begin the sessions with a special Mass at 11 o'clock on the morning of the 25th and to hold the last session on the afternoon of the 26th, for the convenience of those who can spare only a short time. Other details will be forthcoming in a later communication.

Enclosed you will find a self-addressed post-card. If you expect to attend the meeting, will you kindly fill it out and return it IMMEDIATELY. This will in no way oblige you to be present. But we need this preliminary information AT ONCE, in order to make more detailed plans, both in regard to the size of the meeting place and the number of hotel reservations which will be necessary. Many will plan to stay at rectories or with religious communities, and in these days of crowded hotels we must be able to estimate our needs far in advance.

Sincerely yours

FRANCIS J. CONNELL  
(President pro tem)

JAMES EDWARD REA  
(Sec'y, Committee for arrangements)

LETTER OF INVITATION TO THE FIRST ANNUAL MEETING OF THE  
CTSA (1946)



THE FIRST OFFICERS OF THE CTSA (1946)

JAMES E. REA, *Treasurer*; GERARD YELLE, S.S., *Vice President*; JOSEPH C. FENTON, *Secretary*;  
(seated) FRANCIS J. CONNELL, C.S.S.R., *President*