

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR THE CTSA: THE COUNCIL ON THE STUDY OF RELIGION

Since the appearance of the last issue of the PROCEEDINGS of the CTSA, a series of meetings of considerable importance for the membership of our Society has taken place. In order to provide greater coordination of the work of existing associations of scholars in the field of theology and religious studies, and to promote broadly-supported projects of importance to all scholars working in the field, a new *Council on the Study of Religion* has been formed. This *Council* is an organization which will coordinate and facilitate the services of the following societies: American Academy of Religion, Catholic Theological Society of America, Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Society of Biblical Literature, Catholic Biblical Association of America, College Theology Society, and American Society of Church History. The new *Council* is being created in response to the need expressed by individual scholars and existing scholarly organizations for a greater degree of coordination of activities relating to the development of the academic study of religion as a scholarly discipline or a set of interrelated disciplines.

In the past two decades there has been a marked increase of interest in religion and theology as subjects of academic inquiry, attested by the rapid expansion and multiplication of departments of religion, religious studies and theology in public and private colleges and universities. For instance, many members of the CTSA have recently been involved in seminary mergers of one kind or another, in some cases inter-denominational, and frequently clustering around already existing universities. In addition, there has been a sharp rise in the numbers of scholars trained for professional work in the field and an increase in the number of published books and articles, research projects, and journals dealing with religion. Many methodologies are being employed, the related disciplines are becoming more inter-disciplinary, the scholars come from varying religious traditions, and not all of the students are preparing for a clerical career.

All of these changes suggest that the academic study of religion is

in a period of immense vitality. There is as yet, however, no consensus regarding the scope of the subject matter of religious and theological studies or the appropriate standards and procedures to be employed. There are a number of small societies and organizations that address themselves to aspects of the field but, until the establishment of the *Council on the Study of Religion*, none that has been generally looked to for leadership in developing the field of religion as a whole.

The tasks of the new *Council* are therefore: (1) to develop the most effective means of coordinating and extending the work of existing associations, (2) to define an appropriate focus for the field as a whole, (3) to plan and develop new cooperative programs in areas where present efforts are inadequate or absent, and (4) to interpret the new emphasis of the academic study of religion to other academic disciplines, to religious communities, to philanthropic and governmental agencies, and to the general public. Plans for establishing the *Council* were developed at a conference convened by the American Council of Learned Societies. Financial support for the initial conferences held during the past year was generously extended by the Danforth Foundation. The total membership of the organizations presently within the *Council* amounts to about 11,500. Dr. Claude Welch, Chairman of the Department of Religious Thought at the University of Pennsylvania, was elected Chairman of the *Council* by representatives of the above-mentioned learned societies at a conference held May 10-11, 1969 at the ACLS executive offices in New York. The first official meeting of the newly elected delegates to the *Council* is scheduled for October 26, 1969 in Boston.

These developments suggest that the CTSA is launched in new directions, and that membership in the CTSA will provide expanded services and advantages. Convinced of the importance of these new directions, the Board of Directors of the CTSA approved enthusiastically the aims and accomplishments of the formational stages of the *Council on the Study of Religion* and decided that the CTSA should become a founding member of the *Council*, pending the final approval of its Constitution by the CTSA. The total membership of the CTSA present at the June 18, 1969 business meeting of the Society in San Francisco ratified these actions of the Board. Warren

Reich, as Secretary of the CTSA, will be the CTSA member of the *Council's* standing committee of executive officers. The CTSA Board elected Gerald Van Ackeren to a three-year term as delegate to the CSR, Luke Salm to a two-year term, and Charles Curran as alternate to the two delegates.

What will be some of the immediate advantages of our membership in the CSR? An ambitious start has already been made on several mutually advantageous projects: joint meetings, a joint bulletin, and the coordination of operational procedures.

Joint annual meetings are already underway for the American Academy of Religion and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. If the CTSA chooses to move in this direction, it will not mean that our Society will lose its identity, nor will it mean that our annual convention will lose its identity. But there would be advantages in having simultaneous programs in the same city with one or two joint sessions. The ecumenical and interdisciplinary atmosphere which we have tried to accomplish in recent conventions through extensive invitations to non-members will be more easily accomplished; and at the same time it will not be necessary for us to promote an ecumenical membership campaign for the CTSA. Concomitant meetings would also greatly increase possibilities for contacts, interviews, and meetings of joint committees. Our next convention will be held as planned in Detroit in June, 1970. For 1971, the Board of Directors may choose the convention city of the AAR and the SSSR.

A major undertaking of the new *Council* will be the sponsorship of an International Congress of Learned Societies in the Field of Religion, scheduled to be held in the United States in August, 1972. Planning for the Congress was begun by a Committee of the Society of Biblical Literature which was later enlarged to include representatives from other academic societies in the field of religion. This Committee, by mutual agreement, has now become the Congress Committee of the newly formed *Council on the Study of Religion*. A special grant of \$35,000 has been provided by The American Council of Learned Societies to assist in developing the program. It is assumed that each participating group will plan its national meeting as part of the Congress and will conduct its own program enriched by the contributions to the total Congress. The invitation of the Insti-

tute for Antiquity and Christianity of Claremont University Center to hold the Congress in the Los Angeles area has been accepted by the Congress Committee. The tentative dates are August 18-25, 1972.

Some time early in 1970 it is hoped that every member of the CTSA will receive gratis without any increase of dues a subscription to a new joint bulletin, which will be called the *Bulletin of the Council on the Study of Religion*. For many years the Board of Directors of our Society has seen the need for a newsletter or bulletin of a professional nature for our members, and other similar societies (AAR, SSSR) already have bulletins or newsletters which are usually quite expensive to operate. The new *Bulletin*, which will appear about 5 times a year, will not be a journal of learned articles, but a professional bulletin for those engaged in the fields of religious studies and theology. It would contain news of projects, research programs and new educational programs; scholarships and grants available, federal funding, and information on state and federal educational offices pertaining to religious studies; news of interest to the individual societies: annual meetings, regional meetings, organizational news and the like; dissertations completed and in progress; placement referral services; and possibly occasional bibliographical services. The Board of Directors of the CTSA has decided that our Society will participate in this *Bulletin*, and our delegates to the CSR have been empowered to determine the financial contribution of the CTSA, not to exceed \$1,000 for the first year without further authorization. Patrick Granfield, editor of the *American Ecclesiastical Review*, will be the CTSA's contributing editor for the *Bulletin*, assisted by Warren Reich, who will provide organizational information concerning the CTSA. It is hoped that the *Bulletin* will provide many services and be a true professional bond between our members and their many colleagues.

Another immediate advantage for the CTSA will be the unifying and simplification of operational procedures of the Society. The various member-societies will have their joint membership lists and other information computerized, and in this way mailings, billings, and perhaps even the publication of our occasional *Directory* will be centralized and simplified.

Future undertakings of the *Council* which may make a substan-

tial contribution to the study of religion could include an overhauling of the area of book reviewing in the profusion of journals which offer this service, perhaps by inaugurating extensive in-depth reviews of notable works in a new *Book Review* or in a manner of distribution among the already existing journals so as to avoid unsystematic duplication of effort. Under the sponsorship of the *Council*, the editors of the various journals will be able to help one another, criticize one another, and promote cooperative ventures. Furthermore, through the work of the *Council*, the public image of our discipline could be changed from the quaint, the ecclesiastical, or the just plain irrelevant, to that of an emerging academic discipline which not only nourishes faith and Church but benefits academe and society.

The Catholic Theological Society of America is moving in a new direction. Through the *Council on the Study of Religion* we will be able to cooperate in projects designed to strengthen and advance scholarship and teaching in the field of religious studies, to enhance the understanding and status of the discipline, and to assist the individual scholar by providing him with a professional forum which is ecumenical and inter-disciplinary in scope.

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