

COLLEGE THEOLOGY SOCIETY FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY ESSAYS

PRESENT AT THE SIDELINES OF THE CREATION

Gerard S. Sloyan
Temple University

At the 2003 Annual Convention of the College Theology Society in Milwaukee, Sandra Yocum Mize presented some of her research for a history of the Society. I greatly appreciated her investigation of our Society's origins and its progress. She reminded me of things I had forgotten and told me much that I have never known. Let me add a few reminiscences that may be helpful to those who are new in the profession or relatively so.

The Korean War consumed the last two years of Harry Truman's second term as president, when Dwight Eisenhower was elected to succeed him. After the unsuccessful effort to contain Communism on the entire Korean peninsula at the cost of many lives on both sides, the eight Eisenhower years, 1952-1960 were largely a matter of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. Eisenhower was basically a retired general, on the basis of which he had been named president of Columbia University in a kind of travesty of academic life. His brother Milton who might have made a better chief executive rose in academia to become president of the Pennsylvania State University, well before Joe Paterno brought the Nittany Lions to another kind of eminence. The Eisenhower years were a lull of sorts in U.S. life bringing prosperity to the few, Republican style, and a scandal over his chief of staff who had accepted a gift of an alpaca coat. Days of innocence! Catholic college enrollments were still very much on the increase in the mid-1950s as a result of the G.I. Bill granting full tuition and books, not only for undergraduate and graduate study but even for any theological seminary of a veteran's choice. Many a convent motherhouse's instructional situation was being transformed into a bachelor's degree-granting institution in those years, at first for the religious students only but then shortly for adult lay women in the surrounding areas. The teachers of religion in Catholic colleges and in the few universities of the mid-1950s were priests with a seminary education—no religious brothers, sisters or lay persons as yet.

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The only Catholic clergy who had higher degrees in theology were the few seminary professors with doctorates from European universities or the Catholic University of America who also did some college teaching. Some of the priest professors were reasonably good at it, although the religious congregations that conducted colleges often put those men in the religion classroom who had not been sent on for higher degrees in other disciplines. That was the case of my Newark archdiocesan priest teachers of religion at Seton Hall College in the late 1930s, although as it happened these men were as gifted as their colleagues who held New York University, Columbia or Fordham M.A.s and Ph.D.s in other branches of study. But such was not universally the case. Moreover, the few English language textbooks that existed at the time were translated versions of the dogmatic and moral tracts, as they were called, taught in seminaries. Such were the four volumes written by members of the New York province of Jesuits named Doyle, Chetwood and Herzog and another series translated from the French entitled respectively *Bible, Life, and Worship* by a modest man identified on the flyleaf as “A Seminary Professor” who may, in fact, have been a Brother of the Christian Schools.¹ An exception was the series produced for men, *Religious Outlines for Catholic Colleges* by John Montgomery Cooper, founder of the Department of Religious Education at the Catholic University of America. They were what they claimed to be, outlines on the basis of which courses could be constructed. Unfortunately, few instructors of the time had the research skills to follow up the leads Cooper provided in periodical and other literature. Those who did offered classroom instruction on a par with courses in history, sociology and political science, unlike those that were based on manuals in theology. His early interest in cultural anthropology led him to found the University’s department in that subject after a long career in religion teaching. A feature of the Cooper series was that it unabashedly sought commitment to Catholic faith. There was no dispassionate exposition of the truths of faith or the Christian way of life. He exhorted Catholic men to live their Catholicity to the full. A few Catholic women’s colleges adopted the series for use.

As to what brought the Society of Catholic College Teachers of Sacred Doctrine (SCCTSD) into existence, it was not so much the generally jejune character of the classroom teaching of religion based on the seminary courses and textbooks available as it was the professional feelings of the men and women engaged in the work. They knew they were poorer prepared at the graduate level than faculty members in

¹For bibliographical information on these and other series see the writer’s “Bernard Cooke: Creator of the Need for Suitable Theology Texts” in Michael Barnes and William Roberts, eds. *A Sacramental Life* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2003): 33-38.

other departments. Some of the priest teachers doubled in brass as chaplains of women's colleges (and some in colleges of men), a detail that led colleagues to discount their academic seriousness. A lack of respect came from another quarter. The various religious brother, sister, and regular and secular clergy college presidents invariably had doctorates in other fields. This, coupled with their remembered formation in a religious institute or seminary, qualified them in their own minds as knowing more about what should be going on in religion departments than the people instructing several sections of fifty students and more. There was an unhealthy smugness abroad among the administrators of colleges, very few of them laity in the early 1950s, with respect to the quality of religion teaching in classrooms they never visited. They knew it had to be inferior because its practitioners had never written a Ph.D. dissertation like them. Before leaving the instructional and administrative situations in Catholic colleges I should mention that the Protestant college scene was near identical if ordained minister were to be substituted for priest. Two notable exceptions were the religious sister Ph.D.s in philosophy who taught religion courses and the Protestant women professors of English who offered courses in the safely termed (for the benefit of their ministerial colleagues) "The Bible as Literature."

Let me name a few of the early agitators who brought the Society into existence. They were chiefly members of a Washington, a New York, and a South Bend axis. In the District of Columbia they were a triad, John Harvey, an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales, and Rose Eileen Masterman of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, both on the faculty of Dunbarton College (no longer existent and now the site of the Howard University School of Law), and Eugene Burke of the Congregation of St. Paul at Trinity College and the Catholic University of America School of Sacred Theology. The New York area people were primarily Brother Alban of Mary, F.S.C., of Manhattan College but in a minor role Elbert Rushmore of Fordham University and Francis Keating of St. Peter's College, both of the Society of Jesus. The South Bend conspirators were chiefly James Mark Egan of the Order of Preachers at St. Mary's College School of Theology and his quieter Cajun colleague Leo Arnoult, abetted by fellow Dominican Thomas Donlan of the River Forest House of Studies. I was not part of the earliest planning, for the interesting reason that my two Dubuque priest colleagues at the Catholic University of America, Maurice Sheehy and William Russell (who died in 1953) were thought to be soft on theology. In the John M. Cooper tradition they were committed to affectivity with regard to faith in the undergraduate classroom, clearly considered by some a debilitating factor. I

attended the wake service of the sister president of Trinity College, Washington, in the company of Msgr. Russell whom she had fired. He bore her no ill will, understanding her ideological stance.

In the final planning stages of the Society, possibly because I was thought the solitary boast of my department's tainted nature, I was invited to the large gathering at Fordham University that launched the Society and a smaller one in a Dunbarton College classroom. At the latter I floated Aquinas's description of the *scientia* we professed, *sacra doctrina*, as a compromise between the "religion" favored by Jesuit teachers and the "theology" of embattled Dominicans. St. Thomas was more at ease with *theologia* as the proper term for the branch of knowledge concerned with deity or godhead, likewise *virtus* and its opposite *vitium* as categories for the conduct of our life in Christ. I add one final note behind that friendly rivalry between the U.S. sons of Dominic and the much later of the two Saints Ignatius, born Iñigo. A comic poem entitled "The Last Shindig of *De Auxiliis*" describes the bull of Pope Clement VIII declaring the war between the protagonists of Luis de Molina and Domingo Bañez over grace, free will and divine foreknowledge to be at an end. The writhing serpent died slowly.

The American standard bearers were lined up behind Walter Farrell, O.P. who wrote the four-volume *Companion to the Summa*, used as a textbook in many women's college classrooms by Dominican chaplain-teachers, and behind a set of textbooks authored by John Fernan, S.J. and others at Le Moyne College, Syracuse, who claimed John Courtney Murray, S.J., their Woodstock College teacher, as inspirer. He gently repudiated this spiritual parentage once he examined them. If the priest teachers of a religious order and a congregation of clerics regular were especially vociferous in the founding of the Society, they were a numerical minority. The majority were the diocesan clergy, the Franciscan Friars and the Vincentian Fathers, the Benedictines, Basilians and priests of the Congregation of Holy Cross notably Robert Pelton, along with the religious brothers and sisters with graduate training in cognate fields like philosophy and history.

Other entrants in that earliest textbook derby were one for freshmen by Theodore Hesburgh, a young instructor at the University of Notre Dame, and Charles Sheedy the same, who wrote for sophomores. After an interval Albert Schlitzer did a textbook for juniors and another for seniors. There is one last detail that gave impetus to the founding of the Society. A man and a woman produced Ph.D. dissertations at the Catholic University of America in the early 1950s that surveyed the countrywide college theology situation, disclosing how threadbare it actually was. They were Sister Gratia Maher of the New York Province

of Sisters of Mercy and Father Roland G. Simonitsch of the Congregation of Holy Cross who lived out his teaching life at the University of Portland. A Catholic University requirement of 200 printed copies on sale by the University's Press managed to blow the cover of that regrettable secret.

Two publications of the Society contributed greatly to its earlier and later health. One was a mimeographed newsletter called *Magister* distributed by mail to members. It was edited by David Bowman who fled the West Baden, Indiana, Jesuit theologate enthusiastically to become my colleague in Washington in 1958. The other was the founding of *Horizons* by two members still lending luster to Villanova University, Bernard Prusak and Rodger Van Allen. I was on the board of the Society at the time and well remember a discussion in which some asked, "But are there enough members capable of writing articles of a quality to sustain such a journal?" I was happy to have joined with others in saying, "We need to find out. The demand—that and nothing else—will create the supply." And so it happened.

A final reminiscence comes from a later date. I had hoped that the founding of *Horizons* would help make the Society ecumenical in make-up as it had not been up to that time. In my last year on the Catholic University of America faculty, 1966-67, the department I had chaired for a decade made what I think was the country's first fulltime appointment of a professor of Protestant theology. *Horizons* published from the start articles and editorials by a professor of Asian religions at Sarah Lawrence College and very early a sprinkling of pieces by men at Catholic colleges but not of that persuasion. Unfortunately the trend did not continue, probably because contributors in numbers who were Catholics took a clearly first person plural stance in their discussions of theology. The disappearance of the word Catholic from the Society's title, by the way, touched on the case only obliquely. It followed lengthy board discussion about the ambivalence of the adjective Catholic in SCCTSD. Did it modify College and Teachers both or one but not the other? College Theology became the description of the Society's proper concern by a vote at the annual meeting in Pittsburgh in 1967.

At the business meeting of the newly named Society the local bishop, a man well-known for his intellectual interests, was a guest. I was in the middle of a two-year term as president at the time and disclosed at it that I had accepted an appointment at Temple University in Philadelphia, a state-related institution. It was a first for a priest outside the framework of Catholic institutions (although Bernard Häring had taught a semester at Brown and John Courtney Murray the same at Yale). I was taken aback by the valedictory with a tear in his voice

that the bishop accorded me, as if I were a modern Renan who had *déposé la soutaine* in Issy-les-Moulineaux. It told me something about Catholic provincialism and the few strides that that Church had made toward academic ecumenism. College Theology Society membership has broadened somewhat in the last decade and biennial meetings jointly with the Baptist Professors of Theology have been a good move. Now is the time for the pages of *Horizons* to solicit articles from professors in the Protestant and Orthodox/Catholic Eastern Rite classroom.