

CTS CONVENTION REPORT

Report of the Sixty-Ninth Annual Convention of the College Theology Society June 1–4, 2023

MEMBERS of College Theology Society (CTS) explored media and mediation with the theme “Theology and Media(tion): Rendering the Absent Present” at the Sixty-Ninth Annual CTS Convention, held from Thursday, June 1, through Sunday, June 4, 2023, on the campus of Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut. One hundred and sixty-seven people registered for and participated in the convention, which was held in conjunction with the meeting of the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion (NABPR). The call for papers for the conference, organized by cochairs Stephen Okey (St. Leo University) and Katherine Schmidt (Molloy University), noted that “mediation is about the dynamic between that which is present and that which is absent, a dynamic at the heart of so many religious traditions as they encounter the divine” and invited the society to explore how digital technologies, the pandemic, and cultural shifts challenge “traditional perspectives on embodiment, ritual, sociality, and aesthetics.”

Members of the CTS and NAPBR presented eighty-three papers with eight paper responses, and eleven people participated in three panel discussions across forty-three sectional meetings. In addition, the convention included three plenary addresses, as well as the NAPBR presidential address. The opening plenary, “Religion(s) in the Ruins of the Temples,” was delivered by Robert Orsi (Northwestern University) on Thursday evening. On Friday afternoon, Hannah Reichel (Princeton Theological Seminary) offered “Be/longing—A Public Feeling?” Saturday morning included a plenary talk by Joseph Flipper (University of Dayton), “*Numipunm Wéetespe* (Nez Perce Earth): The Land and the Mediation of Catholic Peoplehood on the Palouse.” Kate Hanch of First St. Charles United Methodist Church (Missouri) gave the NAPBR presidential address on Saturday afternoon entitled “The Middle Way Is No Way: How ‘Centrist’ and ‘Moderate’ Discourse Perpetuate the *Status Quo*.”

CTS President Brian Flanagan (then at Marymount University) convened the society's Business Meeting Saturday afternoon. After welcoming the assembled members of the society, President Flanagan shared information about the CTS's forthcoming two-year visioning process. The visioning process is designed to be contemplative and synodal in nature as well as rooted in dialogue and shared discernment. The CTS board of directors has engaged CTS member Mary-Paula Cancienne, RSM (Georgian Court University) to coordinate the process. A working group, including Kathy Lilla Cox (University of San Diego), M. T. Davila (Merrimack College), Brian Flanagan, Craig Ford (St. Norbert College), Flora x. Tang (University of Notre Dame), and Sandra Yocum (University of Dayton), will assist Cancienne in the process.

Flanagan shared the board's recently drafted "Statement on Gun Violence." After an opening paragraph noting that a surge in gun violence in the past five years "has resulted in the deaths of nearly 100,000 persons" in the United States, the statement continues:

The College Theology Society (CTS) understands these deaths as the deaths of persons made in God's image with an inalienable dignity and the right to flourish as beloved children of God. This understanding challenges CTS members—as scholars committed to reading the "signs of the times" in the light of the Gospel proclamation of love and peace—to use our expertise to account for and address the structural roots of gun violence. Silence and indifference are not options. We must speak and act, denouncing social and ideological forces that fuel gun violence and diminish human life, and announcing a radical message of peace. The CTS calls itself and all its members to use whatever resources we possess—as scholars, teachers, ministers, and activists—to shed light on the causes and effects of gun violence and foster a praxis of life that interrupts and seeks to end this terrible reality.

The complete statement, along with an accompanying set of commitments and resources, can be found on the CTS website.

Finally, Flanagan updated the society with some announcements about the CTS's involvement with other groups and societies over the past year. On February 6, 2023, the leadership of CTS gathered virtually with leaders of the Association of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS), the Academy of Catholic Theology, the Black Catholic Theology Symposium, the Canadian Theological Society, the Catholic Theological Society of America, and the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, along with the Catholic Theology Society of America (CTSA)'s liaisons with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB). The conversation circulated around shared challenges facing the various societies, as well as possibilities for future

collaborations. The society's membership was also invited by the USCCB to participate with theologians in the United States in two synodal conversations. These conversations were held on May 25, 2023, and June 6, 2023. Finally, Fr. Dennis Holtschneider of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities invited the CTS to participate in a project examining the place of theology and religious studies in the curricula of Catholic institutions of higher education. Flanagan's address concluded by offering thanks and appreciation for the work of board officers and members.

Vice President Julia Brumbaugh (Regis University, Colorado) announced the election results and new appointees to committees. In the fall special election, Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier (Loyola Marymount University) was elected senior diversity, equity, and inclusion officer, Christina Astorga (University of Portland) was elected diversity, equity, and inclusion officer, and Milton Javier Bravo (Edgewood College) was elected diversity, equity, and inclusion officer-elect. In the regular spring elections, Mara Brecht (Loyola University Chicago) was elected vice president, Paul Schutz (Santa Clara University) was elected secretary, and Nathaniel Holmes Jr. (Florida Memorial University) and Karen Teel (University of San Diego) were elected as new at-large members of the board. Joseph Flipper was elected as diversity, equity, and inclusion officer-elect. Brumbaugh thanked other CTS members for their willingness to run for office, as well as the Nominations Committee for their work to generate nominations.

Brumbaugh asked for the society to ratify by vote the members of the Awards and Nominations Committees for the upcoming year, and thanked members who have concluded their service. The 2023–24 Awards Committee will be chaired by Mary Roche (College of the Holy Cross, Massachusetts) and include Christopher Bellitto (Kean University, New Jersey), Kelly Johnson (University of Dayton, Ohio), Ramon Luzarraga (St. Martin's University, Washington), and Laura Taylor (College of St. Benedict/St. John's University, Minnesota). Brumbaugh offered special thanks to James Bretzke, SJ (John Carroll University, Ohio), for his work on this committee over the past several years and his leadership as chair this past year. The 2023–24 Nominations Committee will include Christina Astorga, Anita Houck (St. Mary's College, Indiana), and Mary Kate Holman (Fairfield University, Connecticut). Brumbaugh acknowledged the service of Chris Hadley, SJ (Jesuit School of Theology, Santa Clara, California), for the past two years on this committee.

Brumbaugh requested a motion to ratify outgoing at-large board members Katherine Greiner (Carroll College, Montana) and SimonMary Asehe Ahiokhai (University of Portland, Oregon) to serve on the Committee on Resolutions along with the vice president (*ex officio*). Brumbaugh explained

that no resolutions were submitted for consideration during the past year. Brumbaugh announced that Kathryn Lilla Cox (University of San Diego, California), Colleen Carpenter (Carleton College, Minnesota), and Craig Ford (St. Norbert College, Wisconsin) served on the Teaching and Learning Committee this year and thanked them for their service. Brumbaugh announced the members who completed their board service and invited the membership to offer their thanks for the generous labor of the following people: Julia Brumbaugh for service as vice president, George Faithful (Dominican University, California) for service as secretary, Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier as senior DEI officer, and two board members at-large, Katherine Greiner and SimonMary Asele Ahiokhai. Finally, Brumbaugh encouraged members to nominate themselves or others for the following position openings: CTS president elect, DEI officer elect, and two at-large board members.

The executive director of national conventions, Dan Rober (Sacred Heart University, Connecticut), offered a special welcome to the attendees of the society's first on the ground national convention since before the COVID-19 pandemic. Rober announced the theme of the upcoming 2024 convention, "Vulnerability, Abuse, and Flourishing," to be held in Denver, Colorado, at Regis University. Christina Lledo Gomez (BBI The Australian Institute of Theological Education [BBI-TAITE]) and John Sheveland will serve as volume editors. Along with outgoing vice president Julia Brumbaugh, Dan Justin (Regis University) and Kevin Burke, SJ (Regis University), will constitute the 2024 local host team. Rober noted that the 2025 convention is planned to take place in the Midwest, though the society is still in pursuit of a host campus. Rober also indicated that the society is engaged in internal conversation about the possibility of a regular four-year convention cycle (with a three-year rotation through regions, followed by an online convention), as well as in conversation with the leadership of other organizations (for example, CTSA and ACHTUS) about the possibility of coordinating convention cycles. These planning discussions are in progress.

The secretary of the society, George Faithful, reported that membership numbers are consistent with the previous year, with 498 active members (compared to 502 active members in 2022). This year's membership numbers represent a return to pre-pandemic membership levels (504 in 2019). Faithful reported that the vast majority of our current members are full members, with graduate students constituting the next largest share of the membership. Faithful also encouraged members to take advantage of the "Jobs and Other Opportunities" feature of the society's website so as to advertise employment and project opportunities directly from our membership.

Treasurer Nicole Reibe (Loyola University, Maryland) reported that the society's finances are healthy. Due to the decreased costs of virtual meetings,

as well as some investments, the society has been able to create a monetary cushion. In 2022, the society's assets totaled approximately \$334,000. At the time of the 2023 annual convention, the society had total assets of approximately \$399,000, though this does not include the cost of the convention itself. Donations to the Fr. Sloyan Annual Fund were at \$610 at the time of the report. Reibe challenged society members to meet our collective goal of raising \$3,000 for this fund.

Director of Research and Publications Reid Locklin (University of Toronto, Canada) announced that the CTS has been working with a new editor at Orbis Books, Thomas Hermans-Webster. He also noted that the 2022 Annual Volume, *"Why We Can't Wait": Racism in the Church*, edited by Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos (Seattle University, Washington), Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier, and Elisabeth T. Vasko (Duquesne University, Pennsylvania), was published in April 2023. The volume includes seven plenary addresses and invocations, the presidential award acceptance speech, and eleven peer-reviewed essays. It also features a new and dynamic cover design and footnotes rather than endnotes. Conference participants were encouraged to submit essays to the forthcoming 2023 Annual Volume, "Theology and Media(tion)," which will be edited by Stephen Okey and Katherine Schmidt.

Horizons editor Elena Procaro-Foley (Iona University, New York) heralded the golden anniversary of *Horizons*. *Horizons* is celebrating its anniversary in volumes 50 and 51, with theological roundtables discussing reprints of now-classic articles from past volumes. The celebration of the fiftieth anniversary also includes a special section of the journal's website, reflections from previous editors, and virtual issues that provide discussion of additional significant articles from the archive. Procaro-Foley also announced that *Horizons* and *Theological Studies* have created a joint style guide in an effort to make submissions easier for potential authors. The new style guide garnered full support from the editorial boards of both journals and marks a unique moment of cooperation between academic journals. Finally, Procaro-Foley explained that *Horizons* has moved to the status of "hybrid open access" with Cambridge University Press, allowing qualifying authors to have their work available without a paywall. The executive director of digital media, Katherine Schmidt, announced changes to the society's website and invited members to share their pictures of the convention, as well as ideas for the society's social media presence.

Saturday evening included a liturgy celebrated at Sacred Heart University's Chapel of the Holy Spirit, followed by the CTS Reception and Awards Banquet at the university's picturesque West Campus Guest House. CTS president Brian Flanagan delivered the presidential address entitled "Theology, Theologians, and Humility" and asked how we as theologians and scholars of religion can

meet the pressures that our institutions of higher education are facing by embracing the virtue of humility in community with one another. Mary Roche presented the society's writing awards. William Portier (emeritus, University of Dayton) was awarded Best Article for "Unintended Ultramontaniam" in *Theological Studies* vol. 83, no. 1, March 2022, pages 54–69. Jessica Coblenz (St. Mary's College, Indiana) received the Best Book Award for *Dust in the Blood: A Theology for Life with Depression* (Liturgical Press, 2022). The Susan G. Perry Best Graduate Student Essay was awarded to Céire Kealty (Villanova University, Pennsylvania) for "Knit to the Cross." Kathryn Lilla Cox, chair of the Teaching and Learning Committee, awarded the 2022 Monika Helwig Teaching Excellence Award to Mary Roche (College of the Holy Cross, Massachusetts).

CTS members enjoyed the return of a fully in-person convention. People conversed and chatted over meals, ran the 5K, and gathered in the evenings for relaxation and fun. Dan Rober deserves recognition for serving double duty as executive director of national conventions and local host. Also deserving of thanks are all those whose labor, intelligence, and care contributed to the success of this year's meeting.

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