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Associations and Advocacies The Professional Citizenship of the Society

This chapter recounts how the Society has taken its place in the wider world of professional associations. It also reports on several limited actions which the Society has taken from time to time to have an impact upon public affairs.

The Society and Other Learned Associations

In July of 1968 James Luther Adams, then president of the Society, wrote a carefully composed letter at the behest of the Board of Directors to the American Council of Learned Societies to explore the possibility that the American Society of Christians Ethics could be considered for membership in the ACLS. President Adams documented the activities of the Society with some care, enclosed the latest membership roster, stressed the accomplishments of those who made up the Society, indicated the nature and scope of its programs, and offered to supply any additional information that might be useful to the *ad hoc* committee that is, under normal circumstances, appointed to consider such a request. About two months later, the president of the ACLS, Frederick Burkhardt, responded to Adams by indicating that their Board had considered his letter and had taken no formal action, but that a clear consensus had developed that it would be "inadvisable" for the ASCE to submit an application to Council as-a-whole in a formal manner.

The stated reasons for this adverse reaction included hesitation to increase the number of constituent societies in the ACLS unless by doing so it would add substantially to the number of disciplines or to the number of individual scholars represented. The letter from Burkhardt also stated that "it was felt that the restricted range of interest of the American Society of Christian Ethics, its relative youth, and its lack of a publication medium also

militated against admission."

Behind these publicly stated reasons were a number of unresolved issues in the politics of the scholarly study of religion. The ACLS was understandably concerned not to have to relate to too many separate societies in the field of religion--and it must be admitted that there were (and still are) a great many of them. The American Academy of Religion, moreover, at the time seemed to many to be an emerging kind of parent group, and representatives from it had played a central role in a conference about the relationship of the ACLS to groups concerned with the study of religion held at Princeton University just before Burkhardt's letter was sent to the president of the ASCE. Moreover, any group in the academic world dealing with the subject of religion, and more particularly one having in its name an identifiable concern for a confessional tradition, operates in such matters with a strike against it. The membership of the Society could take comfort, however, from Burkhardt's assurance that "this decision in no way reflects a judgment upon the quality or the effectiveness of the American Society of Christian Ethics as a scholarly organization, nor does lack of constituent membership in any way preclude your members from the various ACLS programs of assistance to humanistic scholarship."

While many of those having key roles in the Princeton discussions were identified with it, The American Academy of Religion, for all its phenomenal growth and remarkably diversified annual meetings, has never become the kind of overarching group that could establish contact between the several professional organizations in the study of religion and a group like the ACLS. However, near the end of the nineteen sixties another group emerged that promised to perform some of the coordinating functions between the various societies in the field of religion--functions that would need to be performed by any single body likely to qualify as a representative of all the groups concerned with the study of religion.

Word about the formation of The Council for the Study of Religion was first given to the Board of the Society at the 1970 meeting. Some preliminary explorations had been started in the fall of 1969 to determine the degree to which the Society would be interested in joining such a group. It was decided at the 1970 meeting that a liaison committee be appointed and that the Society should send an observer to the next GSR meeting to report back with a recommendation for an appropriate time for the Society to make application for membership. That time came very soon, for at the January 1971 Board meeting it was reported that the Society "had been accepted as a member of the newly

formed Council on the Study of Religion." John Satterwhite was named a delegate to the new organization with a term to expire in 1973 and Max Stackhouse to a term to expire in 1972. The Society agreed to make a contribution of fifty cents per member for *The Bulletin* and seventy-five cents per member for the general budget. It also assumed the per member for the general budget to the GSR meetings. The travel expenses of its delegates to the GSR meetings. The 1972 Board meeting received a report from Stackhouse Stackhouse about the work of the new group. Stackhouse detailed its efforts to support publication and scholarship, its plans to make a directory of undergraduate departments of religion, its role in planning the 1972 International Congress on the Study of Religion, and the possibility it would be setting up a computerized administrative office to handle routine things (like dues billing for member societies). The Board struggled with whether or not the benefits to be derived warranted the sizeable financial commitment entailed. It was pointed out that larger organizations, like the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature, would probably benefit more from the services of such an office than the much smaller ASGR. (Ironically, time would see the two larger groups cease to use the central services of the Council, and the ASGR continue to use them, not only for dues collection purposes, but for printing *The Selected Papers* and *The Annual*. Douglas Sturm was named to be a delegate and became the third person to represent the Society in this way. In future years delegates to the Council would include Edward Long, Jr. (calendar years 1973-75), Glen Stassen (1976-78), and Peter Paris (1979-1984), as well as the executive secretaries serving *ex-officio* during their terms of office. Douglas Sturm also served as a delegate 1973-74 and 1975-77 and rendered its chief important service to the GSR. He was elected its vice-chairman in 1975 and thereafter became its chairman for a term.

The Council for the Study of Religion proposed to hold a conference in Washington bringing together all of its member societies. This was first proposed for September of 1973 and the Board authorized the Society to participate to the extent of planning and conducting one or two plenary sessions, but was not willing to change the date of its annual meeting to coincide with this contemplated larger meeting. The meeting subsequently was rescheduled for October of 1974 as a joint meeting of the AAR/SBL/SSSR. In the report on the work of the GSR given to the 1974 meeting of the Board the creation of TOLL (Teaching Opportunities Inventory Listing) was announced and the service charge of \$25.00 yearly to participating institutions made

known. It was also reported that the GSR had been pointed to administer travel grants, in amounts of \$250-\$600, made available from the ACLS. Across the subsequent years the GSR has undertaken other projects, including cooperation with The Women's Caucus on Religious Studies in the development of affirmative action programs, efforts to stimulate the establishment of religious studies programs in community colleges, and the initiation and launching of *The Religious Studies Review*. While the financial costs of membership in the Council have been high they have provided two distinct benefits. On the one hand, membership in the GSR has made an enormous difference in the administrative work of our executive secretary. The burden of sending out dues notices, keeping the roster up-to-date, and attending to the production arrangements involved in publishing *The Annual* would be unbearable without the help afforded by the GSR. On the other hand, the support of the GSR helps to advance the cause of scholarship in the field of religion in ways that the Society would not be able to do acting by itself.

In the early 1970s a number of groups involved in the scholarly study of religion decided to hold an International Congress of Learned Societies in the field of Religion, in Los Angeles, California, September 1-5, 1972. The Board of Directors began to plan the Society's participation in this gathering at the 1970 meeting, when an invitation was reported to it by the executive secretary. The invitation, which came through Joseph Hough on behalf of a committee headed by James Robinson, called for moving our annual meeting to coincide with the dates of the Congress, as many other groups were doing. The invitation was discussed at length, with particular attention devoted to the purpose of the Congress, whether it would be to the purpose of the annual meeting of the Society, and to what extent membership in the ASGR overlapped the membership in other societies involved. Following this discussion the Board decided respectfully to decline to hold either its 1972 or 1973 annual meeting in conjunction with the International Congress, but indicated that it would encourage its members to attend. It also empowered the Executive Committee to see if arrangements could be made for the Society to participate in the general planning of the Congress, such as participating in the general planning of a session with the *Societas Ethica*. Negotiations were undertaken and at the 1972 Board meeting the vice-president reported that the Society had been asked to sponsor a Saturday session from 10:30 a.m. to noon, and that planning for other events had begun in consultation with

the chairperson of the ethics section of the AAR. When the vice-president, along with other members of the Society who were in attendance at the planning sessions of the Congress in Atlanta in the fall of 1971, learned that the Society would have responsibility for this Saturday session, a consensus developed that Douglas Sturm should be invited to deliver the address as a representative of the Society. Agreement to invite him to do this was made, without Sturm's knowledge, through mail ballot, and the invitation extended to him as a surprise and as a token of appreciation for the many things he had done for the Society and the high esteem in which its members view his scholarship.

Incumbent president Long, who planned to attend, agreed to preside at the session at which Professor Sturm spoke on "Corporations, Constitutions, and Covenants: A Study of Forms of Human Relations and the Problem of Legitimacy." Sturm's address was subsequently published in *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* XLI (September 1973): 331-354.

The meeting in Los Angeles was valuable in several other ways. Docent Harry Aronson, of Lund, Sweden, the secretary of *Societas Ethica*, attended the Congress with other several other colleagues to introduce their Society to the States and contacts between European and American ethicists were made that have had all too few counterparts across the years. The Society has tried a number of times to initiate better contacts with the *Societas Ethica* with letters of cordial greetings, with encouragement of its members to attend the European meetings whenever possible, and with an occasional distribution of the membership list of our European colleagues in the mailings to our members. But it cannot be claimed that we have kept the relationships between the two Societies as functional and as productive as might have been the case.

At the Los Angeles meeting the president of the Society was also asked to preside at a general morning session of the Congress, and to introduce Professor Dorothy Söille of Cologne, Germany, who spoke on "Political Theology and the Liberation of Man."

The session at which Sturm spoke also entertained and passed, with but one dissenting vote, a motion proposed by John C. Bennett, a former president of the Society, calling for the following action: (1) that a committee be appointed by the presiding chairman to draft a resolution expressing moral disgust over the dehumanization of man as perpetuated by the continued and expanded bombing of North Vietnam, and (2) that the text of such a statement be transmitted to the Program Steering Committee of the Congress with the request that some means be found, possibly at some plenary meeting

of the Congress, to allow it to endorse such a statement. The statement, as prepared by the committee (which consisted of John C. Bennett, Victor Obenhaus, and William Byron) was drawn up as follows, and sent with the resolution:

The International Congress of the Learned Societies in the Field of Religion, organized around the theme of "Religion and the Humanizing of Man" wishes to reaffirm the value of Human-life-as-such in Indochina. Moreover, we urge the American people to comprehend and ponder the human consequences of the fact that today in their name, land and cultures in Southeast Asia are being subjected to continuous and disproportional destruction.

As we invite all Americans to reject on religious and moral grounds the slaughter in Southeast Asia, we urge them as well to press upon their national government the moral necessity of ending it now. This statement was transmitted to the leadership of the Congress with the urgent request that adequate opportunity be given for the Congress or its membership to indicate their support and agreement.

It is difficult to be precise about the relationship between the ASCE and the ethics section of the AAR. Many members of the Society are active participants and even officers in the AAR group. Through them the interchange between the program activities of the two groups has been very evident. But the Society has done very little as an organization to relate to the AAR except as this relationship is entailed through the activities of the GSR. In a similar fashion the Society has been more than willing to have the Society for Values in Higher Education hold gatherings in conjunction with its annual meeting, but has not joined with the SVHE in any program planning or joint activity.

At the annual meeting in 1974, a floor-introduced motion was passed which instructed the Board of Directors to investigate during the succeeding year the advisability of periodically holding the annual meeting of the Society simultaneously with the annual meetings of other related societies. A study of overlapping memberships showed that 241 out of 527 members of the ASCE were also members of AAR, and it was argued that having meetings together would help to save money on travel expenses and also increase the interaction between the Society and other groups. The membership of the Society was polled by mail to ascertain whether it thought that such an arrangement would be helpful. Only eleven responses came back. After considerable

discussion, the Board, by a vote of 13 to 1, decided to recommend to the annual meeting in 1975 that the Society continue to meet separately. Efforts from the floor to propose an alternative that involved meeting with another group every third year were defeated by a margin of nearly 5 to 1, and the meeting pattern has remained unchanged ever since.

The Society has also engaged over the years in conversations with representatives from different organizations exploring possibilities of cooperation. For instance, in 1963 there were discussions between the executive committee of the Board of Directors and the Executive Director of the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies exploring whether the Society could have a role in the development of a theological section of the Institute. The next year Paul Ramsey, who had been instrumental in opening up the initial conversations, reported that the prospect of establishing such a center looked dim. Nothing further seems to have come of this matter.

In 1971, upon the fiftieth anniversary of the American Civil Liberties Union, the Board sent greetings to that organization. One of the most recent actions of the Society in cooperating with various other professional organizations was a decision in 1983 to support the National Humanities Alliance with a per capita apportionment of eighteen cents. The Alliance is a coalition of some forty learned societies, libraries, and educational institutions which present their interests to the Congress and governmental agencies. The Society undoubtedly will continue to find ways of being a good member of the community of learned societies.

Good Causes and Public Stands

The Society has been primarily devoted to the nurture of scholarship and to the cultivation of collegiality among those persons who are professionally concerned with Christian ethics. But from time-to-time it has expressed itself on a social, moral, or public policy matter about which some of its members have been sufficiently concerned to press for action. There has been no regular pattern to the appearance of such statements and they have been handled in a variety of ways. The work of the task forces on white racism, conspiracy trials, and the celebration of the nation's bicentennial, that has been described in the previous chapter, also should be considered as part of this overall genre of the Society's work in dealing with public questions.

Apart from the work of the task forces mentioned, the first action of the Board that comes under this category

was taken at the 1968 meeting, when the Board recommended that the Society endorse the 1940 Statement on Academic Freedom of the American Association of University Professors. At the same meeting the Board instructed the president to write to the AAUP requesting that consideration be given to the formulation of standards of faculty responsibility in cases of the disability of faculty members. It also asked the president to inquire of the American Association of Theological Schools just how academic freedom was to be understood in relationship to the professed religious aims of certain types of educational institution.

In 1969, the annual business meeting considered a resolution presented by Preston Williams "urging that all small, informal theological discussion groups throughout the nation open their groups to participation by Black churchmen." The implication of this motion was to urge members to press for such inclusion in groups to which they belonged. After vigorous discussion the motion was amended to include persons of other ethnic groups and was unanimously adopted.

The following year James Luther Adams raised in the Board meeting the possibility that the members of the Society should be concerned about the investment portfolios of the churches and theological schools with which they are associated, and urged that the Society consider ways to communicate about this issue to students and teachers in various institutions. No specific action was taken by the Board, although Frederick Garney suggested that the program committee might include a session on the matter in the program of the next annual meeting (which it did not do).

The 1971 Board also received a letter from Elizabeth Johns to John Satterwhite expressing concern over the status of women in the profession of Christian ethics and in the membership of the ASCE. The Board suggested that the matter should be given attention in the program for the following year. The program in 1972 did hear a paper on women's liberation but not one that specifically addressed the concerns of Elizabeth Johns's letter.

Six years later another resolution addressing a public policy matter was presented to the Society for adoption. A motion, proposed by the Board and adopted by the membership by acclamation, declared "It is the sense of the ASCE that the anniversary of Martin Luther King's birthday be approved privately recognized as a national holiday in the United States."

In 1980, another matter of great concern was considered by the Society. The subject for this action arose in the Saturday afternoon business meeting, which passed a

resolution in principle, leaving the final wording to be determined by the incoming Board at its Sunday morning session. The resolution expressed deep concern over the Vatican declaration against Hans Küng and its investigation of Edward Schillebeeckx and other Catholic scholars. It continued, "We acknowledge the concern of church authorities for the integrity of teaching in a pastoral setting. Nonetheless, we insist that to suppress creative and critical theological inquiry discourages theological scholarship within the church and has a chilling effect on the theological exploration necessary for the successful continuation of the ecumenical dialogue. Furthermore, to restrict creative and critical theological inquiry without following the requirements of due process offends against academic freedom, justice, and human rights." Another motion passed by the Society instructed that the previous motion be distributed to Pope John Paul II, Archbishop Jean Jadot (the apostolic delegate to the United States), the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at Vatican City, and to the press, e.g. through Religious News Service and National Catholic News Service.

At the meeting in 1981 Nancy Bancroft offered a resolution noting the resurgence of militant racism in the country's life. It noted that racist groups derive support for their propaganda from questionable scientific and academic works, some claiming a genetic basis for racial inferiority, and it declared that such special theories fuel and legitimate the activity of racist organizations. The resolution called upon all persons to condemn and counter racist activity and organizations, to scrutinize the propaganda and questionable academic literature upon which racism depends, and to renew both verbal and practical commitment to racial equality. The executive secretary was directed to circulate this statement to all Society members and to publish it in several places. He was also instructed to urge public officials to resist efforts to erode the principle of human rights. The Bancroft resolution, rather extensive in its scope and implications, solicited a floor discussion of some length and it was referred to a committee to report a revised version at an adjourned business session on Sunday morning. The revised version passed without difficulty.

Disturbed by the timing and logistics rather than the substance of both the Küng and the racism resolutions, the Board subsequently undertook to adopt a policy regarding the introduction of resolutions. It hoped to avoid the hassles that are created when the business meeting must be adjourned to Sunday morning in order to handle such matters. After considering the problem, even to the point of

thinking about adopting bylaws strictly determining procedures, the Board settled for an informal notice to the members asking that they submit any proposed resolution for consideration by the annual meeting to the president of the Society as early as possible, preferably no later than the end of the first plenary session. The president is then, after consultation with the Executive Committee, to name an *ad hoc* committee which can bring a report to the annual business meeting, suggesting adoption or rejection. The *ad hoc* committee also has the power to redraft the text. This informal understanding also has within it a declaration of general policy which reads: "The formulation and publication of resolutions on issues of the day is not among the purposes of the Society stated in its Constitution and By-laws. Occasionally however, issues arise that are especially pertinent to the Society's purpose. The Society needs to deliberate such resolutions with care but without disrupting the annual business meeting and the other activities of the annual meeting."

In 1982 it was learned that the National 4-H Center had denied the use of its facilities to the New Ways ministry. President Daniel Maguire was asked to make inquiry into the accuracy of this information and the reasons behind it. The New Ways Ministry provides a ministry of reconciliation and social justice for Catholic gay and lesbian persons and other sexual minorities. The investigation revealed that the 4-H Council had also refused the use of its facilities to such groups as Amnesty International, the Interreligious Task Forces on U.S. Food Policy, and the Religious Task Force for El Salvador. This information was reported in a memorandum to the members of the Society for their information and at its 1983 meeting the Board adopted a resolution that the Society will "not meet at the 4-H Center in the foreseeable future because of unanswered questions regarding that institution's respect for the rights of all persons."

This record of actions would hardly suggest the Society has become an advocacy or action group rather than a learned society. There is almost nothing here that constitutes the kind of political activity that would alter the tax status of the Society or commit its membership to a major partisan agenda. The actions taken by the Society witness in most cases to a high regard for the fundamental amenities of scholarship and a concern to protect the right of persons to pursue the truth without interference from external authorities or distortions from arbitrary pressures. It takes an enormous amount of time and effort from many individuals to sustain the ongoing life of even a modestly complex organization such as the Society. Almost

All of that effort is done voluntarily and even the executive secretaries, who carry the pivotal responsibility for keeping all things functioning smoothly, though paid a modest honorarium, contribute far beyond the call of duty. The activities that have been described in this section are crucial for making possible the interchange of ideas that occurs about the discipline through the programs of the Society. We will now look at the substantive content of the Society's work by examining the issues it has canvassed in the papers and panels that have constituted the programs at the annual meetings.

Part Three Substance