

Society of Catholic College Teachers of Sacred Doctrine

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Founded in 1953 as a national association of Catholic university and college professors of theology whose main objective is the improvement of the teaching of sacred science as a liberal (that is, nonprofessional) study above the secondary or high school level. In 1967, the society adopted a new name, the college theology society. This entry describes the history of the society from 1953–1967.

After much criticism in private circles, university workshops, and journals of the impoverished quality of religion courses then offered on Catholic campuses, this society began in 1953 as a constructive effort to remedy the situation. After preliminary meetings of small groups of teachers in Washington and Philadelphia, representatives of 47 eastern colleges meeting at Fordham University, New York City, on February 24, 1954, agreed on a provisional constitution.

The title chosen for the group (generally abbreviated to Sacred Doctrine Society) is self-explanatory. The word *doctrine* was chosen as being general enough to refer both to theology and the content of religion courses. At that time, a controversy was raging among college educators, dividing them into those who favored the academic learning of theology and those inclined to stress the pedagogical aspect of communicating religious truth. The Society was committed to be an open forum, uncommitted to either side of the controversy.

The ultimate purpose of the Society, according to its original constitution, was the assurance of a high academic level for its special discipline and assistance to professors for imparting solid and effective instruction in sacred science. This original intention was further explicated in more proximate aims that included: (1) the formulation of the proper and immediate aim and content of sacred doctrine curricula for Catholic colleges within the context of the total aim of Christian higher education; (2) the investigation of the suitability of sacred doctrine as a principle of interdisciplinary integration; (3) assistance in the development of programs genuinely intellectual in content and method, yet designed to take into account actual student needs and capacities; (4) discussion and evaluation of methods of teaching; (5) the encouragement of teacher preparation both in the graduate schools and in in-service training; (6) the providing of opportunity for meeting with experts in the various areas of the science; (7) serving as a forum for the communicating of pedagogical experience and information.

The accomplishment of these aims was attempted through a variety of means. For example, the quarterly newsletter, *Sacred Doctrine Notes* (originally called *Magister*), offered both member and nonmember subscribers news, discussion, book reviews, and

bibliographies. The *Proceedings* of the annual national conventions proved to be a valuable source for expert theological articles.

While the membership was largely from the U.S., Canada had a substantial membership and even non-English-speaking countries had representatives. Membership was restricted to priests, religious, and Catholic laity who were qualified by training or teaching experience for the instruction of college students in theology. Although the society attempted to encourage attempts to better high school religion courses, its focus was consistently that of education leading to college degrees.

The national conventions, held Easter Monday and Tuesday, showed the development of the society, the status of theology in the college and of theology itself. The first convention (1955) was devoted to a study of proposed curricular plans, and used a society survey of curricula in use. A year later, the concern was with the finality of theology and the student; another year, the relation of theology to other disciplines. From 1958 to 1960 the topics became more technical, with increasing emphasis on scriptural study. The years following until the 10th anniversary presented special area studies in ecumenism, liturgy, and spiritual theology. Finally, in 1964, the convention, after visiting major American cities, returned to Washington for a realistic appraisal of the present status and future needs. The society demonstrated its advancing maturity by its ability to formulate more specific resolutions on teacher preparation, on the equality of status for religious and secular subjects, on minimum time requirements, on implementation of Vatican Council II's decrees on renewal of church and theology.

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