July 12, 2015

Dear Colleagues Around the World:

As this year’s president of the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality, I am delighted to let you know of some of the remarkable developments taking place in our life together.

A) The Society’s Global Identity:
This year marks a watershed: 2015 will be remembered as the year that the SCS claimed its international identity. This spring, the Society’s Board of Directors authorized the formation of a new International Relations Committee, consisting of the following members:

Noel Burke (Barbados);
Gilberto Cavazos-Gonzalez (Italy);
Rossano Zas Friz (Italy);
Rebecca A. Giselbrecht (Switzerland);
Annie Ng (Hong Kong);
Michael O’Sullivan (Ireland);
Kurian Perumpallikunnel (India);
Pieter G.R. de Villiers, Chair (South Africa);
Claire Wolfteich, Board liaison (United States).

And this past month, this international scope of our Society’s reach took visible form in the gathering of over one hundred participants in Johannesburg, South Africa, for the first-ever gathering of the Society as a multi-continental body meeting outside the U.S. This remarkable conference, meeting at St. Augustine College, May 21-23, drew presenters and participants from around the world on the topic of “Holiness: On the Holy, the Holy One, Sanctification, and the Saints,” including also pre-conference workshops led by Kees Waaijman and SSCS Past President Bernard McGinn. The conference built on the intellectual and spiritual energy of another Past President of the Society, Ann Astell, whose vision for biennial summer conferences of the Society took inaugural form at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, in the summer of 2013. To hold our second conference in South Africa – drawing together a program including internationally renowned presenters, emerging scholars from many nations, local artists, practitioners, and spiritual directors – brought to fruition a truly expansive vision first articulated by Board member Pieter de Villiers and shared by his equally tireless colleagues in SPIRASA (Spirituality Association of South Africa). The level of generosity and hospitality these leaders provided is a gift to the Society, and the insights and energy from these days together will continue to strengthen our truly global common life.

B) AAR/SBL Meetings in Atlanta, GA: November 20-24, 2015:
At the upcoming AAR/SBL meeting we will have the opportunity to continue these international and cross-cultural conversations so urgent for Christian spirituality today. On Friday afternoon (November 20), we are invited into powerful encounter with the experience of racism in U.S. society, historically and presently. Beginning at 3 PM that day, we will tour the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center in Atlanta and reflect together in conversation facilitated by Georgetown theologian and scholar Diana Hayes. Yale professor

Trinity Lutheran Seminary forms leaders for Christ’s church at work in the world.
Miroslav Volf, author of the acclaimed work *Exclusion and Embrace,* will offer centering reflections on spirituality and racism in a video segment prepared specifically for our event. After a shared dinner, our annual pedagogical session will be titled “Spirituality and Pedagogy: An International Perspective.” This session, combining reflections from conversation starters and discussion among participants, will build on the Johannesburg conference. More details on the day – including presenters, transportation, dinner, and a reception – will be sent through the SSCS list-serve and posted on our website as they are finalized. In the meantime, please make plans to join us for as much of that day’s program as possible. Many thanks to Barbara Quinn, Glen Scorgie, and Anita Houck for arranging this day’s powerful experiential immersion.

On Saturday, November 21, we reconvene at 9 AM for our Society business meeting and presidential address. The title of my address will be “Into Local Waters: Rewilding the Study of Christian Spirituality.” As I prepare for this address, I would be happy to hear from any SSCS members who are teaching, writing, or participating in projects on questions related to Christian spirituality and climate change – in relation to Pope Francis’s recent encyclical, *Laudato Si’,* or in other ways. Our Friday and Saturday events are open to all who are interested, so please encourage your students and interested colleagues to join us.

This year we have another rich feast of program sessions from the Christian Spirituality Group, led by Tim Robinson and Glenn Young. These sessions are:

1) **A21-217, Saturday - 1:00 PM-3:30 PM (Joint Session of the Christian Spirituality Group and Mysticism Group): The Life and Times of a Modern Mystic: On the Centenary of the Birth of Thomas Merton**  
   Presiding: Thomas Cattoi, Graduate Theological Union  
   Jack Downey, La Salle University, *"We Drank Many Gin and Tonics": Desire & Enchantment in Merton's Buddhist Pilgrimage*  
   Daniel Horan, Boston College, *The Lady, The Dune, and The Monk: How Julian of Norwich and John Duns Scotus Shaped Thomas Merton’s Incarnational Mysticism*  
   Daniel Rober, St. John's University, *Is Thomas Merton a Saint? Does it Matter? Mysticism, Postmodernity, and the Limits of Sanctity*  
   Katelynn Carver, Harvard University, *The Many-Storied Mountains: A Mertonian Model for the Spiritual Significance of Narrativity*  
   Responding: Christine M. Bochen, Nazareth College

2) **A22-264, Sunday - 3:00 PM-4:30 PM: Preaching and Spirituality in the Work of Barbara Brown Taylor**  
   Presiding: Lauren Winner, Duke University  
   Peter S. Hawkins, Yale Divinity School; Thomas Long, Emory University; Donyelle McCray, Virginia Theological Seminary

3) **A23-220, Monday - 1:00 PM-3:30 PM: Perspectives on Teresa of Avila on the 500th Anniversary of Her Birth**  
   Presiding: Mary Frohlich, Catholic Theological Union  
   Jean-Pierre Fortin, Université de Sherbrooke, *Prayerful Spirituality as Experiential Theology: Teresa of Avila’s Mystical Transposition of Augustine’s Confessions*  
   Tara Soughers, *“The More He Loves Them the Greater the Tribulation”:Teresa of Avila’s Spirituality of Suffering*  
   Ryan Kuratko, Emory University, *Attending to Others: Iris Murdoch and Teresa of Avila on Attention, Consolation, and Transformation*  
   Mauricio Najarro, Graduate Theological Union, *Hematological Linguistic and Itinerant Practice: Spirituality and Tradition in Teresa of Avila*  
   Responding: Bernard McGinn, University of Chicago  
   **Business Meeting:** Glenn Young, Rockhurst University
4) **A23-318, Monday - 4:00 PM-6:30 PM** (Quad-Sponsored Session of the Bible in Racial, Ethnic, and Indigenous Communities Group and Christian Spirituality Group and Music and Religion Group and Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements Group):  
**Gendering Gospel Music**  
**Presiding:** David Stowe, Michigan State University  
Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, Colby College, I Opened My Mouth to the Lord! Authoritative Women’s Voices and Prophetic-Apocalyptic Biblical Discourse in Gospel Music  
Alisha L. Jones, Indiana University, Singing High: Black Countertenors, Treble Timbres of Transcendence in Gospel Performance  
Charrise Barron, Harvard University, Sweeter: The Gospel Music and Performance of Kim Burrell  
Cory Hunter, Princeton University, Gospel Love Albums: Sex, Sensuality, and Spirituality  

**C) Personal Update:**  
Finally, a more local note: I will be taking a new position this summer in the Religion Department of California Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks, CA. After ten years of seminary teaching in Ohio, I am excited to return to my geographic and familial roots. The signature below contains my new contact information (e-mail effective immediately, mailing address as of August 1, 2015). I look forward to what the Spirit is up to in this Southern California watershed – and to seeing many of you in Atlanta.  

Yours,

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