Dear SSCS Colleagues:

I am writing to share with you some important developments in the life of our Society, and, as a planning aid, the anticipated schedule of events when we convene this November in San Diego.

1. **International Conference in Rome (September 22-26, 2019)**

We are looking forward with considerable anticipation to the now-imminent international conference in Rome on evolving methodologies for the study of Christian spirituality and spiritual theology. It is worth nothing that this fully bilingual event has been organized jointly by the SSCS and the Forum of Spiritual Theology Professors in Italy (FPTSI—Forum dei Professori di Teologia Spirituale in Italia). As such, it reflects a growing consensus within the SSCS that as we work to expand our international engagement, we should seek to collaborate with partner organizations in other parts of the world rather than attempt to organize events unilaterally in distant locations. Due to the generous sponsorship and hospitality of the Antonianum University (OFM Pontificia Università Antonianum) in Rome, I am pleased to report that this particular conference will not involve any financial obligations for the SSCS. We are all especially grateful for the vision, and substantive planning effort and initiatives behind the scenes, of four members of our Society in particular: Diana Villegas, Gilberto Cavazos-González, Rossano Zas Friz de Col, and Bernadette Flanagan. Our hearty thanks to each of them. For further information on this conference, please go to the conference website: [http://spiritualitas-2019.weebly.com/](http://spiritualitas-2019.weebly.com/).

2. **International Relations Committee (IRC)**

It was the vision of Bernard McGinn, during his tenure as our President some years ago, to establish an International Relations Committee. The goal was that this committee might serve as an illuminating window upon larger, global conversations about Christian spirituality, and become a way that the SSCS might more intentionally connect with scholars from other parts of the world. Under the leadership of Diana Villegas (current IRC Chair) and her predecessors, these aspirations are becoming a reality. Those who serve on this committee live elsewhere than in the United States and Canada—in Hong Kong, Colombia, Myanmar, and South Africa, to name just some of the homelands represented. It was largely through the initiative of members of this committee that the upcoming conference in Rome took shape. Recently, they published their first newsletter, providing updates on member research, publications and conference involvement in different parts of the world. The members of the IRC are among our most productive and vigorous colleagues. We commend them for their diverse efforts, and look forward to the ways in which they will help us all see the larger world of spirituality scholarship with clearer vision and new eyes.

3. **Emerging Scholars Group (ESG)**

Our Emerging Scholars group includes graduate students, those within six years of graduation, and those in their first six years of employment. All SSCS members are welcome to join the Emerging Scholars Forum on Facebook, where there is opportunity to discuss research, teaching, vocational direction, and other related interests. This year the group has been ably coordinated by Drs. Rachel Wheeler and Kyle Schenkewitz, and we are most grateful for their very capable efforts on behalf of those who represent the future of our discipline and our Society. Anyone interested in participating in this group is encouraged to get in touch with either Rachel (wheelerr@up.edu) or Kyle (kyle.schenkewitz@wartburg.edu).
Among the activities organized by the Emerging Scholars Group is a subsidized meal for Group members during the AAR. For more information on this event, scheduled for Saturday, November 23, again, please contact Rachel or Kyle.

Normally, the SSCS sponsors a Founders’ Circle Prize Essay Contest for emerging scholars every other year. Last year’s contest, and ensuing paper presentation by Leonard McMahon at the AAR, was such a success that a decision was made, on a pilot basis, to have another contest this year. A good number of excellent essays again were submitted. With two former SSCS presidents serving as judges, and Rachel Wheeler chairing the process, one essay emerged as superior. We are pleased to announce that Dr. Heather DuBois’ winning essay on “The Spirituality of a Pluralist: A Theological Reading of Connolly’s Why I Am Not a Secularist” will be presented during the AAR meetings in San Diego this November. Your support of this event will be most welcome and appreciated.

4. The Future of the SSCS: Reviewing the 2018 Survey and Summit

The SSCS is now 28 years old. Many members are sensing that we have entered an important transitional phase. On the challenges side, our founding generation of scholars is retiring. Our membership numbers peaked several years ago. And due to a policy at the American Academy of Religion, the SSCS no longer helps to shape the programming of the Christian Spirituality Unit of the AAR. On the opportunities side, we are living in the midst of a rising interest in spirituality within the larger culture, particularly among young people. And within the Christian tradition, interest in spirituality is expanding ecumenically. Through innovative use of emerging communications technologies, we have opportunities before us to create a much wider global conversation about the study of Christian spirituality, and to make the conversation and community more accessible to those without the financial resources to attend annual meetings of the AAR and SBL on a regular basis.

Last year, we began the process of identifying promising pathways forward for the Society. We conducted a detailed survey, and subsequently convened a summit, for the current SSCS Board of Directors and a number of past leaders of the Society. The survey results (which are available upon request from either the Secretary/Treasurer or the President, and which will be posted on our website) continue to be taken seriously. And we want to widen the conversation in the days ahead in order to hear from the full membership of our Society.

In the meantime, let me mention very briefly-three matters on which the large majority of those polled do seem agreed.

First, most participants agreed that the SSCS should remain distinctly Christian in its scholarly focus. The term Christian in this context denotes kinds of spirituality that have been informed and shaped by the faith and practices of the Christian community past and present. At the same time, there is a desire to practice hospitable, receptive, mutually enriching engagement with other spiritual traditions.

Second, there was strong agreement that we should continue to affiliate ourselves with the AAR, and participate in its annual gatherings as a Related Scholarly Organization (RSO). This we will endeavor, therefore, to continue to do, even while we explore possible additional activities and events. We will continue to participate in the AAR, therefore, even while we acknowledge with concern that fewer scholars are able financially to attend these meetings on a consistent basis.

Third, participants recognized that the chief benefits that members seek through affiliation with the Society are opportunities to cultivate collegial, potentially collaborative relationships with others in our
discipline; and secondly, opportunities to stay current in the field and become better resourced. They recognized that in order to be able to keep delivering such benefits to our membership we will need to cultivate more useful, substantive, and effective means of communication—and not just momentarily each November, but throughout the entire year.

5. **A Study of SSCS Communications**

Acknowledging this reality, we asked one of our SSCS Board Directors-at-Large, Carter Haynes, to conduct this past Fall and Spring a comprehensive study of our SSCS communications policies and practices. Carter graciously agreed, and then recruited two other members of our Society, Savoy Stevens and Elmor Van Staden, to assist him. Together, this triumvirate has done a truly exceptional job, one that included, among other things, a probe of the intricacies of our relationship to Johns Hopkins University Press, and culminated in a detailed report, which was submitted to the Board on May 31 and is currently under Board consideration. We would like to express our genuine appreciation to these colleagues for their hard work and their important recommendations.

Considerable attention was paid in this study to the untapped potential of expanded web-based communication, and also how useful information must sometimes be “pushed out” to members rather than having it sit dormant and neglected somewhere in cyberspace. Hopefully, the Board will be able to have some related recommendations ready for consideration at the annual SSCS business meeting in November. It may be that a more robust and substantive new website, and more accessible ways of connecting and conversing, may prove as strategic to our Society’s post-Gutenberg future as our world-class journal *Spiritus* has been thus far in our journey together. As the Board continues its reflection, we welcome your suggestions on this important aspect of the Society’s work.

6. **Pending Structural Changes**

Admittedly, the structures of our Society, embodied in our constitution, bylaws, policies and procedures, are mere scaffolding to facilitate the shared goals of our scholarly community. Nonetheless, from time to time, these need to be reviewed and updated to reflect circumstantial changes and to keep our activities streamlined. Some such “housekeeping” proposals are being prepared for consideration at the annual meeting in November. Given our modest size, and the Society’s recent uncoupling from the Christian Spirituality Unit of the AAR, we may decide to downsize the Board a bit, and also to shift to more defined roles and responsibilities for certain board members.

7. **SSCS Events at the AAR/SBL in San Diego**

More information on the following events will be coming in early Fall, but I hope you’ll plan now to share these events with your colleagues. Two anticipated highlights are worth mentioning here. After long and distinguished service as the heart and soul of our Society, Anita Houck will be stepping down this year as our Secretary/Treasurer, and we plan to acknowledge and celebrate together in San Diego her great contribution through the years. Something fittingly somber, like a roast perhaps, is in the works!

It has also come to our attention that one of our greatest scholars and leaders, Professor Bernard McGinn, will be receiving a Festschrift volume in his honor at the Oblate School of Theology Reception on Saturday, November 23. We hope that many of you will be able to attend and personally convey to him your appreciation for him as a person, and for his truly exceptional contributions to our discipline. Details of exact time and place will be forthcoming.
As I bring this letter to a close, let me just add, finally, that we are deeply appreciative of your partnership in the study of Christian spirituality, and will welcome your feedback and suggestions on any and all of the aforementioned matters as we move forward together.

With every good wish
Glen
Glen G. Scorgie, President

SSCS at the AAR/SBL, San Diego, 2019

**Friday, November 22**
**Afternoon Experiential Session at Point Loma Nazarene University** (approximately 3:00-5:00 p.m.)
A Contemplative Tour of the Campus led by Rebecca Laird, Point Loma Nazarene University
Shuttles before and after the session will bring participants to and from the Convention area, and the campus is also easily accessible through cab, Uber, and Lyft. Details will be coming through the EMMA listserv and posted on the SSCS website.

**Society Dinner at Edgewater Café in Seaport Village** (6:00 p.m.)
**Evening Reception for Members and their Guests at Eclipse Chocolate Bar and Bistro** (8:30 p.m.)
Including celebration of Anita Houck’s contribution to SSCS, a.k.a. Anita Fest

**Saturday, November 23**
**Presidential Address and Annual Members’ Meeting**
9:00 a.m.-noon, Convention Center-24A (Upper Level East)
  9:00 a.m. 2019 Presidential Address
  Glen G. Scorgie, Bethel Seminary
  “The Diffusion of Christian Mysticism: From the Medieval Rhineland to Contemporary China”
10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m. Annual Meeting

**Founders’ Circle Prize Essay Presentation**
3:30-4:30 p.m., Hilton Bayfront-Indigo H (Second Level)

**Emerging Scholars Dinner**
5:30-7:00 p.m. (contact Kyle Schenkewitz or Rachel Wheeler for more information)

**Sessions of the Christian Spirituality Unit of the AAR**
**Saturday, November 23, 1:00-3:00 p.m., Hilton Bayfront-Aqua 303 (Third Level)**
Water, Christian Spirituality, and Indigenous Spirituality

**Sunday, November 24, 3:30-5:00 p.m., Hilton Bayfront-Sapphire 411A (Fourth Level)**
Liberation: Perspectives from Christian Spirituality

**Monday, November 25, 3:30-5:00 p.m., Hilton Bayfront-Aqua F (Third Level)**
Spirituality and Human Relations: Perspectives from the Social Sciences