

THE AMERICAN THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY  
THE CONSTITUTION OF 1912 ANNOTATED WITH LATER ACTIONS OF THE  
SOCIETY

Article I. Name.

The name of this organization shall be the Theological  
Society.

At the annual meeting of 1926, the name "American  
Theological Society" was adopted.

## Article II. Purpose.

The purpose of the Society shall be to promote the interests of present-day constructive theology, by the holding of meetings for the discussion of theological problems and for the furthering of acquaintance and fellowship among those working in this field, and by arranging for co-operation in theological investigation.

"It was agreed by those present (at a preliminary meeting on 7 February 1912) that such an organization was desirable for such reasons as the following:

- 1) The promotion of fuller acquaintance and fellowship among those working in the same field and with so many interests in common;
- 2) the stimulus to constructive thought that might be expected from the discussion at close range of topics of common special interest;
- 3) the fact that in the presence of the changed situation confronting modern Christianity, denominational theological differences are in many cases coming to seem less important, while there have emerged new problems which are common to all and which can be discussed in an eirenic spirit;
- 4) the shift of interest and emphasis now taking place from the historico-critical to constructive problems; and
- 5) the possibility of suggesting fields that ought to be worked up afresh in the general domain of systematic theology."

### Article III(a) Membership.

The membership shall consist of those who have responded favorably to the first general invitation, and of such others as shall later, on nomination of the Executive Committee, be received by vote of the members present at any regular meeting of the Society.

#### A. LOSS OF MEMBERSHIP.

In 1925 it was voted that members who failed to pay their dues for two consecutive years should be dropped from membership of the Society.

#### B. CATEGORIES OF MEMBERSHIP.

In 1960, the Executive Committee was authorized to remove from the rolls any member absent from three successive annual meetings. In the next year, however, this policy was altered. The limit of sixty-five members (established in 1947) was henceforth to be construed to apply only to "active members", and a new category of "sustaining members" was established. The latter was to include all persons who had been elected to membership of the Society but had absented themselves from three successive meetings. Sustaining membership was to include "full responsibility for dues and all rights and privileges of the Society, including voting".

At the annual meeting of 1981, the Society in effect created a category of "suspended membership", for members of the Society who are "out of Canada or the United States for two years or more". Such members pay no dues and receive none of the Society's mailings, but are restored to membership with full privileges and obligations on their return to North America.

#### C. NUMBER OF MEMBERS.

In 1947 the Society set the maximum number of members at 65. This number was later (see <B> above) retained to limit the size of the body of active members. In 1967, however, it was decided that the Society might have up to 100 active members, no limit being set on the number of sustaining members.

#### D. ELECTION OF MEMBERS.

In 1942 it was enacted that with the regular January announcement of the date of the Society's annual meeting,

the Secretary should transmit to members a request for nominations to membership of the Society. No such nominations were to be received after March 1st of each year. The list of such nominations was to be sent to the members of the Society with their mimeographed copies of the papers to be discussed at the Annual Meeting. The members in turn were requested to make any comments they chose upon individual nominations and return them to the Secretary for the use of the Executive Committee, which would then place the names of such candidates as it chose "in formal nomination before the Society at the Saturday Business Meeting". This procedure was in effect reaffirmed at the Annual Meetings of 1947 and 1954. The Secretary was to receive nominations, circulate the list of those nominated to the membership for their written comment, and submit the list with the comments received to the Executive Committee, which would then "recommend selected names to the Society for membership". According to the resolution of 1947, the Executive Committee was "to act as a committee for the nomination of new members", and prior to its nominations, "the membership of the Society" was to be asked to send "comments about proposed members".

This procedure was slightly changed in 1959, when it was resolved that the Society should have a "Chairman of Membership", who would take over the functions previously performed by the Secretary: those of requesting nominations, transmitting to the members of the Society a list of those nominated, receiving comments on the candidates, and transmitting these comments to the Executive Committee.

The 1947 Annual Meeting determined that "at the meeting of the Society that receives the nominations of the Executive Committee, at least a two-thirds vote of those voting be necessary for election".

#### E. CHARACTER OF, AND QUALIFICATIONS FOR, MEMBERSHIP.

The Annual Meeting of 1947 attempted to define the scope of the Society's membership. "The American Theological Society is a professional society consisting primarily of theological scholars who feel themselves to be in the Christian tradition and who desire to engage in friendly discussion of problems that are mainly systematic." It went on to explain that "Theology is understood to include systematic, historical, and Biblical disciplines and the philosophy, psychology, and history of religion. The historical and descriptive disciplines in this context are considered primarily as the source of the materials for the discussion of systematic problems".

This definition of the character of the Society and its membership has been reaffirmed in its main lines by later actions, but at the same time qualified and particularised. It had already been enacted in 1936 that

"no discrimination on grounds of sex should be exercised in the selection of new members for the Society". In 1968, the Society voted to admit Jewish members to its number. Ten years earlier, in 1958, the question of qualifications for membership had been raised. At that time, the Executive Committee affirmed its policy of including "members of the American theological community whose scholarly achievements provide the basis for effective discussion", as well as the Society's intention of focusing "on constructive, systematic theology, without neglect of closely related scholarly disciplines". At the same time it was emphasized that "the membership of the Society should represent an awareness of the need for the widest representation possible of accredited theological seminaries and other institutions of higher learning". At the Annual Meeting in 1978, the Membership Committee was commissioned to take a more active role: not only to receive nominations, but to exercise "an active initiative in seeking out new members, both among persons nominated in earlier years and among those whom the Society may have overlooked". One part of the intention of this action was to secure wider representation of minority persons and of differing theological perspectives.

At the Annual Meeting of 1976, the following resolution on membership policy was approved by the Society:

"I. Definition of eligibility: Any person in North America whose achievement in the discipline of theology, broadly conceived, is of sufficient merit to promise significant contribution to the field of theology.  
 II. Criteria of evaluation: A. Scholarly devotion to reflective, critical, and/or constructive study of theology, as distinct from general religious studies; B. Evidence of excellence in theological research and writing, meaning at least one work of significance; C. Strong, informed recommendation by a member of the Society; D. Evidence of willingness to participate responsibly in the meetings of the Society."

At the Annual Meeting of 1980, the phrase "Any person in North America" was qualified. The Society voted that "new members...should normally be resident in the Eastern region of the United States or Canada", but added that "no member of the Society shall lose membership on account of geographical location".

## ARTICLE III (b) &lt;Membership Fee&gt;.

There shall be an annual membership fee of one dollar.

## A. AMOUNT OF DUES.

The original dues of one dollar p.a. have been gradually increased. In 1913 they became five dollars. Lowered because of a surplus in 1925, they were first restored to five dollars in 1930, then (in 1953) increased to six dollars. The sum became ten dollars p.a. in 1967, fifteen in 1975, and, in 1982, twenty dollars.

Since 1970, the dues of retired members have been fixed at five dollars p.a.

## B. DUES AND TRAVEL EXPENSES.

The action by which, in 1913, dues were originally raised from one dollar to five was intended to enable the Society to equalize the traveling expenses of members. In 1919, the Society resolved to pay "the entire railroad fare (not including Pullman or dining charges) of members in attendance at any meeting...so far as funds permit". In 1926 the maximum reimbursement for this purpose was set at \$16.00. In 1952, the maximum which any member could receive for travel expenses was raised to \$25.00. In 1962, the Society voted to pay "towards its members' costs of transportation at aircoach rates". The present system of reimbursement was adopted in 1975. According to this scheme, members who travel 200 miles or more are reimbursed up to the sum of \$40.00; while for those who travel less than two hundred miles the original limit of \$25.00 is retained. For both groups, however, reimbursement is calculated only after \$10.00 have been deducted from a member's total travel expenses. Retired members are excepted from this latter rule.

#### ARTICLE IV. OFFICERS AND COMMITTEES.

The officers shall be elected at the last meeting of the academical year, and shall be a President, a Vice-President, and a Secretary-Treasurer, who, together with two other members of the Society, shall constitute the Executive Committee.

##### A. THE PRESIDENT.

In 1968, it was voted that each year's retiring president should serve on the Executive Committee during the year next following the end of his term of office.

##### B. THE VICE-PRESIDENT.

The following resolution was passed in 1977: "Resolved that in preparing a slate of officers for 1978...the vice-president of the Society nominated for 1978 be also designated as president-elect for 1979, and that this procedure be followed by future nominating committees."

##### C. THE SECRETARY-TREASURER.

In 1917 (April), this post was divided into two separate offices, both of whose occupants serve on the Executive Committee.

In 1967, an annual honorarium of \$150.00 was voted for the Secretary and the Treasurer. <This policy has become a dead letter, since after the first year both the Treasurer and the Secretary refused their honoraria.>

##### D. OTHER OFFICERS.

In the course of the years, further officers have been added to the Society and the Executive Committee.

At the 1958 meeting the post of Chairperson for Membership was created, the occupant to serve a term of not fewer than three, nor more than six, years. This officer took over the earlier functions of the Secretary in receiving nominations for membership, advertising them to the Society, and transmitting to the Executive Committee the written judgments of members on the candidates proposed.

In 1969, the post of Chairperson for Program was created "in order to lighten the load of the Secretary".

In 1973, the post of Chairperson for Arrangements was created, the occupant to serve on the Executive Committee.

#### E. COMMITTEES.

In 1946 at the Annual Meeting it was voted that the Chair should appoint a Nominating Committee to consist of past presidents of the Society, its duty being to nominate officers of the Society. In practice, this committee has consisted of all past presidents attending a given Annual Meeting.

In 1973, a Program Committee was formed "for one year" to assist the Chairperson for Program. It was agreed that the Society would pay the expenses of members of this committee for one meeting.

A resolution of 1978 (see above, Article III <E>) refers to a "Membership Committee". No formal action has been taken, however, to create such a committee or to specify how its members shall be appointed or elected.

In 1967, two additional members were added to the Executive Committee to serve staggered two-year terms as members-at-large.



## ARTICLE V. MEETINGS.

There shall ordinarily be two regular meetings of the Society annually at such times and places as may be arranged by the Executive Committee. The members attending any regular meeting of the Society shall constitute a quorum.

### A. FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS.

Meetings of the Society were, to begin with, held twice each year -- in the late Fall and the Spring. At a session of the Executive Committee in September, 1918, it was decided to omit the autumn meeting (because of the War). The meeting has been omitted ever since.

### B. TIME OF MEETINGS.

At the Annual Meeting of 1925, it was agreed that the next Annual Meeting should be held on the Friday and Saturday after Easter. This has continued to be the practice of the Society, save in those years when the weekend after Easter conflicts with the Jewish Passover.

### C. PAPERS.

In 1941, it was agreed that the number of papers to be read and discussed at each Annual Meeting be limited to two. Two years later (1943) the Society agreed that "the full texts of the regular papers (excluding the Presidential Address)" should be reproduced and sent to all members of the Society in advance of the Annual Meeting.

In 1970, it was resolved that each year's Presidential Address be mimeographed and distributed to the entire membership after its delivery.

In 1982, "the members...approved a proposal that in future respondents to the two principal papers should be asked to supply copies of their replies to the papers' authors prior to the Annual Meeting".