



# The Catholic Theological Society of America


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## Statement of the Board of Directors, The Catholic Theological Society of America

## Convention

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### With Respect to the Notification Issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith concerning the book, *Jesus: Symbol of God*, by Rev. Roger Haight, S.J. and Prohibiting Fr. Haight from Teaching Catholic Theology

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As members of the Board of Directors of the Catholic Theological Society of America, we wish to express our profound distress at the actions taken by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith against the Rev. Roger Haight, S.J., a former President of the Catholic Theological Society of America. As Fr. Haight's colleagues, we wish to publicly affirm that he is a person of the highest character as well as a respected theologian and teacher who pursues his theological vocation as a service to the Church.

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We fully affirm the ecclesial responsibilities of the theologian and the intrinsically ecclesial character of theology as these have been articulated in the "Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian," issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1990. We likewise affirm the responsibility of the Magisterium to make authoritative judgments concerning theological conformity to Catholic doctrine.

As Catholic theologians, we acknowledge our collective responsibility to engage each other critically in the light of divine revelation as this has been defined by the Magisterium. We encourage this process of mutual correction, which is the ordinary way in which theological arguments are evaluated, clarified, corrected, and, if necessary, rejected.

Fr. Haight's book *Jesus: Symbol of God* has done a great service in framing crucial questions that need to be addressed today. He has welcomed critique and dialogue about his own work. Since the time that his book appeared, the theological community has been in the process of engaging in a lively debate over the strengths and weaknesses of his speculative proposals. Indeed, an open forum on Fr. Haight's book was held at the Catholic Theological Society's Annual Convention in 2002, where he willingly and graciously explained his views and responded to his colleagues' critical observations. In many ways, the theological community has been engaging in precisely the kind of internal debate and mutual correction that has been encouraged by the Magisterium. Ironically, rather than promote greater criticism of the book, the Congregation's intervention will most likely discourage debates over the book, effectively stifling further criticism and undermining our ability as Catholic theologians to openly critique our colleagues. In short, the Congregation's intervention in this case gravely threatens the very process of serious, systematic, internal criticism which the Congregation and the bishops have long been encouraging among theologians. While this process of internal critique can never replace the proper teaching and disciplinary roles of the Magisterium, the intervention of the Magisterium should be a last resort, reserved for situations where this process has clearly failed.

We seriously question, moreover, whether the procedures established for investigating a theologian's work--as articulated in the 1997 "Regulations for the Examination of Doctrine"

from the Congregation--do in fact afford a theologian an adequate "opportunity to clear up possible misunderstandings of his or her thought" as the 1990 Instruction requires. Moreover, we note that the Instruction states that any official judgment that is rendered by the Magisterium concerns not the person of the theologian, but only his or her publicly espoused intellectual positions (#37). Thus we are dismayed that the action taken regarding Fr. Haight moves beyond a judgment on some of his theological positions to the prohibition from teaching Catholic theology. This act unavoidably implies a negative judgment upon a theologian's personal integrity and responsibility.

We must also call attention to the important distinction between theology and catechesis as this was articulated in the Holy Father's 1979 Apostolic Exhortation, "Catechesi Tradendae." In that document, the Holy Father reminds us of the intrinsic relationship between theology and catechesis while, at the same time, warning against the danger that catechesis will "transform itself into theological research or scientific exegesis" (#21)—and, presumably, the danger that the reverse will also occur. Of its nature, theology has a speculative dimension. This is recognized in the Apostolic Constitution Ex Corde Ecclesiae, which affirms that:

Bishops should encourage the creative work of theologians. They serve the Church through research done in a way that respects theological method. They seek to understand better, further develop and more effectively communicate the meaning of Christian Revelation as transmitted in Scripture and Tradition and in the Church's Magisterium. They also investigate the ways in which theology can shed light on specific questions raised by contemporary culture (#29).

Given the actions taken against Fr. Haight, we are concerned that the Congregation's Notification elides the traditional distinction between theology and catechesis in a way that threatens the proper function of both in their service to the Church. We thus express our concern for the ramifications that this action may have for the future of the Catholic theological vocation.

Signed,

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