Taking the Longer View
A History of the ATS Commission on Accrediting (1934–2024)

By

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The Commission on Accrediting

The Association of Theological Schools
in the United States and Canada

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Table of Contents

Preface iv

Introduction: "*What Hath God Wrought?*" 1

Chapter 1. Recognizing the Need for Standards (1918-1933) 4

Chapter 2. Writing the Standards (1934-1939) 11

Chapter 3. Revising the Standards (1940-1955) 24

Chapter 4. Reorganizing the Standards and ATS (1956-1969) 37

Chapter 5. Redeveloping the Standards (1970-1979) 51

Chapter 6. Rethinking the Standards (1980-1991) 65

Chapter 7. Redoing the Standards (1992-2003) 82

Chapter 8. Reorganizing and Revising the Standards (2004-2012) 100

Chapter 9. Re-envisioning the Standards (2013-2024) 116

Conclusion: "*Taking the Longer View*" 133

Endnotes 137

Appendices:

A. Listing of ATS Presidents (1918-2024) and ATS Commission Chairs (1934-2024) 141
B. Original Standards from 1936 142
C. List of First 46 Schools Accredited by ATS in 1938 143
D. ATS Membership and Enrollment Trends (1936-2023) 144
E. Commission Milestones 145

Preface

In June 2024, the ATS Commission on Accrediting celebrates its 90th birthday. At a June 1934 Conference of Theological Schools in Rochester, New York, a group of 59 seminary leaders from 35 schools authorized "a commission on Accrediting Institutions of Theological Education… to establish some plan for the accrediting of theological seminaries" (ATS Bulletin 9, 1934, p. 16). It was a historic first, much like the first ever Conference of Theological Schools that gathered on the campus of Harvard in 1918 "to consider the problems of theological education." One of their most lasting "solutions" to the "problems of theological education" was to create a Commission on Accrediting in 1934. That first ever Commission developed a set of Standards in 1936 that led to the first ever list of accredited theological schools in 1938. All for the purpose of "improving theological education in the United States and Canada" (Bulletin 9, 1934, p. 21).

This history tells that 90-year story. I'm grateful for the privilege of being able to tell this tale. I have been employed in theological education since 1979—45 years. I attended my first ATS Biennial Meeting in 1980—and haven't missed many since. My first accreditation visit was in 1984—40 years ago, though for a different, faith-based accreditor. My first ATS visit was in 2006, shortly after editing my own seminary's self-study report. I chaired my first ATS visit in 2007 and was invited to join the ATS staff in 2012 as a Director of Accreditation. Since then, I have been on more than one hundred visits to scores of ATS schools—and have loved (almost) every minute of it. Most of my professional life has been involved in some way with theological accreditation, even after I retired from ATS in 2022. Writing this history has been a lifetime labor of love.

I am indebted to Frank Yamada, ATS Executive Director, for permission to write this story and to access the private files of the Association and the Commission (all 100+ bound volumes comprising some 20,000 pages, plus dozens of digital files). Working with Frank (and others) on the 2020 redevelopment of the ATS Standards was a highlight of my career. I am deeply indebted to Stephen Graham, Strategic Director of Context and Continuity at ATS, for his insights and comments as he read through multiple drafts of this document. Others at ATS who helped supply data or insights are Chris Meinzer, Senior Director and Chief Operating Officer; Chris Olsztyn, Director of Information Technology; Alissa Horton, Manager of Data and Reporting; and especially Barbara Mutch, Senior Director of Accreditation, who was very encouraging to me in this project. Thanks are also due to Daniel Aleshire, former ATS Executive Director, who hired me, mentored me, and pastored me. Most of all, I am indebted to my wife Debby for her constant encouragement, her unending patience, and her selfless support. But in the end and always toward that end, *Soli Deo gloria*.

Tom Tanner, May 2024

Introduction: "What Hath God Wrought?" [1]

> *"The Conference reverently records its sense of deep gratitude to God for the sudden realization of the hopes and prayers cherished during many years in many hearts among the theological schools of the United States and Canada, in the gathering of this unique, and, it may be, this historic, Conference; and also its earnest prayer that by the grace of the Divine Spirit and in the name of the Lord, the Head of the Church, this Conference may grow in strength, become a permanent institution, and contribute beyond our present measure to the equipment of the ministry of the gospel and the uniting in one holy service of the separate positions of the Church of Christ."*
>
> –Closing Statement/Prayer of first Conference of Theological Schools[2] at Harvard in 1918

During several scorching, 90-degree days[3] in August 1918, 101 theologians[4] from 53 North American seminaries gathered at Harvard to "consider the problems of theological education, especially as affected by the war."[5] But as their closing statement/prayer above indicates, they were praying for something much more. Oh, what God hath wrought from their prayer. More than a century later, The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) in the United States and Canada—the successor to that 1918 Conference of Theological Schools—is going strong. ATS has grown to be the largest, longest lived, most denominationally diverse organization of theological schools in the world. From 53 Mainline Protestant schools enrolling 4,000 students in 1918 (see Endnote 1), ATS now serves 286 schools with 77,000+ students from Mainline Protestant, Evangelical Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, and Jewish traditions.

The history of ATS is a rich one that has been told before.[6] This is not that story but instead a history of the ATS Commission on Accrediting—a story of its own that has never been told.[7] The Commission is

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[1] "What hath God wrought" is a phrase found in the King James Version of Numbers 23:23, Balaam's surprise blessing of Israel on the plains of Moab. Those four words also constituted the first text ever sent electronically, telegraphed by Samuel Morse in 1844, ushering in a historic new age of technology. The 1918 Conference of Theological Schools likewise ushered in a historic new age of theology, or at least a historic new age of theological cooperation.

[2] The Conference of Theological Schools has had several names in its 106-year history. The 1918 program used two names: "Conference of Theological Seminaries and Colleges in the United States and Canada" and "Conference of Theological Schools." The former became its legal name in the 1922 Constitution and remained its name until the 1936 Constitution, when it was renamed "The American Association of Theological Schools." In 1972, it adopted its current name, "The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada," abbreviated ATS. For simplicity, that abbreviation is used throughout.

[3] The website www.extremeweatherwatch.com/cities/boston/year-1918 indicates Boston reached a high of 96 degrees on August 14, 1918, the first full day of the Conference (it was 90 for the opening reception the day before). That 96-degree day was the second hottest that summer in Boston—long before air conditioning was common. The heat may explain why the 1918 program listed the following event for the afternoon of August 14: "an expedition down Boston Harbor… weather permitting."

[4] The 101 "delegates" at the 1918 Conference were mostly faculty (see Endnote 2 for details).

[5] "Conference of Theological Seminaries and Colleges in the United States and Canada, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., August 13 to 16, 1918" (p. 11). The preceding title includes the "Program" and "Findings of the Conference," available in the ATS Office with the bound ATS Bulletins. Bulletin 1 was not published until December 1920, describing the second conference at Princeton University June 16-18, 1920. [All references to "Bulletin" hereafter are to ATS publications of that name.]

[6] Glenn T. Miller, *A Community of Conversation: A Retrospective of The Association of Theological Schools and Ninety Years of North American Theological Education* (ATS, 2008). See also his *Piety and Profession: American Protestant Theological Education, 1870-1970* (Eerdmans, 2007) and his *Piety and Plurality: Theological Education Since 1960* (Eerdmans, 2014). Note Jesse Ziegler's *ATS Through Two Decades: Reflections on Theological Education, 1960-1980* (Heffernan Press, 1984) and Leon Pacala's *The Role of ATS in Theological Education, 1980-1990* (Scholars Press, 1998)—both former ATS Executive Directors.

[7] The closest thing to a history of the Commission is David Cable's 1970 PhD dissertation at the University of Pittsburgh, *The Development of the Accrediting Function of the American Association of Theological Schools, 1918-1938*. As the subtitle indicates, however, that study stopped in 1938, the year ATS first published a list of accredited schools.

related to but separate from The Association of Theological Schools.[8] While the two bodies have intertwined histories, each has served a different purpose[9] with different boards and responsibilities. The Association focuses on various kinds of leadership programs, research, and resources for its 286 member schools (ATS website; note that the number 286 includes 10 Associate Member schools to be voted on at the June 2024 Biennial Meeting). The Commission focuses almost exclusively on accreditation for its 265 some member schools, through a 20-person Board of Commissioners elected every two years by the membership to make all accreditation decisions (ATS Commission website).

Since this study is about the ATS Commission on Accrediting, it seems appropriate to say a bit about what "accreditation" means. One of the best definitions is by Judith Eaton, former president of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA): "accreditation is a trust-based, standards-based, evidence-based, judgment-based, peer-based process" for quality assurance and improvement (CHEA, An Overview of U.S. Accreditation, p. 5). Accreditation arose in the 20th century as a way to assure various publics that a given school offered a quality education, provided through some form of external review. In most countries, the federal government functions as the external reviewer/accreditor. In Canada, each provincial or territorial government serves that role for its schools, though there are private programmatic accreditors that accredit professional programs across Canada in a variety of fields such as architecture, dentistry, engineering, and nursing (Accrediting Agencies and Quality Assurance in Canada). Most graduate schools of theology in Canada also choose to be accredited by the ATS Commission on Accrediting.

In the U.S., almost all postsecondary accreditation is handled by private membership organizations who either accredit institutions (called institutional or regional accreditors; see Footnote 14) or accredit specific professional programs offered by an institution (called programmatic or specialized accreditors). Some accrediting agencies may offer both institutional and programmatic accreditation, which the ATS Commission does. While accreditation is not a governmental function in the U.S., both federal and state governments play major roles. The U.S. Department of Education must "recognize" (certify) an accreditor in order for students at the schools it accredits to be eligible for federal financial aid, valued at $240 billion in 2022-23 (College Board, Trends in Student Aid). Most schools could not survive without those federal funds. State governments must "authorize" (give legal status to) schools that wish to operate in that state, and accreditors generally do not accredit schools not so authorized. Historically, accreditation in the U.S. has been a trilateral partnership of sorts among private accreditors, state governments, and the federal government (U.S. Department of Education's Overview of Accreditation in the United States). The ATS Commission on Accrediting is one of 90 private accrediting agencies in the U.S.[10]

2024 seems an appropriate year for a history of the ATS Commission on Accrediting. It is the 100th anniversary of a seminal work in theological accreditation: Robert Kelly's *Theological Education in*

[8] The two bodies (the Association and the Commission) became legally separate entities in 2004, primarily in response to new regulations from the U.S. Department of Education that required accrediting agencies to be "separate and independent" from any parent or associated organization, with each agency having its own board, budget, and bylaws (see p. 100 below).

[9] The mission of ATS is "to promote the improvement and enhancement of *theological schools* to the benefit of communities of faith and the broader public" (Association Bylaws, 1.2). The mission of the Commission is "to contribute to the enhancement and improvement of *theological education* through the accreditation of schools that are members" (Commission Bylaws, 1.2). The italicized phrases raise an interesting irony: ATS improves *theological schools* by focusing on topics that deal with *theological education* as a whole, while the Commission improves *theological education* by focusing on individual *theological schools*.

[10] Among the 90 accreditors, 18 are institutional and 72 are programmatic. CHEA recognizes 62 of the 90 (12 institutional and 50 programmatic), and USDE recognizes 51 of the 90 (18 institutional and 33 programmatic), with 23 of those 90 recognized by both (see CHEA's list as of March 2024 in CHEA- and USDE-Recognized Accrediting Organizations). CHEA is a nongovernmental organization in Washington DC that advocates for accreditation issues for its 3,000+ institutional members (List of Member Institutions). See also Footnote 122.

America: A Study of One Hundred and Sixty-One Theological Schools in the United States and Canada. That pioneering study of seminary education led ATS to recognize the need for improved quality in theological education. That 1924 study, though not sponsored by ATS, was discussed at length at the 1924 ATS Conference, which voted to seek funding for a deeper study to address key issues raised in Kelly's work, as well as involve ATS more directly in the study and its implications (see Chapter 2 below).

2024 is also the 90th anniversary of two other important events in theological accreditation. The first event was Brown and May's 1934 magnum opus, *The Education of American Ministers*—the deeper study that addressed key issues from Kelly's 1924 study. Their 1934 study involved ATS more directly in its planning and interpretation and was discussed at length at the ATS Conferences in 1932 and 1934. The second event is the "birth" of the Commission on Accrediting in 1934, when the ATS membership authorized "a commission on Accrediting Institutions of Theological Education … to establish some plan for the accrediting of theological seminaries" (Bulletin 9, 1934, p. 16). Their "plan" included the first ever Standards in 1936, and the first ever list of accredited schools in 1938.

This history of the ATS Commission on Accrediting focuses on the 90 years since the Commission on Accrediting began in 1934. *Chapter 1 looks at the earlier period of 1918-1933,* beginning with the beginning of ATS in 1918, the publication of Kelly's work (in 1924), and the first set of standards proposed but not enacted (in 1932). *Chapter 2 focuses on the period of 1934-1939*, when the Commission on Accrediting was birthed (in 1934), the first Standards were approved (in 1936), the first schools were accredited (in 1938), and the first Commission policies were implemented. *Chapter 3 addresses the period of 1940-1955*, when the first significant addition to the 1936 Standards was made (the library in 1952) and many of the current accreditation policies were first implemented. *Chapter 4 reviews the period of 1956-1969*, one of the most pivotal in ATS history, with new Bylaws, a new Constitution, new Executive Director, and new Roman Catholic members. *Chapter 5 examines the period of 1970-1979*, when the first major redevelopment of the Standards was made, including the first DMin degree standard (in 1972) and the first standard on minority and women's concerns (in 1978).

Chapter 6 examines the period of 1980-1991, that began with a new ATS Executive Director and a new set of priorities that included rethinking the Standards, with the first standard on mission (in 1984) and the first standard on globalization (in 1990). *Chapter 7 looks at the period of 1992-2003* that began with the second major redevelopment of the Standards (in 1996), the addition of standards on distance education (in 2000), and consideration of a major reorganization of the Association and the Commission. *Chapter 8 reviews the period of 2004-2012,* which includes a major reorganization (in 2004) and a major revision of the Standards (in 2010-2012). *Chapter 9 covers the most recent period of 2013-2024* and the third major redevelopment of the Standards (in 2018-2020). This history concludes with some reflections on what the last 90 years of Commission history might say about the next 90 years, as the Commission on Accrediting continues *to take the longer view* in its goal of improving theological education.

Chapter 1. Recognizing the Need for Standards (1918-1933)

Higher education in early 20th-century North America could be characterized as somewhat chaotic and uncontrolled, with many colleges and professional schools operating with little or no oversight or accountability—and little comparative data. The same, sadly, was true for theological education, with the Carnegie Foundation observing in 1911 that "any comparison of theological schools with other professional schools [is] quite difficult… with no data on hand for giving a complete or satisfactory analysis of the work of these schools."[11] One of the first to offer a widespread critique of the educational quality of American colleges and universities in the early 20th century was Abraham Flexner (1866-1955), a graduate of Johns Hopkins who did graduate work at Harvard and the University of Berlin and later in life founded the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. In 1908, he published *The American College: A Criticism*, documenting significant educational shortcomings for U.S. colleges and universities. His work caught the attention of the Carnegie Foundation, who commissioned him to do a study of 155 medical schools in the U.S. and Canada. That study was requested by the American Medical Association (AMA), which, though founded in 1846, had waited until 1904 to create a Council on Medical Education to develop standards for medical training, standards that were being widely ignored.

Flexner's resulting study in 1910 of 155 medical schools, *Medical Education in the United States and Canada*, became known as the "Flexner Report." It led to major overhauls in the field of medical education, with nearly half of all medical schools closing within the decade because they could not meet the call for higher standards relative to admissions, graduation, and curriculum. Helping address the criticisms that Flexner raised was the Rockefeller-funded General Education Board, where Flexner served as secretary and through which flowed tens of millions of dollars to improve higher education, especially medical education. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. would fund a similar study of theological education within a few years—similar both in scope and even in the title (see discussion later in this chapter of Robert Kelly's 1924 study, *Theological Education in America: A Study of One Hundred and Sixty-One Theological Schools in the United States and Canada*). The legal profession also wrestled with concerns over educational quality and appropriate professional preparation in the 1910s and 1920s. The American Bar Association, founded in 1878, issued its first list of "approved" law schools in 1921 (ABA timeline),[12] followed that same decade by the professions of library science and music education.[13]

As noted above, the concern over educational quality was not limited only to professional schools, whether medical, legal, or theological. Higher education as a whole—at least in the U.S.—suffered from the criticisms Flexner raised in his 1908 study of American colleges. To be sure, regional accrediting agencies in the U.S. had existed since the late 19th century.[14] However, in their early years they focused

[11] "Theology" (p. 94) in The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching: Sixth Annual Report (Google Books, 1911). The Carnegie report devoted only six of 300 pages to theological seminaries but see Footnote 127.

[12] 1921 was also the year that Alfred Reed's classic study of legal education was published, Training for the Public Profession of the Law: Historical Development and Principal Contemporary Problems of Legal Education in the United States. Reed's study served as a law school version of Flexner's study of medical schools—both reports were published by the Carnegie Foundation (Miller, *Piety and Profession*, p. 474).

[13] The American Library Association, founded in 1876, did not issue its first list of "approved" schools until 1923. The National Association of Schools of Music was formed in 1924 and began accrediting schools of music in 1928 (NASM website).

[14] In the U.S., the six "regional" accrediting agencies (also referred to as "institutional" accreditors since 2020) were all founded in the late 19th and early 20th centuries: New England in 1885, Middle States in 1887, North Central in 1895, Southern in 1895,

on secondary schools and high school preparation for postsecondary education. It wasn't until the 1910s that regional accreditors began systemically addressing the problem of poor educational quality at the undergraduate and graduate levels by developing standards and compiling lists of higher education institutions considered "approved" (the term "accredited" was not widely used until the 1930s) by meeting those standards.

The first regional accrediting agency in the U.S. to develop standards was the North Central Association (known since 2001 as the Higher Learning Commission). Though established in 1895, its first standards were not issued until 1909 and its first list of "approved" colleges was not published until 1913. The Southern Association, also established in 1895, waited until 1917 to create a Commission on Institutions of Higher Education that developed its first standards in 1919 and its first list of approved colleges in 1920.[15] Middle States published its first list in 1921 (Miller, *Piety and Profession*, p. 460).[16] In light of these efforts by regional accreditors, in 1920 the American Council on Education (established in 1918) published the first nationwide list of "accredited" institutions in the U.S., based on "criteria that reflected the basic standards of a sound post-secondary education and developed peer evaluation procedures to ensure an institution's academic quality" (ACE Timeline). Nothing similar, however, had ever been attempted for theological schools.

It was in this context of concerns over educational quality and calls for educational standards that the first Conference of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada met in 1918 at Harvard.[17] The last three of the five "findings" from that inaugural Conference recognized the need to improve the quality of theological education (source cited in Footnote 5):

> "III. The Conference respectfully appeals to college and university authorities to *give guidance* to candidates for Ministry in preparation for their theological studies *similar to that now given to students intending to enter other professional schools*" (italics added).
>
> "IV. The Conference recognizes that after the war there will be many men[18] looking to the Ministry [but recommends]… *great care should be exercised in maintaining a high standard of qualifications for the Ministry*" (italics added).

Northwest in 1917, and Western in 1924. Initially, they served as conversation forums not accrediting agencies; for example, in his history of North Central, Mark Newman said "NCA began as an elite debating society" (*Agency of Change: 100 Years of the North Central Association*, 1996, p. xi). The first regional to issue a set of standards was North Central in 1909 (El-Khawas, Accreditation in the United States, UNSECO, 2001, p. 28).

[15] George Allen, Jr., A History of the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 1949-1975 (PhD Dissertation, Georgia State University), 1978, pp. 6-7.

[16] Interestingly, while North Central, Southern, and Middle States published their first lists of "approved" (accredited) schools in 1913, 1920, and 1921 respectively, Western did not publish its first list of accredited schools until 1948. New England, the oldest of the regionals (1885), did not publish its first list of accredited schools until 1952 (Miller*, Piety and Profession*, p. 460).

[17] The first ATS Conference in 1918 "originated in a chance remark by President Horr, of Newton Theological Institution, to Professor Henry Wilder Foote, of the Harvard Divinity School, on January 15, 1918. Newton was arranging a conference of representatives of Baptist theological schools to be held in Newton Centre [near Cambridge] about the middle of March. The faculty of the Harvard Divinity School invited these Baptist delegates to dinner on March 13th… President Horr remarked that he greatly wished that an institution like Harvard University would host a general conference of theological seminaries of all denominations to discuss problems of theological education arising out of the war. Professor Foote reported this remark to President Lowell [president of Harvard University, 1909-1933, who] responded with great cordiality that the University would gladly consider issuing invitations for such a conference" (1918 ATS Conference Proceedings, p. 1). President Lowell sent a "personal letter to the heads of seminaries and colleges in the United States and Canada" (reprinted in the 1918 Proceedings).

[18] References to "men" in the early proceedings of the ATS Conferences were ubiquitous, since virtually all Mainline Protestant clergy (and theology faculty) in that era were, though some seminaries had begun admitting women well before 1918. Oberlin College (OH) was reputedly the first U.S. college to admit women, in 1837 (Oberlin website). Oberlin Graduate School of

> "V. In view of the many problems confronting all the seminaries, … the Continuation Committee is requested to consider the advisability of *appointing committees to study and prepare reports* upon such subjects [to be] presented at a future conference" (italics added).

The 1918 "Continuation Committee" (mentioned above in Finding V and authorized in Finding II) had the power "to call this Conference together again for consultation concerning… any matter which in their judgment renders the cooperation of the theological schools necessary or important." The first Continuation Committee consisted of 27 members: 11 presidents, 9 deans, and 7 professors. That committee then chose an 11-member Executive Committee from its ranks, with three officers.[19] William A. Brown, professor of theology at Union (NY), was on that first Continuation Committee (and every other one until he retired in 1936), as well as on the Executive Committee beginning in 1922. His key leadership role in ATS from the beginning is worth noting because he served as the co-author of the 1934 Brown and May study of ministerial education and was instrumental in ATS developing an accrediting agency (see Chapter 2 and p. 28 below).

The second Conference of Theological Schools met at Princeton University in June 1920, as reported in Bulletin 1 in December 1920. The 56 delegates from 35 schools at that 1920 meeting asked the Continuation Committee "to prepare plans for the permanent organization of an Association of Theological Seminaries in the United States and Canada and report at the next meeting" (Bulletin 1, 1920, p. 5). William Brown of Union (NY) also read a paper on "The Value and Future of This Conference," which, unfortunately, was not preserved in the 1920 Bulletin.[20] The minutes for the 1920 Conference ended with an historic vote, described this way:

> "All the papers read at the Conference awakened unusual interest and the time for discussion might have been prolonged with profit. The spirit which prevailed and the evident possibility of counsel and conference among the Theological Schools of the United State and Canada for the general improvement of their common work, *resulted in a unanimous vote for a permanent organization*, with a preference for biennial meetings of the Conference" (italics added).[21]

Theology attended the 1918 ATS conference (it merged with Vanderbilt University Divinity School in 1966, Vanderbilt website). Boston University School of Theology, which also attended the 1918 Conference, awarded a doctorate in Greek in 1877 to Helen Magill White, "the first woman to receive a PhD in the United States" (BU School of Theology website). Among Canadian schools, the first to admit women was Mount Allison University in New Brunswick in 1862, according to The History of Canadian Women in University. Mount Allison attended their first and only ATS Conference in 1922, held in Toronto. McMaster Divinity College, which attended the 1918 ATS Conference, claims to be the first theological school in Canada "to confer a theological degree on a woman, and the first to have a woman professor" (McMaster website, no years are listed there).

[19] Appendix A has a list of all ATS presidents (and Commission chairs) from 1918 (and 1934) to 2024. The first president listed is William Mackenzie, who actually served as chair of the 1918 Executive Committee (Cable, p. 24; see Footnote 7)

[20] Brown's 1920 address on "The Value and Future of This Conference" was later published in 1921 in the *Journal of Religion* as "The Common Problems of Theological Schools." Brown acknowledged that the profound theological differences among theological schools might mitigate against forming an association, but he felt that such an association would be possible and fruitful because, instead of ignoring or condemning those differences, an association of theological schools might actually help understand those differences. Such an understanding, he argued, could "create a united front, capable of facing with relative efficiency the problems common to virtually all [North] American theological schools following the War" (Cable, p. 31; see Footnote 7 for full Cable citation). The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw an explosion of voluntary associations in the U.S., which Max Weber in 1905 called "the association-land par excellence" (cited in *Agency of Change*, p. 17, by Newman, who devoted an entire section to the "rise of educational voluntary associations" in that time period (pp. xv ff.).

[21] Interestingly, earlier at that same 1920 ATS Conference, the Executive Committee made this report about its first meeting in September 1918: "The Secretary was instructed to take a vote of the [27-member] Continuation Committee by letter whether or not another Theological Conference should be held. All the members, save two, voted favorably" (Bulletin 1, pp. 4-5). One wonders who were the two who voted no.

When the Continuation Committee met later that year in December 1920, a "draft constitution was submitted, and, after several modifications and additions, was adopted to be submitted for further consideration and final action to the next regular Conference which will be held in Toronto" in June 1922 (Bulletin 2, 1921, p. 1; the text of that draft constitution is preserved in Bulletin 2, pp. 2-3). The membership approved the new constitution in 1922 at the Toronto Conference (Bulletin 3, 1923, p. 1), with a few minor modifications (not listed in that Bulletin). Article III of the 1922 Constitution listed six aims of the organization, including these two key ones: "to promote intercourse amongst the institutions which compose its membership" and "to advance the highest ideals of training for the Christian Ministry." As the Continuation Committee reported at the 1922 Conference: "The purpose of this Conference is to promote co-operation among theological schools, not by executive action but by conference and council, on all matters of mutual interest and benefit" (Bulletin 3, 1923, p. 4).

One of the matters of mutual interest and benefit, discussed at some length at the 1922 Conference, was a preliminary report on the "results of a survey of theological education in the United States and Canada, which are about to be published in a book," with the minutes noting that the report was "received with much favor" (Bulletin 3, 1922, p. 2). The members even voted to "express our appreciation of the Survey of Theological Seminaries under the leadership of [Robert] Kelly and express the hope that the work will be continued, and the results reported to this Conference [in 1924], and that the charts in connection therewith be published" (Bulletin 3, p. 6).

The 1924 ATS Conference spent considerable time discussing and debating Kelly's book, published in 1924 as *Theological Education in America: A Study of One Hundred and Sixty-One Theological Schools in the United States and Canada.* Robert Kelly had been chosen to do this study by the Institute of Social and Religious Research, organized in 1921 in New York City and solely funded by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Kelly (1865-1954) had served since 1917 as the Secretary of the Church Boards of Education, founded in 1911 in New York City to represent 19 Mainline Protestant denominations in the U.S. He had previously been president of Earlham College (1903-1917), leading that Quaker school in Indiana to become a charter member of North Central's first list of "accredited" schools in 1913 (Earlham College Presidents). He was well respected as an advocate for educational quality through accreditation but had never served at an ATS school (Earlham School of Religion did not become accredited by ATS until 1973). He was also a proponent of greater ecumenical cooperation, as well as economies of scale, two values prized by Rockefeller (Miller, *Piety and Profession*, pp. 314-321).

As stated in Kelly's opening sentence: "This study grew out of the widely held belief that the machinery and methods [note the 1920s industrial imagery] used in educating Protestant ministers were inadequate" (p. vii). In his introduction, Kelly notes that "no thoroughgoing study of the seminaries has ever been made"[22] and that a "painstaking investigation of the seminaries and a careful presentation of the results might be helpful in … bettering the quality and distribution of Christian ministers" (p. viii).

Kelly's 456-page study was indeed "painstaking" and quite thorough, surveying 161 seminaries in the U.S. and Canada, half of which he visited, with a combined enrollment of 10,421 students. Part of his

[22] Prior to Kelly's 1924 survey, the 1920 Conference discussed a preliminary report on 200 theological schools conducted in 1919 by the Interchurch World Movement of North America. The Conference proposed that the report "should be carefully revised in the light of the suggestions [and criticisms] made by members of the Conference before its final publication" (Bulletin 1, 1920, p. 5). That was not done. The final report, never mentioned after the 1920 Conference, was published in late 1920 as the *World Survey by the Interchurch World Movement of North America: Volume One, American Volume*. It devoted only 11 of over 300 pages to "Theological Seminaries and Training Schools" (pp. 190-200), which ended with a call for "raising standards" (p. 200).

problem was in defining a seminary, to which he admitted that "No definition of a 'seminary' is now attempted" (p. 28), though his analysis presumes a seminary to be primarily a professional graduate school preparing clergy. A key issue then was the pre-seminary preparation of theological students, or the lack thereof, with the presumption that a graduate school should enroll only college graduates. Kelly found that in the early 1920s in North America more than half of all seminarians (56%) did not have a college degree, including a fourth (24%) who had some college preparation but no degree and a third (32%) who had no college work at all (p. 164).[23] And of the 44% with a college degree, the quality of many of those colleges was suspect, especially any that were not "accredited." Kelly concluded that "the fundamental difficulty [for theological education is] … the absence of recognized standards" (p. 29). Or as he later stated, "The main problem is not one of adequate numbers [of theological students] but of high quality" (p. 234).

In his concluding chapter, Kelly raised numerous problems that he framed as questions. One of his most provocative questions was this: "Are there too many seminaries?" (noting also that so many seminaries meant many of them had too few financial resources). To his question, Kelly offered this response: "The efficiency[24] expert would undoubtedly answer this question in the affirmative" (p. 213). One must remember that Kelly's 1924 study was financed by the same Rockefeller funds that were instrumental in implementing the findings of the earlier Flexner Report on medical education. That 1910 report raised the same question about medical schools, which led to a reduction by half (!) in their number by the time of the 1924 Kelly study on theological education.

Kelly's response that there were too many seminaries did not sit well with ATS leaders, many of whom were affiliated with numerous small and relatively poor denominational schools[25] (Miller, *Piety and Profession*, pp. 317-318). ATS leaders did not want their schools to experience the same revolutionary reduction that medical schools had just experienced. Concern over Kelly's conclusion is one of the key reasons ATS requested a follow-up study that resulted in Brown and May's 1934 work (see Chapter 2).[26]

One of the most important questions Kelly raised in his concluding chapter was this: "Should the seminaries be standardized?" (p. 219). He elaborated on that question with this question: "Shall the seminaries be subjected to the same type of standardization that is operating in other fields of American education and which is characterized by numerous and powerful standardizing agencies?" (p. 219). It was a question that would occupy ATS for the next ten years, resulting in the first Commission on Accrediting Institutions in 1934. In that in-between decade (1924-1934), ATS was pre-occupied with developing and discussing another study of theological education in North America, Brown and May's

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[23] The 44% of seminary students who had a college degree in 1922 is a significant decline from the 53% who did in 1872, per data from the U.S. Bureau of Education cited in Volume IV (p. 65 of Appendix to Volume II) of Brown and May's *The Education of American Ministers* (1934).

[24] Kelly's use of the phrase "efficiency expert" in 1924 in some ways anticipates the very first ATS Standards adopted in 1936. The word "efficiency" occurs three times in that one-page set of nine standards. All standards represent the culture in which they are developed, and the industrial culture of early 20th century North America valued "efficiency."

[25] Half of the 28 schools at the 1924 Conference enrolled fewer than 100 students (29% enrolled fewer than 50). Those numbers may be skewed since attendance at the 1924 Conference in Evanston (IL) was the lowest ever for an ATS Conference, with only 44 registrants from 28 schools—well below the 101 at the first ATS Conference in 1918, though the 1920 and 1922 Conferences registered only 56 and 54 respectively (see attendance data in Endnote 2). The low attendance in 1924 may be because that was the first Conference held outside of the Northeast (where most members lived) or perhaps because of a high number of smallpox cases in 1924 (The Roaring '20s Smallpox Epidemic and Statista, Number of Smallpox Cases Recorded in U.S.).

[26] Despite their concerns, or perhaps because of them, the 1924 Conference recommended "that every Faculty member seriously study the findings and suggestions of Dr. Kelly's Book" (Bulletin 4, 1924, p. 9).

monumental study that began in 1929 and culminated in 1934 in the publication of the four-volume *The Education of American Ministers*.

Every ATS Conference from 1924 to 1934 featured one or more addresses and discussions on the need for standards.[27] The first address was in 1924 by Professor Herbert Evans of the Pacific School of Religion on "Standardization of Theological Degrees" (Bulletin 4, 1924, p. 6; the text of that paper is not included in the 1924 Bulletin). It was at that 1924 Conference that the ATS membership voted to appoint a "Committee of Co-operative Research" (Bulletin 4, p. 9), led by William Brown, to consider a follow-up study to Kelly's 1924 work. That committee reported at the 1926 Conference at Yale on "the sympathetic attitude shown by the Institute of Social and Religious Research" to fund a follow-up study to Kelly's 1924 study that the Institute had previously funded (Bulletin 5, 1926, pp. 5-6; see discussions of 1926 and 1928 Conferences below).

The 1926 Conference at Yale featured an address by "Professor" Luther Weigle of Yale Divinity School, soon to become Yale's long-serving dean [1928-1949], as well as ATS president in 1928 and chair of its Executive Committee from 1930 to 1948 (Bulletin 18, 1948, p. 63; Weigle also chaired the committee that produced the Revised Standard Version in 1952). He spoke on "A Survey of Contemporary Theological Education," discussing key implications of Kelly's 1924 study and reiterating the need for a follow-up study with greater ATS input on the concerns Kelly had raised (Bulletin 5, 1926, pp. 11-18). In 1934, Weigle would become a member of the very first Commission on Accrediting (see Footnote 44).

The 1928 Conference at Union in New York reported that the Institute of Social and Religious Research had given ATS its first ever grants,[28] totaling $7,500 (worth about $135,000 in today's dollars), to help fund what became Brown and May's 1934 four-volume work (Bulletin 6, 1928, pp. 3, 9, and 14). Brown gave a report at the 1928 Conference on a "study of theological education" (pp. 14-16) that outlined three broad areas for this work, focused on the preparation and effectiveness of seminary graduates.

The 1930 Conference in Chicago (at the Windermere Hotel, the first not held at a member school; see Endnote 3) had five major addresses on the need for educational standards for theological schools: one by William Brown, two by Mark May, one by Luther Weigle, and one by Arlo Brown, the president of Drew University and later president of the Conference. Outgoing ATS president Weigle gave the "Presidential Address" on "The Educational Standards of Theological Schools" (Bulletin 7, 1931, pp. 54-67). He addressed the need for entrance requirements, minimum grades, graduation requirements, and total hours/years required for the BD degree, along with other issues. He stated that he was "very hopeful that through this Conference of Theological Seminaries we may work together upon this matter of improving our educational standards" (p. 60), concluding that "the seminary ought to be a graduate

[27] The ATS Conference of Theological Schools was not the first to call for standards for theological schools. Charles Briggs, professor of Hebrew and theology at Union in NY (and head librarian), had called for "restoring to theological education high academic standards" in an article published in 1892 (cited by Cable, p. 9; see Footnote 7 for full Cable citation). Briggs' solution was for theological schools to affiliate with universities, something that Flexner called for medical schools to do in his 1910 report, which most of them did. William Mackenzie, president of Hartford Seminary, also called for standards for seminaries as early as 1911 in his article in *Religious Education*, "The Standardization of Theological Education." Mackenzie would later serve as the first chair of ATS's Executive Committee in 1918 (Cable, p. 24) and also ATS's Continuation Committee in 1920 (Bulletin 1, 1920, p. 1). In addition, the Carnegie Foundation had funded a 1911 survey of theological and lay training schools that lamented the wide range of standards among theological schools (cited in Footnote 11).

[28] It probably helped that William Brown (1865-1943) was a friend of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., the sole funder of the Institute of Social and Religious Research. Brown often entertained Rockefeller Jr. at his summer home in Maine, where he also hosted such luminaries as Charles Eliot (Harvard's longest-serving president, 1869-1909) and Seth Low (Columbia's president, 1890-1901), who served as mayor of New York City in 1901-1902 (William Adams Brown, Wikipedia).

professional school [that] employs better methods of teaching than are employed in the colleges" (Bulletin 7, 1931, p. 67). Arlo Brown led a discussion at the 1930 Conference on Weigle's address in which he proposed four standards: making the BA prerequisite to the BD, a grade of "C" to pass seminary classes, 90 hours to complete a BD, and three years as "the normal length" of the BD degree[29] (Bulletin 7, pp. 68-67). No action was taken on those proposed standards at the 1930 Conference.

The 1932 Conference at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg (PA) featured an opening address by Mark May on a "Partial Report on Study of Theological Education" that was spread across six sessions (Bulletin 8, 1932, pp. 1-2). The 1932 Conference voted "to recognize the notable service rendered to the cause of theological education by Dr. Mark A. May… and also to note with appreciation the indispensable aid given by Dr. William A. Brown as theological consultant" (p. 12). Brown clarified that "this is not a Report of the Conference of Theological Seminaries, but of the staff appointed by the Institute of Social and Religious Research and approved by the [Executive] Committee of this Conference" (p. 13). And while that is true, Brown himself played a significant role, writing a "Summary and Interpretation," the first of the four volumes published in 1934. Given Brown's long-standing leadership role at ATS (see discussion on p. 6 above), the 1934 study had a much higher impact on ATS than did Kelly's 1924 work.

Given all the work that would be required in implementing the results of Brown and May's ongoing study (1929-1934), the 1932 Conference also voted to develop plans "for the possible employment of an executive secretary… in connection with the Study of Theological Education and the possible lift of the standards of our men" (Bulletin 11, 1933, pp. 13-14). Notably, the 1932 Conference also adopted what could be viewed as ATS's first standards, on "degrees conferred by seminaries" (pp. 14-15), though the lack of any implementation mechanism rendered them somewhat powerless. Still, key statements[30] from that document made their way into the first official set of ATS Standards adopted in 1936 (see Chapter 2 below).

To the adoption of the very first ATS Standards in 1936 we now turn, after reviewing the monumental, four-volume work of Brown and May, *The Education of American Ministers*, that dominated the 1934 Conference and led to the launch of the first ATS Commission on Accrediting that same year.

[29] The Bachelor of Divinity (BD) degree was the most common degree for clergy in the first half of the 20th century in North America. ATS recommended in 1966 that the BD be called the Master of Divinity (MDiv; see pp. 48 and 52 below), though the MDiv nomenclature did not officially replace the BD until the 1972 revision of the Standards (see p. 55 below and also p. 25 below).

[30] Two of the statements adopted at the 1932 Conference on "Degrees Conferred by Seminaries" were adopted nearly verbatim in the 1936 Standards: (1) that the BD be the first "professional degree, the standards of which in intellectual attainment are fully equal to those in any other scholarly field" and (2) that it be "undesirable for a seminary that is not an integral part of a university to grant the Ph.D. or the A.M. degree." The other statements adopted in 1932 dealt with diplomas, certificates, a second theological degree, and the ThD degree; however, those other statements were controversial enough in the 1930s that none was reflected in the 1936 Standards.

Chapter 2. Writing the Standards (1934-1939)

The 1934 Conference at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School (Rochester, NY) was a major milestone and turning point in the history of ATS and the ATS Commission on Accrediting. The four-volume *Education of American Ministers* by Brown and May (published earlier that year) was the focus of the meeting, with three major addresses devoted to its results. The opening "President's Address" by Warren Moulton of Bangor Theological Seminary was one of the longest to date, with 13 pages of printed text, "Regarding the Report on Ministerial Education in America" (Bulletin 9, 1934, pp. 20-32). Moulton reminded the members that it had been ten years since the Conference appointed a Committee on Co-operative Research in 1924 to undertake "a study of Protestant ministerial education." Moulton noted that "this work has been carried out under our auspices and has been made possible by the exceedingly efficient and most generous cooperation of the Institute of Social and Religious Research" and "to Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., in particular, we are under very great obligation for continued interest and financial aid, without which we should not have been in a position to carry out our plans in such a satisfactory manner" (Bulletin 9, 1934, p. 20). He added that "it is now incumbent upon us to carry forward the unfinished task" and, quoting from the opening of the second volume of Brown and May's work, "to lay a foundation for the improvement of theological education in the United States and Canada" (p. 21).

Kelly's 1924 study of 161 theological schools in North America (*Theological Education in America*, which was discussed thoroughly at several ATS Conferences, especially in 1922 and 1924) always raised some suspicion because ATS had no direct involvement in its planning or the interpretation of its results (see p. 7 above; see also Miller's discussion of the role that Douglas Mackenzie [ATS Executive Committee chair, 1918-1924] tried to play in Kelly's study, *Piety and Profession*, pp. 317-318). Kelly also seemed to have a bias toward larger, more ecumenically oriented seminaries and a lack of appreciation for the critical role played by denominational seminaries, which were many and mostly small (see p. 8 above). To address that suspicion and bias, ATS leaders insisted on a follow-up study that would involve them more directly. As noted earlier (p. 9 above), the 1924 Conference appointed William Brown of Union (NY) to chair a Committee on Co-Operative Research to plan for that follow-up study.

The Institute of Social and Religious Research (funded by Rockefeller) agreed to fund a follow-up study and agreed with the ATS Committee on Co-Operative Research to appoint as director Dr. Mark May, a professor of educational psychology at Yale University, and to appoint William Brown to be "Theological Consultant" (Brown, Volume I, p.vi).[31] The four-volume work was allocated and published as follows:

Brown, Volume I - Ministerial Education in America: Summary and Interpretation
May, Volume II – The Profession of the Ministry: Its Status and Problems
May, Volume III – The Institutions that Train Ministers[32]
May and Shuttleworth, Volume IV – Appendices [to Volume II and Volume III]
[Frank K. Shuttleworth, a statistician at Yale, was responsible for most of Volume IV]

[31] Both Brown and May had Yale connections. Brown was a Yale graduate (BA in 1886, MA in 1888, and PhD in 1901), a member of the Yale Corporation (1917-1934), and had served one year as acting provost of the University (1919-1920).

[32] The chapter on seminary libraries in May's Volume III (pp. 149-191) was "a condensed version of a master's dissertation written by Mr. Raymond P. Morris, Assistant Librarian of Yale Divinity School" (p. 149; see also Endnote 7). He included six recommendations for library standards (pp. 190-191). The six recommendations were rather quantitatively focused (e.g., library budget should be at least 9% of the institutional budget). None of those recommended library standards was incorporated into the 1936 Standard on the library, which was only one sentence long.

May's research, begun in 1929, identified 224 theological schools in North America:[33] 198 in the United States and 26 in Canada. His study focused on 176 of them, excluding 39 of the 41 schools in the U.S. that served African American students (May, Volume III, p. 4). May explained that exclusion by noting that "an intensive study of Negro institutions," *The Education of Negro Ministers*, had just been completed in 1925 by the Institute of Social and Religious Research (May, Volume III, p. 5).[34]

Brown's Volume I on "Summary and Interpretation" provided for the 1934 study what Kelly's 1924 study lacked: direct input on the results from a trained and trusted theologian who was well known by ATS schools. Brown divided his volume into five parts: the problem presented by contemporary ministerial education, the status of the minister in [North] American Protestantism, where the Protestant minister receives his professional education, the education that is given today, and—most tellingly—the education needed for tomorrow. Brown summarized five functions of the Protestant minister: teacher, preacher, priest, pastor, and administrator (pp. 22-23). These are five areas that needed attention in seminaries in order to achieve what he labelled as "educational efficiency" (p. 101; see Footnote 24), especially in the "standardization of theological degrees" (pp. 141-143 and 217).[35]

May's Volume II was the most thorough analysis to date of Protestant clergy,[36] divided into four parts over 400 pages: the minister's education, denomination, work, and success. May's research noted that about 40% of Protestant clergy indicated in the 1926 U.S. Census of Religious Bodies that they were seminary graduates, though only 30% listed one of the 198 U.S. seminaries identified in May's study (pp. 12-15). A more detailed analysis of a subset of those 198 U.S. seminaries suggested the actual percentage was about 36%, meaning the vast majority (nearly two-thirds) of American ministers had not graduated from a seminary—and "probably as many as half were not graduates of either a college or a seminary" (p. 375). And of those who were, the effectiveness of their training varied widely. On the first page of Volume II, May began with this observation: "It is commonly known that the educational status of Protestant ministers in the United States…is very low" (p. 11). On the last page of his Volume II, May ended with this conclusion: "The need for closer cooperation between seminaries, local churches, and denominational boards is one of the basic conclusions of this entire study" (p. 394).

May's Volume III focused on seminaries in five parts: the seminary as a professional school, seminary teachers and teaching methods, the student body, the seminary as a center of religious life, and the relation of the seminary to its larger constituency. What he found was an enormously wide variety of seminary approaches and effectiveness. May concluded Volume III with a final section on "Educational

[33] The word "American" in the title, *The Education of American Ministers*, refers to "North American" (both Canada and the U.S.), though admittedly most of the data analyzed in this four-volume study focused on the U.S.

[34] The first Black seminary to become a member of the ATS Conference was Gammon Theological Seminary of Atlanta in 1930 (Bulletin 7, 1931, p. 4), which is now part of the Interdenominational Theological Center. Gammon was also the first Black seminary to be accredited by ATS (see first list of accredited schools in Bulletin 12, 1938, p. 15). Another Black seminary, Howard University Divinity School (known then as the School of Religion of Howard University), applied for initial ATS accreditation in 1937, but when the Commission on Accrediting met in December that year to consider the initial list of 61 applicants, they asked Howard (along with several other schools) to withdraw its application until some concerns could be addressed, e.g., finances, library, faculty (Commission Minutes, December 1937, p. 7). Howard addressed the Commission's concerns, reapplied, and was accredited in December 1939 (Commission Minutes, December 1939, p. 1). The school was included for the first time in the list of accredited schools in the 1940 ATS program (Bulletin 14, 1940, p. 51).

[35] Brown cited on p. 143 the statements on "Degrees Conferred by Seminaries" that was adopted at the 1932 ATS Conference, several of which ended up in the original ATS Standards in 1936 (see Footnote 30).

[36] May's data sources for the study of Protestant ministers included responses by 67,429 ministers in the 1926 U.S. Census of Religious Bodies, detailed questionnaires filled out by 1,805 ministers for his study, and the histories of 248 ministers obtained from denominational yearbooks (Volume II, p. 245).

Standards" that included this clear criticism: "Theological seminaries in the United States and Canada are relatively untouched by the wave of standardization that has spread over [North] American colleges and universities" (p. 505). To be sure, May's original purpose was "to discover and define the problems involved in American theological education… not to solve [those] problems" (Volume II, p. 375). Still, developing and implementing a set of standards seemed one of the most obvious solutions.

A helpful summary of Brown and May's 1934 study is found in Miller's *Piety and Profession* (pp. 470-489; see Footnote 6 for full citation). As Miller notes, "Brown is careful to place the study in the context not of the development of higher education in general, but of professional education… For Brown and May the seminary is a professional school [and] the minister is a professional, a person educated to accomplish a specific task" (p. 474). To highlight the cultural context of that approach, Miller adds that this emphasis on the seminary as a professional school "was an attempt to relate the ministry to the twentieth-century social order [since] the centrality of the professions, after all, is one of the marks of the modern industrial city that is organized more around the temple of 'know-how' than the classical temples of religion and scholarship" (p. 475).

More tellingly for ATS, this "appeal to professionalism was also an attempt to get beyond the denominational impasse that seemed, especially to those connected to the Institute of Social and Religious Research, to be choking American religious institutions to death" (Miller, *Piety and Profession*, p. 476). This focus on theological education as a graduate professional enterprise also led ATS to clarify its own focus and its own criteria for membership. That was made clear at the 1932 Conference when the Committee on Business and Findings[37] reported on a request "from a training school for lay [church] workers, asking the Conference to admit such schools and in the future give a place on the program to the discussion of the problems of this group of institutions." In response to that request, it was resolved at the 1932 Conference that "theological seminaries are graduate schools preparing men [see Footnote 18] for ordination and it would be outside their province to deal with the problems of institutions training lay workers" (Bulletin 8, 1932, p. 9).

Miller also observes in his *Piety and Profession* (p. 480): "Most interestingly, Brown and May discovered that seminaries [in the 1920s and 1930s] were essentially regional institutions" with "mostly commuter students [who] took advantage of the system of rails and roads to aid them in their commute… The great age of the 'residential' seminary was in fact in the future, after the GI Bill [of 1944] and national prosperity [in the 1950s] made it possible for students to pick up and go to school where they liked rather than where it was most convenient." [38]

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[37] The Committee on Business and Findings is mentioned for the first time in the 1920 Conference proceedings (Bulletin 1, 1920, p. 4), consisting of 12 men, half of whom were also on the Continuation Committee. The Committee on Business and Findings gave reports at every Conference thereafter until 1942, after which it is never mentioned (nor is it in the 1922 Constitution or the 1936 revision). The Committee's biennial reports focused primarily on nominations: for officers and for members of the Continuation Committee and Executive Committee, "in accordance with power granted the Committee on Business and Findings by vote of the Conference" (Bulletin 4, 1924, p. 7). The Committee also reported at each Conference (until 1942) on various other issues, from thanking the host school to recommending new committees, as well as on various communications and requests sent to ATS, which it was empowered to handle.

[38] Miller (*Piety and Profession*, p. 481) also points out from Brown and May's study that most seminaries of in the 1920s and 1930s charged little or no tuition. In Volume 1 of *The Education of American Ministers*, Brown observed: "It is probable that theological students are subsidized more largely than any other group of students except those training for commissions in the Army and the Navy" (p. 146). Rather than affirming the widespread use of low or no tuition by seminaries, Brown bemoaned "the evil tendencies of this system of subsidization," noting that it "makes the way into the ministry too easy… [for theological students and] makes them financially irresponsible" (p. 147). Brown's criticism of student subsidies in 1934 came, ironically, in the midst of the Great Depression, which began in 1929 and lasted in the U.S. until 1941 (Federal Reserve History: Great Depression) and in Canada until 1939 (The Great Depression in Canada). To address the question of student subsidies, ATS

Perhaps the most telling point made by Brown and May's milestone study in 1934 was to define seminaries as professional graduate schools preparing theological students for ministry. To quote Miller again in his intentionally named book, *Piety and Profession* (emphasis added): "The ideal of simple professional competence formulated by Brown and May was the cleanest understanding of the seminary formulated between 1930 and 1960" and their "formulations were, despite fits and starts, reigning orthodoxy among theological administrators until the late 1960s" (pp. 488-489).

Discussion of Brown and May's *The Education of American Ministers* dominated the 1934 ATS Conference—from the opening presidential address (discussed at the beginning of this chapter) to the concluding actions taken at that Conference at the recommendation of the Executive Committee. Chief among those actions were the appointment of a Commission on Standards of Admission and a Commission on Accrediting Institutions of Theological Education. The first commission was to recommend at the 1936 Conference "standards of admission." The second commission was to make recommendations at the 1936 Conference regarding: "(1) classes[39] of accredited institutions…, (2) the type of ratings of institutions which might be used, (3) the standards or criteria by which it would be proposed to rate institutions, and (4) proposals for putting a plan of accrediting into effect, upon such bases" (Bulletin 9, 1934, p. 16). In addition, the Executive Committee reported at the 1936 Conference that it had appointed in 1935 a Committee on Revision of the Constitution (Bulletin 11, 1936, p. 25).

The period between 1934 and 1936 was one of the busiest in ATS history, at least for these two new Commissions and the recently appointed Committee on Revision of the Constitution. Unfortunately, no minutes exist of the discussions held by either Commission or by that Committee during those two years. What we have are the rather amazing results (given the quick turnaround time) of their work, printed in Bulletin 11 for the 1936 Conference. A special Bulletin was also published in June 1935 (Bulletin 10) that featured two brief but key articles: "A Step Forward" by William Brown and "Next?" by Lewis Sherrill.

The 1935 article by Brown announced the hiring of the Conference's first Executive Secretary, Lewis Sherrill (1892-1957), who served part-time and without salary from 1935 to 1938 (he was dean of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary from 1930 to 1950). His hiring was based in part on his outstanding work as chair of the Curriculum Committee since 1930. Sherrill was later elected to a two-year term as ATS President in 1938, after serving as chair of the Commission on Accrediting from 1936 to 1938. Luther Weigle (long-time dean at Yale, who was Sherrill's PhD adviser there) chaired the first Commission in 1934, but as the new Executive Secretary in 1935, Sherrill had a major role in guiding the development of ATS's first set of standards[40] that were approved by the membership at the 1936 Conference. At Sherrill's funeral in 1957, the then-president of ATS paid him this high tribute: "He was

appointed a "Committee on Scholarship and Student Subsidies" that gave a lengthy report at the 1936 Conference, with no recommendations other than that schools make their financial aid policies clear in their catalogs (Bulletin 11, 1936, pp. 92-103).

[39] Regarding "classes" of institutions, the minutes of the 1934 Conference (Bulletin 9, 1934, p. 16) reference four "provisional classifications" proposed by May in Volume III (p. 15): independent theological institutions, postgraduate theological departments of universities, undergraduate theological departments, and Bible schools. Based on the "membership" criteria adopted at the 1932 Conference (see discussion on p. 13 above), only the first two types were considered by the Commission on Accrediting, though the Commission ended up proposing a system of "notations" to deal with seminaries (independent or embedded) that admitted students without a college degree (see discussion on pp. 20-21 below).

[40] In fact, one of the more unusual words in the 1936 Standards may be attributed to Sherrill. Standard 5 stipulated that a theological school "should have a library which is *live*" (Bulletin 11, 1936, p. 43). In his 1935 article, "Next?," Sherrill uses the word "live" to describe theological libraries, noting the need for libraries that "are always 'live,' changing, calling for up-to-date information" (Bulletin 10, 1935, p. 6).

the guiding light on the Executive Committee and the Commission on Accrediting. Whatever influence [ATS] has had in shaping theological education in America from 1935 to 1957, Lewis Sherrill has had the profoundest influence of all."[41] In his 1935 article, "Next?," Sherrill called attention to the newly formed Commission on Accrediting Institutions and the Commission on Standards of Admission, stating somewhat prophetically, that "their reports [at the 1936 Conference] may prove to be turning points in theological education" (Bulletin 10, 1935, p. 7).

The 1936 Conference[42] reviewed and approved three major reports. The first was the "Report of the Committee on Revision of the Constitution" (Bulletin 11, 1936, pp. 36-38). Among key changes to the 1922 Constitution were these: (1) changing the Conference name to The American Association of Theological Schools;[43] (2) clarifying the organization's purpose "to confer concerning matters of common interest, … to consider any problems that may arise, … and to deal with any other matter which the Association may wish to consider"; and (3) stipulating new criteria limiting membership to "institutions engaged in educating and training for the Christian ministry [who are] elect[ed] at a regularly called meeting… [and who pay] annual dues of at least $10.00" (see also discussion on membership criteria on p. 13 above).

The 1936 Constitution also eliminated the Continuation Committee, begun in 1918 and described in the 1922 Constitution (its last report was at the 1934 Conference). In addition, the 1936 Constitution had a separate article for "Officers" (four elected for two years as before, except the Secretary was now called the Executive Secretary, a part-time staff position with expanded duties) and another article for an "Executive Committee," consisting of the four officers and eight others elected at each biennial meeting. The Executive Committee had three primary responsibilities: "to prepare the programs for all the meetings of the Association, to direct the Executive Secretary, and to transact the business of the Association *ad interim*" (Bulletin 11, 1936, p. 37).

The most significant change in the 1936 ATS Constitution, however, was the formal establishment of the Commission on Accrediting, shortened from its original name in 1934 of the Commission on Accrediting Institutions. The new Commission consisted of the four officers of the Association and six other persons appointed by the Executive Committee to serve six-year terms. That composition method did not change until 1964, when the membership began electing all nine (then) members (see p. 47 below); it changed

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[41] Cited in article on Lewis Joseph Sherrill in Biola University's Database: Christian Educators of the 20th Century. Part of Sherrill's skill as a highly praised leader of an association of schools with such profound theological differences may be due to his role as the long-term dean (1930-1950) of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Miller made this comparison/observation: "Perhaps befitting the dean of a school that served two Presbyterian denominations [Northern and Southern] divided by a common confession, Sherrill was a master of negotiation and compromise, a person almost instinctively trusted by others" (*Piety and Profession*, p. 459). Those attributes must have served him well in working with the ATS Commission on Accrediting to develop the first set of standards in 1936.

[42] The 1936 Biennial Meeting was the first not to use the word "Conference," calling itself "The Tenth Biennial Meeting of the American Association of Theological Schools (*Formerly*: The Conference of Theological Seminaries and Colleges in the United States and Canada)" (Bulletin 11, 1938, title page). The 1936 meeting was held at Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester (PA), the oldest city in the state and a suburb of Philadelphia. Martin Luther King, Jr., was a 1951 graduate of Crozer, which merged with Colgate-Rochester in 1970. The 1936 meeting occurred at the height of the Dust Bowl (the "Dirty Thirties") in the U.S. and Canada. It was also the summer of the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, the first ever televised. As an interesting sidebar, the 1936 ATS meeting had a report on "Foreign Students in Our Seminaries," which said about German students that "as a rule they are Nazis, and their relationship to [North] American student bodies calls for a great deal of tact and patience" (Bulletin 11, p. 78).

[43] The new name, "American Association of Theological Schools," was meant to refer to "North American." However, the single word "American" often left Canadian members feeling left out. The name was eventually changed in 1972 to its current name "The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada" (see also Footnote 147).

again in 1974, adding three public members (see p. 59 below). The Commission's "duty [was] to institute and maintain a list of Accredited Theological Schools under standards determined by the Association." The 1934 Commission had five members,[44] compared to the ten called for under the 1936 Constitution.[45]

The second major report given at the 1936 meeting was by the Committee[46] on Standards of Admission (Bulletin 11, 1936, pp. 84-91), chaired by Sherrill. Their report focused on three areas: a pre-seminary curriculum, entrance standards, and personality and aptitudes of candidates for ministry. *Regarding a pre-seminary curriculum*, the committee proposed a minimum of 28 undergraduate hours in seven areas of study for all new seminary students. The committee recommended that the member schools "adopt this statement of the Association regarding pre-seminary curriculum," but that it "not [be] binding" on any member school (p. 86). No pre-seminary curriculum standards were included in the 1936 Standards. *Regarding entrance standards*, the committee had five recommendations: (1) not admitting anyone without an undergraduate degree, (2) not counting undergraduate courses toward a seminary degree, (3) reviewing undergraduate transcripts for the minimum pre-seminary curriculum courses, (4) admitting students from non-accredited colleges only on a probationary basis (or giving a "general examination to the applicant on the pre-theological curriculum" before admission), and (5) not accepting transfer students from another seminary without a transcript and recommendation from that seminary. Modified versions of the first and fourth recommendations made their way into the 1936 Standards. *Regarding personality and aptitudes of candidates for ministry*, the committee had numerous suggestions but no recommendations, given the complexity of that issue.

The third of the three major reports at the 1936 meeting was the most consequential, "Report of the Commission on Accrediting Institutions" (Bulletin 11, 1936, pp. 41-43). The bulk of the Commission's report was a proposed set of nine standards (reprinted in Appendix B below), which the Association "amended and adopted" with no mention of what the amendments were (Bulletin 11, p. 13). Those nine standards are startling in their simplicity and brevity, with only one paragraph per standard and barely one page in total length. They focused on (1) Standards of Admission, (2) Length of Course and Standards

[44] The five members of the original Commission on Accrediting Institutions in 1934 were *Luther Weigle* (dean of Yale Divinity School; see discussion on p. 9 above), *Arlo Brown* (president of Drew University; see discussion on p. 9 above), *Henry Washburn* (dean of Episcopal Theological Seminary), *Richard Davidson* (principal of Emmanuel College in Toronto), and *A. R. Wentz* (then professor and later president [1940-1951] of Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg, "one of the 20th century's most important Lutherans… and a pioneer of global Lutheranism" [Gettysburg Times]). That first Commission in 1934 included some of ATS's most well-known leaders, with three serving as ATS presidents: Weigle (1928), Brown (1936), and Davidson (1934).

[45] The ten members of the 1936 Commission included three members from the 1934 Commission (Arlo Brown, Luther Weigle, and A. R. Wentz; see list in Footnote 44). *Arlo Brown* and *A. R. Wentz* were ex officio members as officers of the Association (Brown as president and Wentz as treasurer), as were *Frederick Grant* (president of Seabury-Western and ATS vice president) and *Lewis Sherr*ill (dean of Louisville Presbyterian, ATS executive secretary [1935-38], and ATS president in 1938). The other six members (appointed by the Executive Committee) were *Luther Weigle* (see Footnote 44), *Albert Beaven* (president of Colgate-Rochester and ATS president in 1940), *Sandford Fleming* (president of Berkeley Baptist Divinity School in California and ATS president in 1944), *Albert Palmer* (president of Chicago Theological Seminary), and *Taliaferro Thompson* (professor at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia). The final member of the 1936 Commission was *William Brown*, co-author of the 1934 Brown and May study and an early ATS leader who had done so much to develop ATS as an accrediting agency (see discussion on p. 6 above). Brown, however, resigned from the Commission in the fall of 1936 when he retired from teaching at Union in New York (Bulletin 12, 1938, p. 6). To fill his term, the Executive Committee appointed Professor *Lavens Thomas* of Candler School of Theology. Oddly, none of the 10 members of the 1936 Commission was Canadian, though one was appointed to the 1938 Commission on Accrediting, Richard Davidson, principal of Emmanuel College in Toronto, who had been on the original Commission in 1934 (Bulletin 13, 1938, p. 2).

[46] By the time of its 1936 report, the Commission on Standards of Admission, appointed in 1934, had become the Committee on Standards of Admission (compare Bulletin 9, 1934, verso of title page and p. 16, and Bulletin 11, 1936, p. 84).

for Graduation, (3) Fields of Study and Balance of Curriculum, (4) Faculty, (5) Library, (6) Equipment, (7) Finances, (8) General Tone, and (9) Inspection. Most were only one sentence; the longest (Faculty) was four sentences. The first eight were almost all phrased as "should" statement, while the last one had three "shall" statements (the Faculty standard had both: three "should" statements and three "shall" statements). The language of "shall/should" continued in every revision of the Standards until 2020.[47]

Only one of the nine 1936 Standards had any quantitative measures: the Faculty standard specified that an accredited school "should include at least four full-time professors whose instruction shall be distributed over the four areas" (specified in Standard 3: Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Practical). The Faculty standard also specified: "A weekly teaching load of more than twelve hours per instructor shall be considered as endangering educational efficiency." As noted earlier in Footnote 24, the 1936 Standards used the word "efficiency" three times, a reflection of the early 20th century industrial culture in which they were developed. Perhaps the most interesting standard was (8) General Tone. [North Central also had a standard then on "the general tone of the institution" (Newman, *Agency of Change*, p. 193).] The ATS Standard on General Tone highlighted the need to look at institutions holistically (terms for "efficient" occur twice in this standard): "*In accrediting a Theological Seminary or College regard should be had for the quality of its instruction, the standing of its professors, the character of its administration, the efficiency of its offices of record and its proved ability to prepare students for efficient professional service or further scholarly pursuits*." [See also Appendix B.]

The last part of Standard 8 also underscored the importance of "outcomes" (long before assessment of student learning made that term common) in referencing a school's "proved ability to prepare students." As the preface to the 1936 Standards made clear: "[The Association's] interest in having a list of accredited institutions grows out of its interest in the best possible preparation of men for a successful ministry. It regards as the chief grounds for inclusion in the list, evidence that the institution is effective in preparing students for a successful ministry" (Bulletin 11, 1936, p. 41). That said, the Commission confessed that "such evidence … is difficult to secure and … difficult to interpret." From the beginning, the ATS Commission on Accrediting had no desire to treat accreditation as a matter of "compliance" (a word not found in any version of the ATS Standards) or a "checklist" requiring a simple (and simplistic) "met/not met" response. As the preface to the 1936 Standards stated, the Commission "does not treat its standards as definite rules and specifications to be applied in an exact and mechanical fashion." Rather, the Commission wished to administer these new standards "by way of stimulus and encouragement" (Bulletin 11, p. 41).

The last standard (9. Inspection) spoke to the issue of process and policies, i.e., how a member school could achieve accreditation:

> *"A Theological Seminary or College desiring accreditation shall upon request be inspected and reported by an agent of the Accrediting Commission of this Conference* [changed to Association in 1938]*. Only institutions thus inspected and approved by the Commission shall be accredited.*

[47] The 2020 Standards, as noted in the Preamble (p. iv), "are all stated as simple declarative sentences (e.g., 'planning focuses on…'), rather than as 'shall' or 'should' or 'must' statements." That approach characterizes other current accreditation standards, which require schools to meet all standards, rather than meet some ("shall") and only aspire to meet others ("should"). That said, the 2020 Standards "are also stated in ways that allow for a range of responses (not a simple 'meets/doesn't meet') and in ways that reflect the 'highest (not lowest) common denominator'" (Preamble, p. iv). The 2020 Standards "frequently use words like 'appropriate' and 'in ways consistent with the school's mission.' That is intentional, to underscore that written standards must be interpreted—first by the school in its context, next by peer evaluators with their professional judgment, and finally by a Board of Commissioners who are elected by and act on behalf of the membership" (p. iv).

The Accrediting Commission shall review periodically the list of accredited institutions and make recommendations for the revision of the list."

Standard 9 on Inspection clarified that accreditation was voluntary ("upon request"[48]) and that accreditation would be determined through some form of "inspection," a common term used by most accreditors in the 1920s and 1930s. The Commission appointed in 1936 would spend the next two years finding ways to implement Standard 9 in order to develop a list of accredited schools, the first of which it published in 1938[49] (Bulletin 12, 1938, pp. 15-17).

In undertaking its work after the first ATS standards were approved in June 1936, the Commission on Accrediting held three meetings prior to the June 1938 Biennial Meeting in Toronto. At its first meeting in December 1936, the Commission began by looking at what other accrediting agencies were doing in terms of determining whether a school should be accredited or not. The Commission found two other accrediting agencies "especially helpful," the North Central Association, a regional/institutional accreditor, and the American Medical Association, a programmatic accreditor (Bulletin 13, 1938, p. 43; see also discussion on those accreditors on pp. 4-5 above).

The ATS Commission would have found that those accrediting agencies, like most accreditors in that era, relied on "schedules" (data forms) to gather key input from member schools to help them decide whether to accredit a school or not. The 1936 ATS Commission reported in 1938 that one of its first tasks was "the construction of schedules through which information from theological schools applying to be accredited should be gathered… based on the standards adopted by the Association [and] framed to enable a school to present information about its own position and work, in light of the standards" (Bulletin 13, 1938, p. 43). Bulletin 12 (1938, p. 7) lists all 18 schedules, totaling more than 50 pages, that the first Commission used; eight of those 18 schedules mirrored the first eight standards. The 18 original schedules from 1936 were the predecessors to the current ATS Annual Report Forms[50] completed by every ATS member school each year.

The 1936 Commission on Accrediting received 61 applications before the 1938 Biennial Meeting (the first one was received in September of 1936).[51] Schedules had to be sent to each applicant, and all of those data had to be reviewed. Those applicants that seemed to meet the standards were then assigned an "inspector" to visit each school. The Commission's 1938 report to the Association (Bulletin 12, p. 8) noted that each school visited was to "provide for the inspector to hold certain interviews and examine

[48] In its first list of accredited schools (Bulletin 12, 1938, p. 7), the Commission reported that it "interprets the standards to mean that the initiative in the procedure leading to accreditation is to be taken by a school which believes it is now meeting the standards and desires to be accredited. Therefore, the Commission does not solicit nor invite applications, leaving the first step to be taken by the individual theological school."

[49] ATS published two bulletins in 1938. Bulletin 12 was published in early June as a special 52-page report by the Commission on Accrediting, in time for participants to review at the Biennial Meeting in Toronto on June 13-15. Bulletin 13 was published in July, with the usual program and proceedings that were typically published the month following the Biennial Meeting. The 1938 ATS Biennial Meeting was the last before WWII (Canada entered the war in 1939). The possibility of war must have weighed upon the hearts of those at the June 1938 ATS meeting, judging by the following remarks by Lewis Sherrill in his Report of the Executive Secretary: "Theological schools today stand in a position of increasingly heavy responsibility, now that our world faces the crossing of roads which lead to life or to destruction. Morning, noon, and night it is borne in upon us that civilization as we have known it is breaking up around us, but no [one] can yet see what shall be born out of this travail. We confidently believe that Christianity came into our world for such hours as these" (Bulletin 13, 1938, p. 36).

[50] The ATS Annual Report Forms are found on the ATS website. The forms were significantly revised in 2023 (ATS Seeks Feedback on Public Draft of Revised Annual Report Form, *Colloquy*, January 2023).

[51] Cited by Cable, p. 104 (see Footnote 7 for full Cable citation).

such phases of the school's work as cannot be described through the schedules." Each visit would require "at least one day … often more time is used [and sometimes] the inspector returns for a second visit… After the visit of inspection, the inspector makes a written report to the chairman of the Commission,[52] relating the results of the visit."

For each visit the school was charged an "inspection fee of $25, payable on call after the inspection is made. The member of the Commission who makes the visit receives no financial compensation in any form. His travel fees are paid by the Association out of funds derived from the inspection fees.[53] While in the school, he is regarded as its guest. A room is provided for his personal use, and frequently an office is made available also" (Bulletin 12, 1938, pp. 9-10).

At first, given the overwhelming amount of work involved, the Commission hoped to hire someone to do all the inspections. However, the foundation that was asked to fund an inspector position eventually chose not to do so.[54] So, the Commission members took turns doing the visits themselves, though a few, due to time or distance, were assigned to ATS school administrators not on the Commission. Because of the six-month delay to find out there would be no funds to hire a full-time inspector, the first campus visits did not occur until the fall of 1937.

At its second meeting in December of 1937, the Commission considered 34 applications, 32 of which had been visited, with a report written on each one. After reviewing each report, along with the school's completed schedules, the Commission voted to accredit 29 of those 34 applicants and asked for the other five to withdraw their applications until they could address key concerns raised in either the schedules or the reports. As noted in their June 1938 report, "the most frequent single factor influencing the Commission to an unfavorable action was the question of faculty size," with the Committee concluding that an applicant needed at least four *full-time* faculty to be accredited, based on their understanding of Standard 4 (Bulletin 12, 1938, p. 10).

At its third meeting in April 1938, the Commission reviewed 24 of the remaining 61 applications (three other applications could not be addressed due to lack of time to schedule visits[55]). Of those 24 applicants, 17 were accredited and the other seven were asked either to withdraw or to postpone their applications until key concerns could be addressed (mainly those related to insufficient faculty). So, of

[52] Commission Minutes from December 1937 (p. 9) clarified that inspector reports were not sent to the school that had been inspected but were viewed only by the Commission. The Commission chair sent a summary of the Commission's deliberations and decisions to each school.

[53] The Treasurer's Report at the 1938 Biennial Meeting included a revenue line item of $1,325 from 53 "Inspection fees," worth nearly $30,000 in today's dollars. The initial inspection fee of $25 equated to about $550 in today's dollars. The ATS Commission currently charges $3,000 for a "comprehensive evaluation visit" (Commission Billing Policies).

[54] In its report to the Association in 1938 (Bulletin 13, p. 43), the Commission reported that at its first meeting in December 1936 it asked the Executive Committee to seek external funds to pay someone to do all the inspections. The Executive Committee "approached one of the large educational foundations [but] a reply was not received until June of 1937, when the foundation reported that it could not see its way clear to make the grant." That delay meant there were no "visits until the autumn of 1937" (p. 44).

[55] The three schools that were not visited in time for the 1938 Conference were listed in the Commission's first report to the membership in Bulletin 12 in 1938 under a special section on "Reports Unavoidably Delayed" (p. 17). Those three schools were Harvard Divinity School, Chicago Theological Seminary, and Queen's Theological College (Kingston, Ontario), with all three accredited before the 1940 list appeared (Bulletin 14, 1940, pp. 50-52).

the 61 applications, 46 (75%) were accredited, 12 were not, and three others were not able to be decided before the June 1938 Biennial Meeting (see Appendix C for a list of the first 46 schools).

Fifty-three (87%) of the 61 applicants were visited, a rather remarkable feat to accomplish in less than one year, especially given the challenges of travel during the Great Depression. Among the 12 not accredited, even eight of those were visited, though they were not charged the $25 inspection fee, since only 53 fees are reported in the 1938 Treasurer's Report (Footnote 53).

In reviewing schools' application materials, the Commission quickly realized that "very few theological schools meet the standards completely in every particular. The very first problem that confronted the Commission was that of dealing fairly and honestly with these divergencies. To make the matter more complicated, the divergencies were of various degrees of importance" (Bulletin 12, 1938, p. 11). The Commission's solution to this problem was to adopt four categories of "divergence" (Bulletin 12, 1938, pp. 12-13):

1. *Deviation* referred to some matter where "the school's practice varied from standard practice, but where the matter was not regarded by the Commission as having primary educational significance." Deviations were reported to the school, but not to the Association.
2. *Significant deviation* referred to "some variance from standard practice in a matter which significantly affects the quality of the educational work done." Significant deviations were reported to the school, but not to the Association.
3. *Information* referred to some matter "which is not easily evaluated in light of a standard, but which the Commission believes should be taken into account by those responsible for a school." Matters of information were reported to the school, but not to the Association.
4. *Notation* was "a way of referring to footnotes appended to the list of accredited schools to indicate that while a school is being accredited, it does not yet adequately safeguard standards of admission or graduation or has degree practices not in harmony with the standards, or its library is inadequate, and so forth." Notations were reported publicly to the Association, as well as privately to the school.

This four-fold solution was the Commission's rather ingenious way to "recognize that a large proportion of the theological schools deserve to be accredited, under the standards adopted by the Association, [yet they] do not meet these standards fully in every respect" (Commission Minutes, December 1937, p. 1). The first three categories—all private—were an attempt to be honest and helpful to the schools to encourage improvement.[56]

The last category—the only public one—was an attempt to make sure the Commission's published list of accredited schools was an "honest, objective report, which would be as fair to the Association and the public, as it is to the individual school" (Bulletin 12, 1938, p. 12). While the first three terms fell out of use after some time, the category of "notation" was used until the 2020 revision of the *Policies and Procedures*, which replaced that term with "warning," in keeping with most every accrediting agency's practice in recent years.[57]

[56] The Commission Minutes from 1937 and 1938 record 8 deviations, 34 significant deviations, and 34 items of information, along with 62 notations imposed. Only two schools (Yale and Colgate-Rochester) received none of these four actions.

[57] The 2020 Policies and Procedures (III.G-I) list three "public sanctions:" warning (previously notation), probation, and 'show cause' [as to why accreditation should not be withdrawn]. The U.S. Department of Education had effectively treated "notation" as a "warning" for some time, with specific regulations for schools with that sanction.

The Commission's first published list of accredited schools (Bulletin 12, 1938, pp. 15-17, and Appendix C) included 46 schools[58] (3 in Canada and 43 in the U.S.). Twelve of the 46 had no notations, while 34 had one or more notations (the most were two schools with four notations each). That list of accredited schools in 1938 added a description of 22 different notations: the first six (and the last one) dealt with admissions, the next four with the library, the next ten with degrees, and the one remaining with the length of an academic year.

Of the 62 total notations imposed on 34 schools, more than half (36) dealt with admissions. Of the 36 notations on admissions, 15 were for admitting 10-24% of incoming students without college degrees, ten were for admitting 25-49% without college degrees, two were for admitting 50-75% without college degrees, and nine were for double counting undergraduate and graduate credits. The other 26 notations dealt with degrees (18), the library (7), and the length of an academic year (1). [59]

The 36 notations on admissions clearly underscored the Commission's concern that seminaries be viewed as *graduate* schools. That definition of seminaries as professional graduate schools of theology was something made clear in the membership criteria adopted in 1932 (see discussion on p. 13 above), in Brown and May's 1934 study (see discussion on p. 14 above[60]), and in the Commission on Standards of Admissions appointed at the 1934 Conference and chaired by Lewis Sherrill, ATS's very first executive secretary (see p. 16 above). The Commission realized that it needed from the beginning to hold the line on ensuring that accredited schools took seriously their roles as professional *graduate* schools, while also giving member schools some time to implement that definition, as well as providing some form of accountability (via public notations) that would encourage them to do so.

One of the most intriguing features of the Commission's 1938 report was "A Partial Summary of Forty-Five Accredited Theological Schools" (Bulletin 12, pp. 19-52). That report functioned as a forerunner of the ATS Fact Books that were published from 1970 to 2002, which have been published since then as the Annual Data Tables.[61] The 34-page report in 1938 summarized key data from 1935-36 for the 45 schools included (one school's application had not been decided in time to be included, Bulletin 12, p. 19).

The summary data included 35 tables, including those related to the following: *enrollment* (5,102 total for those 45 schools, down from 6,071 in 1931-32[62]), *admissions* (4,148 of the 5,102 total students had college degrees), *degrees* (1,158 awarded), *retention rates* (averaged 94%), *faculty size* (median of 8 full-time, ranging from 4 to 24), *faculty salaries* (median ranging from $2,400 to $3,750), *faculty degrees* (43% had doctorates), *library holdings* (median of 35,000 volumes), *endowments* ($920,000 median, or

[58] The original list of ATS accredited schools would have totaled 49, but the Commission did not have sufficient time to visit three of those original applicants (see Footnote 55). Appendix C lists all 46 "charter" members on the 1938 list of accredited schools and puts in italics those schools that were also "charter" members of the first ATS Conference in 1918.

[59] The 18 notations on degrees (second only to the 36 on admissions) reflected the Association's concern over standardizing degrees, a concern that dated back to at least 1924 (see discussion on p. 9 above). Notably, there were no notations on finances or faculty. The lack of notations on finances may have been due to the Depression. The lack of notations on faculty reflected the Commission's decision not to accredit institutions with substantial concerns over faculty, especially if there were not at least four full-time faculty (see discussion on p. 19 above).

[60] As noted on p. 14 above, perhaps the most telling point made by Brown and May's milestone study in 1934 was to define seminaries as professional graduate schools preparing theological students for ministry.

[61] The ATS Fact Books from 1975 to 2002 are available online on the ATS website, as are the Annual Data Tables since 2003.

[62] Some of the data in the 1938 report includes prior years, either back five years or sometimes back ten years. The report states that it was "impossible to say what combination of factors… fully account for this [enrollment decline but] it appears very likely that the decrease in enrollment is closely associated with rising standards of admission" (Bulletin 12, p. 20).

$20 million today), *annual income* ($64,000 median, or $1.4 million today) and *annual expenditures* ($68,000 median, or $1.5 million today).[63] These schools' annual income and expenditures revealed that "accredited schools considered as a whole … ran deficits every year from 1931-32 to 1935-36" (Bulletin 12, p. 47)—during the Great Depression.

The Commission's 1938 "Partial Summary" report (p. 50) also noted: "It is expensive to prepare persons for the ministry. The median school expended $972 per student enrolled in 1931-32 [but] trimmed its expenditure per student [by 1935-36] to $728" (or $16,000 today). The Great Depression, again, must have been a factor. On the other hand, 35 schools (77%) reported that they charged no tuition (p. 51). Only half of the schools reported charging for room and board, with a median of about $210 per year (about $4,600 today), though Brown and May's 1934 study showed seminarians in the 1920s and 1930s were "mostly commuter students" (p. 13 above).

The 1938 "Partial Summary" report by the Commission on Accrediting concluded with this intriguing summary and challenge (Bulletin 12, p. 52):

> "The high cost *per* student and the low cost *to* the student are in striking contrast. Sincere [members] are divided in their interpretation of the meaning that should be given to these facts. But can there be any doubt that the accredited theological schools have a moral responsibility to continue what they have begun—the raising of standards of admission, of scholarship, and of graduation? It is difficult to avoid the conviction that any other course of action will not justify the theological schools in the eyes of the Church which has entrusted to us more than seventy-five million dollars[64] to administer in the preparation of ministers of the Gospel."

It is no wonder that the Report of the Committee on Business and Findings (see Footnote 37) expressed its gratitude in this way at the 1938 Biennial Meeting: "Especially we would register our appreciation for the arduous work accomplished by the members of the Commission on Accreditation[65] and its Chairman, Dean Sherrill. We believe that through their efforts the biennium which this meeting closes may in time be regarded as *one of the most momentous periods in the history of Theological Education* on this continent" (Bulletin 13, 1938, p. 41; emphasis added).

Momentous indeed. In the span of two short years (1936-1938), in the midst of a depression and under the dark clouds of an approaching world war, the newly formed Commission on Accrediting achieved incredible results. Those ten Commissioners developed 18 schedules totaling 50 pages for applicant schools to complete. They reviewed 61 resulting applications and—in an era when long-distance travel was mostly by train—visited 53 of those schools scattered across two countries, all on a volunteer basis. They accredited 46 of those seminaries and formulated 22 notations to address the thorny problem of implementing nine new standards in a consistent and fair manner. In addition, they established initial

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[63] The 1938 report divided ATS faculty salaries into a low and high range, with the medians at $2,400 and $3,750, respectively. Those two medians today would equate to $52,000 and $83,000. Table 3.2 of the 2023-2024 ATS Annual Data Tables lists a faculty salary median range of $66,144 to $92,579, higher than the medians in 1938 during the Great Depression.

[64] Sherrill, who submitted this report on behalf of the Commission, did not specify how he arrived at the figure of $75 million. Total endowments for the accredited schools in his report were listed at $57 million, but only 35 of the 45 schools completed that part of the report (p. 49). So, he may have been calculating a total figure based on all 45 schools. Regardless, the figure of $75 million in 1938—in the midst of the Great Depression—would equate to roughly $1.6 billion in today's dollars. Total revenues for all 276 ATS member schools in 2023-2024 was $2.6 billion (Annual Data Tables, Table 4.6). Total endowments for those same schools in 2023-2024 was $11.3 billion, though nearly one-fourth (61) had no endowment (Table 1.2).

[65] The Committee's 1938 report referenced the Commission on *Accreditation*, though the correct name was Commission on *Accrediting*. Some ATS Bulletins in the 1940s continued that confusion (e.g., Bulletin 17, 1946, p. 2, and Bulletin 18, 1948, p.2).

accrediting policies and procedures that set the stage for the next century of theological accreditation.[66] On top of all that, the Commission wrote a 52-page "First Report of the Commission on Accrediting," including a 34-page summary with 35 tables summarizing key demographic data from the first accredited schools, documenting the encouraging state of theological education in North America in the 1930s.

Arlo Brown, member of the first Commission on Accrediting in 1934 and elected ATS president in 1936 (see Footnotes 44 and 45 and discussion on p. 9 above) summarized the previous decade of work on accreditation in this way in his presidential address in 1938: "A degree of cooperation through the agency of this Association has been achieved which would have been unthinkable to many of us ten or more years ago. Theological differences have played no important role in this constructive movement… The progress made in the last four to eight years would not have been possible without the pioneering of preceding years, and we are greatly indebted… for getting this Association into a position from which it could move forward" (Bulletin 13, 1938, pp. 17-18).

One important task of the newly established Commission on Accrediting proved to be crucial in helping the Association "move forward." That task was ensuring that the Standards adopted in 1936 remained relevant to theological education as it encountered and adapted to changing cultural circumstances in the coming decades. Oddly enough, that important task had been missed in the revision of the 1936 ATS Constitution that specified the duties of the new Commission on Accrediting inaugurated in 1934. To address that oversight, the 1936 Commission proposed an expansion of its duties to the Association at the June 1938 meeting, which was quickly adopted. The expanded duties empowered the Commission "to bring to the Association any recommendation for the revision or extension of the standards of the Association. This action lays upon the Commission the duty, not only of administering the standards as they are, but also of keeping constantly under view the needs for revision of the standards" (from letter to ATS member schools sent by Executive Secretary Sherrill on June 28, 1938, in the June 1938 Minutes of the Commission on Accrediting).

Revisions of those 1936 Standards would occupy the discussions and decisions of ATS Biennial Meetings during every one of the coming decades, beginning with the period of 1940-1955, to which we now turn.

[66] One interesting policy established by the 1936 Commission related to confidentiality, whereby ATS "refused to open the files of the Commission on Accrediting to researchers of various types" (a policy reviewed and repeated in Bulletin 14, 1940, p. 27—the source of the above quotation). Over the years, that policy was relaxed in specific situations, allowing researchers access to "the largest body of information about theological education in [North] America" (Bulletin 10, 1935, p. 6). In 2018, the Commission adopted a new data-sharing policy (ATS Board of Commissioners Approves New Data Sharing Policy), published in Section X of the 2020 Policies and Procedures, which allows a broader range of researchers greater access to the Annual Report Forms data (the successor to the data in those early "schedules," see discussion on p. 18 above).

Chapter 3. Revising the Standards (1940-1955)

The period of 1940-1955 continued the work of accrediting from the previous period of 1934-1939, but with some significant revisions, especially in the Standards. That era began under dark clouds with the 1940 ATS Biennial Meeting, the first of three to occur during World War II, since Canada had entered the war in September of 1939.[67] Lewis Sherrill, in his opening sentence of his opening presidential address, drew an obvious parallel with the very first ATS meeting in 1918: "This Association was born out of the throes of the first World War. In this meeting, which is but our twelfth, the same shadow is on the world again" (Bulletin 14, 1940, p. 18). Sherrill, who had served as ATS's first executive secretary (1935-1938) and on the 1936 Commission on Accrediting (see pp. 14-15 above) acknowledged that ATS member schools "must view our task for the immediate future in light of the conditions which have quickly taken on the aspect of emergency," yet he encouraged everyone to "take the longer view … so that what we do now may, if possible, become a worthy foundation for a long series of tomorrows" (Bulletin 14, p. 18). Much of what the Association wrestled with during those war years sought to "take the longer view."

Some in the Association even raised the possibility in 1940 of adopting a second set of standards for schools "not able to qualify for accreditation [but who] are rendering a service to theological education which is valuable" (Bulletin 14, 1940, p. 30; see pp. 27-28 below). The Commission on Accrediting reported in 1940 that 12 more schools had been accredited since the initial list of 46 in 1938, but that one had been removed.[68] That brought the total to 57 accredited schools, two-thirds of the 85 member schools. The Commission noted that of the 34 schools given notations in 1938, ten of them had their notations removed (Bulletin 14, p. 45). The Commission also added three new notations to the original 22, mostly dealing with combining undergraduate and graduate credits (Bulletin 14, p. 53).

The Association also heard a "Report of the Committee on Extension Theological Education" (Bulletin 14, 1940, pp. 69-75). A paper on that topic had been read at the 1938 meeting. "Extension education" in this context referred to seminary training offered outside of a formal degree, especially continuing education for alumni and lay training for local church workers. Typically, however, that "extension education" was offered on the seminary's main campus via special lectures or by opening up regular courses to non-seminarians, i.e., "extension" referred to the audience, not the location (see p. 65 below for first off-site programs in 1980). That Committee in 1940 was one of the first to raise and then to reject the possibility of "correspondence work," bemoaning its "checkered career" (Bulletin 14, p. 71).

Another key report presented at the 1940 Biennial Meeting was from the Committee on Theological Degrees (Bulletin 14, 1940, pp. 76-82). That Committee had been first appointed in 1937 "to study the system of degrees in theological education, both as to the nomenclature of all degrees, and standards for degrees beyond the first theological degree" (cited in the Committee's follow-up report two years later in Bulletin 15, 1942, p. 61). The Committee noted that the Association had in 1932 "adopted a statement recommending that the BD degree be adopted as the standard first degree… and that the ThD

[67] That explains why there were no Canadians present in 1940 or 1942 for the first time ever (except for the lowest-attended meeting in 1924 in Evanston; see Footnote 25). The ATS Executive Secretary in his 1940 report put it this way: "We miss today the faces of our Canadian brothers," citing a letter from Queen's Theological College of Ontario apologizing for not being able to send its principal because he was serving as "Senior Chaplain of the Canadian forces over-seas." He added, "When we think of the life and death struggle going on across the sea, some of our problems here appear rather petty" (Bulletin 14, 1940, p. 36).

[68] The Commission Minutes for June 5, 1940, noted: "Auburn Theological Seminary, having ceased to exist as an independent institution, was removed from the accredited list."

should be the earned doctor's degree in theological schools without university affiliation" (Bulletin 15, 1942, p. 61). The 1936 Standards reflected the BD degree as the first professional degree and added that the research-oriented PhD should be reserved for schools affiliated with a university but made no mention of the ThD (see Appendix B below). The Committee's 1940 report raised two important questions: (1) should the first theological degree be a master's rather than a bachelor's and (2) what kind of doctorate should theological schools not affiliated with a university offer.

Regarding the first question, the Committee reviewed degree nomenclatures from 46 schools accredited in 1938. Of the 11,204 degrees granted by those 46 schools between 1926 and 1937, the BD (Bachelor of Divinity) accounted for over half (55%), with 6,237 awarded. The second most common was the STB (Bachelor of Sacred Theology), with 1,075 awarded (10%). Of the 11,204 total degrees, 8,282 (74%) were bachelor's, 2,392 (21%) were master's, and 530 (5%) were doctorates (Bulletin 14, 1940, p. 77).

Regarding the second question, the Committee described in 1940 considerable disagreement by members on doctoral degrees. For example, "some have said that three years of theological schoolwork should be recognized by a doctor's degree," not a bachelor's degree (the BD), citing the approaches taken in medicine and dentistry (Bulletin 14, 1940, p. 80). The Committee said others want to change the BD to a ThM, followed by "some form of earned doctorate." The Committee noted three different types of doctorate had been suggested: *the PhD* for schools affiliated with a university (per 1936 Standard 2), *the ThD* for schools offering two years of residential work after the ThM, and *the DD* (Doctor of Divinity) for schools offering five years of non-residential work for ministers in the pastorate, followed by a brief residency and examinations (Bulletin 14, p. 80). The third type would eventually be reflected in the DMin degree in the 1972 revision of the Standards. The Committee concluded its 1940 report on standardizing degrees with this somewhat sassy quotation from a "well-known" ATS leader who was not named: "There is no logic or reason in degrees. A rose by one name will smell just as sweet as by any other name. Choose your name, any name, and then make it mean something" (Bulletin 14, pp. 81-82). The Committee decided more discussion and study was needed.

The Committee on Theological Degrees also noted in its 1940 report that the only way to "standardize" all the types of degrees offered would be "to state standards for those degrees as has already been done for the BD" (Bulletin 14, 1940, p. 79). Toward that end, the Committee proposed a somewhat generic set of six "Standards for Theological Degrees Beyond the BD" (Bulletin 15, 1942, pp. 65-67). The Association voted that this proposal be "received and ordered to be filed" (Bulletin 15, p. 17).

The Committee concluded its 1940 report by wondering if there should be "a systematic canvas of the members of the Association with respect to the question: Should there be a fundamental change in the degree system?" (Bulletin 14, p. 82). In 1942, the Committee reported that it had done just that in 1941, surveying all 86 member schools with the question: "Should there be a fundamental change in the degree system?" The Committee received 76 responses, a very healthy 88% response rate. Two-thirds of the respondents bluntly said "no" (Bulletin 15, 1942, p. 63). The Committee further found that of the 56 accredited schools at that time, 84% used BD as their nomenclature for their first degree. Only a fourth even offered a doctorate. Consequently, the Committee recommended in 1940 "no fundamental change in the degree system" (Bulletin 15, p. 65). Most intriguingly, however, the Committee raised the possibility of the Association *collectively* offering a doctoral degree, probably the ThD, through "extra-mural work," i.e., with no residency required (Bulletin 15, pp. 67-74). That possibility would resurface in the Committee's report to the Association in 1944 (see p. 27 below).

The 1942 Commission on Accrediting reported that it added only one school to the list of 57 accredited institutions, though it had received 11 applications. Ironically, the Commission added that it had met

only once that biennium, indicating that "the work of the Accrediting Commission is gradually diminishing in volume" (Bulletin 15, 1942, p. 37).[69] How wrong that would soon prove to be. Their 1942 report noted that while total enrollments in accredited schools had increased since 1936, "all studies and predictions of enrollment trends are now in the discard [because] no one knows what to predict in view of the present emergency" (p. 38), with the U.S. having entered the war since the last Biennial Meeting.

The 1942 Commission also referenced a meeting in October 1940, hosted by the American Council on Education in Washington DC, to which all leading U.S. accrediting agencies had been invited. One result of that meeting was the "preparation of a Master Schedule," which it hoped would be "adopted by all accredited schools in the country [so] an institution would fill out only one set of schedules" (Bulletin 15, 1942, p. 39). That did not happen until 1966 with the launch of the Higher Education General Information Surveys (HEGIS), the predecessor to IPEDS in 1985 (History and Origin of … IPEDS, pp. 5-6). However, ATS's invitation to that October 1940 meeting in Washington indicated the growing reputation that the ATS Commission was receiving in the U.S.

In that vein, the 1942 Commission reported that U.S. "government officials charged with the selection of chaplains is making use of the Accredited List of Seminaries of the Association, just as they are using the American Medical Association accredited list when commissioning doctors as officer" (Bulletin 15, 1942, pp. 39-40). ATS even invited Lieutenant Commander Patrick Winston at Selective Service Headquarters in Washington to give a special address at the 1942 meeting. It was followed by a Report on the Committee on Selective Service and the Ministry by Albert Beaven, ATS president (Bulletin 15, pp. 100-102).

In his *Piety and Profession* (p. 468), Miller makes this important point: "The Second World War was to provide confirmation of [ATS's] decision to adopt accreditation. The new executive [secretary] of the Association, Edward Roberts of Princeton, had already begun negotiating with the [U.S.] government about standards for military chaplains. Arguing that graduates of [ATS] schools were parallel in their qualifications to graduates of accredited medical and legal institutions, he was able to secure a privileged place for them in the armed forces." Miller adds that while WW II disrupted ATS schools in many ways, it "would also, paradoxically, establish the value of what they were doing" (p. 468). In less than a decade, accreditation of theological schools had gone from a dream to a determination by the world's largest democracy that ATS accreditation signified quality theological education.

The last ATS Biennial Meeting to occur during WW II took place June 8-9, 1944 (two days after D-Day) on the campus of Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological Seminary (now Pittsburgh Theological Seminary). Despite the war, the meeting had a record attendance of 106 participants from 77 schools. ATS membership had also increased during the war from 80 in 1938 to 104 in 1944. The 1944 meeting featured several addresses related to the war: one by Lieutenant Commander McLeod of the Navy on a new chaplaincy training program and another by Harry Cotton (president of McCormick) on "The Seminary and the Church in the Post-War World."

The Executive Secretary was Gould Wickey, General Secretary of the Council of Church Boards of Education in Washington DC. He had been appointed in 1942 to serve until 1946, the first and only ATS Executive Secretary not at an ATS school. The previous two were Lewis Sherrill, academic dean at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary (Executive Secretary, 1935-1938) and Edward Roberts, dean of students and then academic dean at Princeton Theological Seminary (Executive Secretary, 1938-1942). Wickey reported at the 1944 meeting that the new ATS "office" had been moved from Princeton to "the

[69] The 1942 Commission did take time to review the list of 25 notations reported at the 1940 Biennial Meeting. It deleted two that dealt with MA degrees and added one that dealt with the ThD degree (Bulletin 15, 1942, p. 38).

city of confusion," Washington, in August 1942 (Bulletin 16, 1944, p. 67). He saw that as fortuitous because "relations with governmental agencies became a matter of major concern." Wickey also noted in his Executive Secretary report in 1944 that "the number of schools seeking accreditation increased greatly," even though the overall enrollment among the 57 accredited schools had declined during the war from 5,108 in 1942 to 4,386 in 1943, a 14% drop, due no doubt to the war (Bulletin 16, 1944, p. 68).

One of the most significant actions taken at the 1944 Biennial Meeting related to revisions to the 1936 ATS Constitution. The 1944 Constitution differentiated—for the first time—between two classes of membership: accredited and associate. The new second class was for schools that "cannot attain accredited membership but desire the fellowship of the Association" (Bulletin 16, 1944, p. 75). The Executive Committee also raised the question of whether the Commission should adopt a "separate set of standards [for] institutions which require for admission less than… four year's course of study in an approved college of liberal arts" (p. 75). Since 1938, such admissions had been handled by the imposing of notations. One impetus for considering a separate set of standards was the rise of two-year (junior) colleges in the U.S. While such colleges, now typically called community colleges, had existed since 1901, the Great Depression saw a boom in their enrollment, from 56,000 in 1929 to 150,000 in 1939 (Community Colleges in America: A Historical Perspective, p. 4). The Commission would consider the question of a second set of standards during the 1944-46 biennium and give a report at the 1946 meeting (see p. 28 below).

The Commission on Accrediting reported in 1944 that it had accredited twelve schools, "rejected" four, and received more than a dozen other applications too late to schedule visits (Bulletin 16, 1944, p. 77). The Commission deleted yet another notation (#3 on accepting 50-70% of new students without a college degree) and added one regarding "residence requirements for the second theological degree." The number of accredited schools now stood at 69 (out of 104 member schools), a 21% increase from the 57 in 1942. One other thing the Commission did during the 1942-44 biennium was to adopt a policy that any school applying for accredited membership that was "part of an institution which does college work, such theological school cannot be considered for *accreditment* (sic) until the college is accredited by a regional agency" (Commission Minutes, December 1943, p. 2).

The Committee on Theological Degrees, appointed in 1937 (see p. 24 above), gave one of its most controversial reports in 1944 (Bulletin 16, 1944, pp. 78-84). In 1940, the Committee had raised the possibility of the Association *collectively* offering a doctoral degree, probably the ThD, through "extra-mural work," i.e., with no residency required (see p. 25 above). The Association had voted in 1942 "to give general approval to the principle of the scheme" regarding a doctorate awarded collectively *by ATS* (Bulletin 15, 1942, p. 17). The Committee reported in 1944 that it had surveyed all 95 member schools in 1943 about a general plan to offer such a doctorate. Among the 83 responses, 48 (58%) "were favorable in general" (Bulletin 16, 1944, p. 79). However, the Committee decided that it seemed "hazardous to bring a recommendation to the Association, which… would be supported by only half of its member schools and might easily prove divisive" (p. 79).

The Committee still proposed, with no specific recommendation for action, that the Association offer a professional doctorate, overseen by an ATS "Board of Graduate Professional Studies," for students with a BD who were engaged in pastoral ministry. Those doctoral students would complete "ten years of reading and study under the direction of one of the accredited institutions" (the one where the BD was earned), including "study in actual residence for four periods of six weeks each" and "pass[ing] examinations set by the Board at the end of a five-year period and at the end of a ten-year period" (Bulletin 16, 1944, p. 81). The Executive Committee would appoint six members to the Board of Graduate Professional Studies, serving for six-year terms (p. 82). In response to this proposal, the Association

punted by voting to have the Committee "explore further the possibilities of a graduate professional degree" (Bulletin 16, 1944, p. 64).

One of the saddest items in the 1944 Bulletin (p. 85) concerned the passing of three early leaders in the Association: Albert Beaven, Richard Davidson, and William Brown. Beaven was president of Colgate-Rochester and Davidson was principal of Emmanuel College in Toronto. Both had both been ATS presidents: Beaven was elected in 1940 and Davidson in 1934. And both had also been members of the ATS Commission on Accrediting: Beaven in 1936 and Davidson on the first one in 1934, reappointed again in 1938. The highest tribute, however, was reserved for William Brown of Union:[70]

> "The American Association of Theological Schools wishes to record its deep sense of loss at the passing, in the course of the last year of the Rev. Dr. William Adams Brown. Dr. Brown was one of the founders of the Association and for many years was one of its most active and constructive members. While theological education was but one of the many interests[71] of Dr. Brown, who was one of the most ecumenical figures[72] of our generation, it owes to him a deep debt of gratitude for the part he played in the monumental survey of theological education[73] in which he collaborated… The Association rejoices in the memory of his inspiring life and dedicates itself afresh to tasks which were one of his abiding passions." (Bulletin 16, 1944, p. 85)

One of those "abiding passions" of William Brown had been the improvement of theological education, especially through the work of accreditation. That work of accreditation continued after his death, beginning with the 1946 ATS Biennial Meeting.

At the 1946 Biennial Meeting, the Commission announced two major changes in accrediting policies and standards. Both changes were in response to a question the Executive Committee had raised at the 1944 Biennial Meeting (see p. 27 above): whether the Commission should adopt a "separate set of standards [for] institutions which require for admission less than… four year's course of study in an approved college of liberal arts" (Bulletin 16, 1942, p. 75). The Commission decided not to adopt a second set of standards, but instead to add a second category of accredited membership. The idea of a second category or class of accredited members was first raised by the Commission in late 1943 (Commission Minutes, December 1943, p. 3), with a decision in late 1944 to recommend a change to the Association at its June 1946 meeting to approve a new, second class (Commission Minutes, December 1944, p. 2).

Consequently, the 1946 Commission presented two changes to the membership, both of which were approved (Bulletin 17, 1946, p. 44). The first change was to specify "two classes [Class A and Class B] of accredited members." *Class A* members were institutions which fully met the Standards. *Class B* members were institutions which meet the Standards, "except that, as a matter of policy, they do not

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[70] William Brown (1865-1943) taught systematic theology at Union (NY) for 44 years (1892-1936). He attended the first ATS meeting in 1918 and served on the Continuation Committee from 1918 until he retired in 1936, as well as on the Executive Committee from 1922 to 1936. He also served on the 1936 Commission that developed the first set of ATS Standards.

[71] Among Brown's "other interests" was mountain climbing (he was a founding member of the Alpine Club in NYC), having climbed "a goodly list of major peaks in Switzerland" (Alpine Club). He was also "instrumental in the founding of Union Settlement, East Harlem's largest social service agency serving the poor" (William Adams Brown). He even officiated the wedding of aviation pioneer Charles Lindbergh in 1929 (*NY Times* Obituary for W. A. Brown, December 16, 1943, p. 27).

[72] Brown was a founding member of the World Council of Churches and the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, and a member of the executive committee of the World Conference on Faith and Order (*NY Times* Obituary for Brown).

[73] This "monumental survey of theological education" refers to *The Education of American Ministers*, the four-volume work by Brown and May published in 1934 that led to the appointment of the first ever ATS Commission on Accrediting in 1934 (see pp. 11-14 above).

require for admission to candidacy for their degrees, the degree of A.B., based upon four years of work, beyond secondary education, in a college which is approved by one of the regional accrediting bodies or the equivalent of such a degree" (Bulletin 17, 1946, pp. 9 and 43).

The second change added this (italicized) phrase to Standard 1: "An accredited Theological Seminary or College should require for admission to candidacy for its degrees the degree of A.B., *based upon four years of work beyond secondary education,* from a college which is approved by one of the regional accrediting bodies, or the equivalent of such a degree" (Bulletin 17, 1946, pp. 14, 43). The Commission also added a notation for schools that did not meet the revised admission standard (Bulletin 17, p. 40).[74]

Those two changes in 1946 represented a major shift, albeit short-lived, in theological accreditation. For the first time, there would be "two classes of accredited members," with the only distinction related to whether a school accepted students who had not completed four years of undergraduate work. That distinction, however, lasted only until 1956 when the standard on admissions was revised and accredited schools were no longer distinguished by class. During the decade when the two classes did exist, the Commission never publicly identified which schools were in which class. In reality, between 1946 and 1956, only three schools (all in Chicago) were ever placed by the Commission into the second class, based on Commission Minutes for those years (see Commission Minutes, December 1944, p.3).

One other item in the Commission's 1946 report demonstrated that ATS accreditation was not a "one and done" matter, i.e., that a school's accreditation, once granted, would be regularly reviewed and could be revoked. The Commission noted (Bulletin 17, p. 41) that a school accredited since 1938 "was removed from the accredited list [but] after meeting certain standards was reaccredited."[75]

The 1946 meeting also heard a report of the Committee on Theological Degrees, first appointed in 1937 (see p. 24 above). The Committee acknowledged that its last proposal in 1944 to develop a professional, non-residential doctorate to be administered by an ATS Board of Graduate Professional Studies (see p. 27 above) had been met with very mixed reviews by the membership. The Committee, therefore, requested that it be discharged from further responsibility. The Association thanked the Committee but voted to continue it (with modified membership) "to consider whether this Association should create a degree-granting body [for] a graduate professional degree" at the doctoral level (Bulletin 17, 1946, pp. 48-49).[76]

The 1948 ATS Biennial Meeting was at Bonebrake Theological Seminary in Dayton (OH).[77] The 1948 Bulletin 18 (p. 16) noted that there were now two classes of Accredited Members, per the decision made

[74] The Commission also deleted five notations from the 1938 list and added one other (Bulletin 17, 1946, pp. 17-18).

[75] The Commission minutes for 1944 clarify that the school was removed "having fallen below the Standards" (December 1944, p. 2) but was reinstated a year later after a visit by the Commission chair (Commission Minutes, December 1945, p. 2). That episode prompted the Commission "to appoint a committee to restudy the forms, standards, and procedures of the Commission" (Commission Minutes, 1945, p. 2). The minutes of that same meeting record that a school of religious education inquired about accreditation, but the Commission decided that "the type of work of these schools seems to fall outside the range of theological seminaries" (Commission Minutes, December 1945, p. 5); see also pp. 46, 49-50 below and Footnote 85.

[76] The Association also voted in 1946 to ask the Executive Committee to explore "calling a conference of theological librarians" (Bulletin 17, 1946, p. 58), something that would eventually lead to a new organization (American Theological Library Association in 1947) and a new ATS library standard (in 1952).

[77] Bonebrake was one of the more unusual names among ATS schools. It started as Union Biblical Seminary in 1871 but was changed to Bonebrake Seminary in 1909 to honor Mary and John Bonebrake, who gave nearly 4,000 acres of land in Kansas to the seminary, worth nearly $3 million today. Bonebrake became United Theological Seminary in 1954 after a merger with Evangelical School of Theology (Reading, PA). Both were charter members of the Commission in 1938. Interestingly, the former

at the 1946 Biennial Meeting, but the published list did not specify which schools were in which class. The 1948 Bulletin 18 (pp. 11-13) reprinted the Standards for Theological Degrees Beyond the BD that were originally published in the 1942 Bulletin (pp. 65-67). The 1948 Bulletin (p. 11) was the first time that the six "Entrance Standards" proposed in 1936 (Bulletin 11, pp. 86-87) were included at the end of the Standards, though with the caveat that they were "added for information" (Bulletin 18, 1948, p. 11).

In his 1948 report, the new Executive Secretary, Charles Pyatt of the College of the Bible in Lexington (who served from 1946 to 1950), noted the establishment of the American Theological Library Association (now Atla) in 1947.[78] In that same report, he reminded the membership that the Association had adopted in 1946 a three-phase, six-year study of several 1936 Standards, focusing on advanced degrees in the 1946-48 biennium, libraries in 1948-50, and faculties and students in 1950-52 (Bulletin 18, 1948, pp. 41-42). The Executive Committee reported in its 1948 report that it had appointed a committee "to plan for a thorough study of libraries, which would lead to the establishment of standards for library budgets, controls, and ideals" (Bulletin 18, p. 46). That committee also authorized a committee to "approach foundations and endeavor to secure financial support for a fresh study of theological education" (p. 46) since the last one had been Brown and May's four-volume study in 1934.

The 1948 Commission on Accrediting reported that it had accredited one new school, bringing the total of accredited schools to 70 (out of 105 members). The Commission also reported that it would "not hear personal representatives of the institutions asking for accreditation," that "seminaries again be warned that standing and accreditation of each institution depends upon the prompt submission of the schedules requested," that "hereafter two inspectors be appointed to investigate an institution seeking accreditation, rather than one," and that "the inspection fee be raised from $50 to $100" (Bulletin 18, 1948, p. 49).[79]

Continuing their work since 1937, the Committee on Theological Degrees reported at the 1948 meeting that they were now recommending a revised professional doctorate (modified from their 1944 proposal; see pp. 27-28 above). The new degree would be a DD (Doctor of Divinity), which students with a BD could complete in seven years of "reading and study under the direction of one of the accredited institutions," with at least one year of residency, and a thesis (Bulletin 18, 1948, pp. 51-53). A key change this time was that the school offering the work would be the one granting the degree, not some "degree-granting body of the Association" (Bulletin 18, 1948, p. 51). The Association voted "that the proposed plan be adopted in principle, that it be submitted to seminary faculties for study and comment, and that the committee prepare a revised plan for presentation at the next meeting of the Association" (p. 53; see discussion below on pp. 32 and 33).

The 1948 Bulletin (p. 64) ended on a bittersweet note, announcing the retirement of Luther Weigle.[80] Weigle had been a luminary in ATS since 1924, serving as president of the Association in 1928, chair of the first Commission in 1934, and chair of the Executive Committee from 1930 to 1948 (see p. 9 above).

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main building of Bonebrake Seminary housed a top-secret research site from 1943 to 1945 to help produce plutonium for the Manhattan Project (Top Secret Seminary in *In Trust Magazine*, Winter 2024).

[78] L. R. Elliott, librarian at Southwestern and ATLA's first president, gave an address at the 1948 ATS meeting on "Seminary Libraries and Theological Education" (Bulletin 18, 1948, pp. 82-92, complete with bibliography).

[79] Commission Minutes from December 1947 (p. 3) suggest that one of the reasons the Commission decided to require two inspectors was due to a complaint from the Methodist Board of Education. That Board apparently felt that ATS had accredited one particular school based on too little information and an inadequate inspection.

[80] On a brighter note, the 1948 Bulletin concluded with a recommendation that ATS "would look with favor on the creation of a World Association of Theological Schools" (Bulletin 18, 1948, p. 64). That didn't happen until 1989 (see pp. 77-78 below).

That same bulletin included Weigle's final address[81] to ATS: "Thirty Years of Cooperation in Theological Education" (Bulletin 18, 1948, pp. 75-81). He concluded his seven-page address and his thirty years at ATS with this challenge: "The time has come for another comprehensive study of theological education… We need a fresh appraisal of the Christian ministry and of the theological schools and their educational aims" (p. 81). That study, led by Richard Niebuhr, would come in the 1950s (see p. 35 below).

The 1950s proved to be one of the most decisive decades in ATS history. It was the *fifties of firsts*: the *first* suspension of an accredited school, the *first* policy on reinspection of schools, the *first* revision of the 1936 Standards, the *first* revision of the 1936 Constitution,[82] the *first* death of a Commission chair while in office, the *first* hiring of a full-time Executive Director, the *first* survey of theological seminaries since Brown and May's 1934 study, the *first* major gifts from two foundations (worth over $9 million today), and on a more troubling note, the *first* report from Canadian members over a growing "uneasiness" about ATS's lack of attention to the bi-national nature of the Association and Commission.

The 1950s, in fact, was such a pivotal period in ATS history that this study splits it into two chapters. The first half (1950-1955) is covered in the rest of this chapter and the second half (1956-1959) is covered in the next chapter: Chapter 4. Reorganizing the Standards and ATS. The year 1956 proved to be replete with reorganization, as Chapter 4 explains. In this chapter, however, we will focus on the first half of the Fifties, which, in many ways, continued the critical work begun in earnest in 1934.

The decade began with the 1950 Biennial Meeting in Columbus. Those were heady days for seminaries, with enrollment increasing 163% (!) between 1945 and 1950,[83] reflecting the postwar boom in higher education enrollment.[84] The ATS president, John Mackay of Princeton, in his address on "The Finality of Theological Education," echoed that euphoria with this affirmation: "Theological education is the crown of education" (Bulletin 22, 1950, p. 73), concluding that "our task is the greatest that God ever gave… and this hour is the greatest, … the most hopeful in which this task was ever attempted" (p. 84).

That said, the 1950 meeting began the decade somewhat slowly—at least in terms of accreditation activities by the Commission. The Executive Secretary, who chaired the Commission in that era (see Appendix A), reported that he had mailed 25,000 copies of the Association's statement on pre-seminary studies to institutions and individuals, along with 7,000 copies of the Standards (Bulletin 19, 1950, p. 45).

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[81] Weigle's 1948 address was his "final address" as a member of the Executive Committee. Weigle gave another, rather lengthy, address in 1952 on "The Relevance of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible" (Bulletin 20, 1952, pp. 91-108). Weigle chaired the committee that produced the RSV in 1952 (see p. 9 above). For more on Weigle, see Endnote 4.

[82] There was a modest revision of the 1936 Constitution in 1944, when the Association approved a new category of membership (see p. 27 above).

[83] There were 5,690 students enrolled in 69 accredited schools in 1945 (Bulletin 17, 1946, p. 32) and 14,971 students enrolled in 73 accredited schools in 1950 (Bulletin 29, 1952, p. 45), per the biennial reports of ATS executive secretaries, who served as Commission chairs from 1936 to 1956 (see Appendix A). ATS did not include enrollments for all schools until 1956, when the total enrollment of all 122 schools (79 accredited and 43 associate) was 19,499 (Bulletin 22, 1956, p. 53)—up 30% since 1950.

[84] In the U.S., the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (the G.I. Bill) led to 2.2 million veterans enrolling in higher education between 1945 and 1956, when the Act officially expired. In 1947 alone, half of all college admissions were veterans (Born of Controversy: The GI Bill of Rights, p. 2). The Veterans Readjustment Act of 1952 (the Korean War G.I. Bill) extended the 1944 Act and allowed another 1.2 million to enter higher education (VA, Data on Veterans of the Korean War, p. 6). The 1952 act was also significant for accreditation because the U.S. government—for the first time—limited veterans enrollment to schools accredited by agencies officially recognized by the U.S. Office of Education (Hooked on Accreditation: A Historical Perspective), which ATS was. Canada's version of the 1944 G.I. Bill was a smaller-scale Veterans Charter, with almost 35,000 veterans enrolling in universities by 1947 (Second Word War Veterans in the *Canadian Encyclopedia*).

By 1952, he reported that he had mailed more than 100,000 copies of the former and 11,000 copies of the latter (Bulletin 20, 1952, p. 48). Growing interest in seminary education was clearly evident.

The Executive Secretary added a rather dramatic word in his 1950 report on the value of the ATS Standards, which he viewed as "ideals of cooperation to which, in a sense, we pledge our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor" (Bulletin 19, p. 46). He added that the Standards "allow a large measure of freedom and experimentation for each institution [while] avoiding the mechanical standardization which has sometimes characterized the work of accrediting organizations." That characterization of accrediting agencies would be raised in the 1954 Biennial Meeting, which the Executive Secretary described as "evil" and a "threat" (see p. 35 below).

The 1950 Commission also issued a set of six accreditation policies, two of which were restatements of earlier policies. Most of the six policies dealt with procedural matters, such as not considering any applications until all paperwork had been submitted and not appointing visitors (inspectors) from the same denomination as the school being visited (Bulletin 19, 1950, pp. 53-54).

The 1950 Commission also emphasized the importance of completing the annual schedules promptly every year, noting that for the first time ever a school had been removed from the accredited list for repeated failure to submit the required forms (schedules). However, having "no desire to make an example of this one case, it was therefore voted to restore Calvin to its accreditation [but] henceforth when an institution loses its accreditation for failure to submit its annual report, it will have to undergo reinspection" (Bulletin 19, 1950, pp. 54-55). The issue of "reinspection" would be clarified by issuing a set of "Policies and Procedures on Reinspection of Accredited Schools" in 1956 (Bulletin 22, 1956, p. 12).

The Committee on Theological Degrees, authorized in 1937, with reports at almost every Biennial Meeting since then, reported in 1950 on its survey of member schools in 1949 on its 1948 proposed professional doctorate. Only 33 of 100+ schools responded, leading the Committee to conclude that "on this latest program for a Graduate Professional Degree it is impossible to know the mind of the Association" (Bulletin 19, 1950, p. 58). As in 1944, the membership punted, voting that the Committee's report "be remitted to the Executive Committee for thorough study and report two years hence" (p. 59).

The 1950 meeting heard the Report of the Committee on a Survey of Theological Education, appointed in 1948 (Bulletin 19, 1950, pp. 60-67). Lewis Sherrill, recently retired (see p. 30 above), was named chair of the Survey Commission, which was to seek external funding. The Committee noted that much had changed since the last such survey in 1934, adding that "in no other twenty-year period of the world's history had such changes been wrought" (p. 63). The survey would cover four areas: Protestant ministry, accredited seminaries, other theological institutions, and "the place of the accredited theological seminary in the national educational situation" (p. 64-65). That survey, however, would be preceded by a previously promised survey of theological libraries (p. 62) to inform a new library standard.

The 1952 Biennial Meeting in Louisville had the sad distinction of reporting the death of the Executive Secretary/Commission chair appointed in 1950: Nevin Harner of the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical and Reformed Church (Lancaster, PA). He was the first and only ATS executive to die in office (in July of 1951) and the first but not only ATS leader to have a memorial service at an ATS Biennial Meeting (Bulletin 20, 1952, pp. 75-80). His mid-term replacement was Charles Pyatt, his predecessor as Executive Secretary. Pyatt reported that ATS now had three classes of members: Accredited, Associate, and Affiliate "for qualified theological schools outside of the United States and Canada" (Bulletin 20, p. 29). Pyatt also reflected, on behalf of the Commission, on the value of notations, which he thought were "exceedingly wise" as a way to accredit seminaries that didn't meet fully every standard (p. 50).

In 1952 Pyatt also reported that ATS officers had met with representatives of the American Association of Schools of Religious Education [AASRE][85] and the fairly new Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges and Bible Institutes (founded in 1947 and now named the Association for Biblical Higher Education, ABHE) "to discuss matters of common interest" (Bulletin 20, 1952, p. 53). In that same meeting in 1952, Pyatt reported, however, that the Commission voted that ATS accredited schools should "be very reluctant to accept the credits" of any Bible colleges that were not regionally accredited (p. 56).[86]

The 1952 meeting finally found a resolution for the Committee on Theological Degrees, first authorized in 1937, which had issued reports and offered proposals for a professional doctorate at almost every meeting since 1944 (see p. 27 above). In 1950, the Committee had reported that "on [its] latest program for a Graduate Professional Degree it is impossible to know the mind of the Association" (Bulletin 19, 1950, p. 58). Consequently, in 1952 the Executive Committee reported that the Committee "be discharged with appreciation of the work done" (Bulletin 20, 1952, p. 53). Thus ended, with something of a whimper, the vision of some in ATS to offer a professional doctorate, a vision that would not be realized until the DMin was approved in 1972, though one was proposed in 1960 (see p. 46 below).

The 1952 meeting also saw the first suspension of an ATS accredited school. The Commission reported that it had unanimously adopted a resolution that "Asbury Theological Seminary be and hereby is suspended until June 1954 from the Association list of accredited seminaries and that reaccreditation… be contingent upon a favorable outcome of a re-inspection of the institution" (Bulletin 20, 1952, pp. 56-57). The suspension was based on "reports of strife and dissension within the student body, faculty, administration, and board of trustees… [that] have disturbed public confidence in the institution" (p. 56), with a "special committee of the Commission of Accrediting [having] conducted an investigation at first-hand" (p. 57). The catalyst was the firing of a professor, with confidential discussion about that recorded in Commission Minutes (December 1950, p. 3, and December 1951, pp. 2-4). That "special committee" visit by the Commission to Asbury was the first recorded example of what ATS now calls a "focused visit" (Policies and Procedures, III.D.2).[87] The suspension of Asbury in 1952 became a withdrawal of accreditation in 1954, which lasted until 1960 when the school was re-accredited (see Footnote 217).

The 1952 meeting heard the Report of the Committee on Library Standards (Bulletin 20, 1952, pp. 58-66) that included five recommendations, culminating in the proposal of new library standards. The members adopted all five recommendations (pp. 68-69). This was the first significant revision to the Standards since their adoption in 1936. The new library standard, first printed with the Standards in 1954 (Bulletin 21, pp. 11-14), tripled the length of the one-page standards adopted in 1936. The former, one-paragraph Standard 5 on Library was replaced with a new, three-page Standard 10 on Library Standards.

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[85] In 1954 the Commission was asked by the U.S. Office of Education if it could "incorporate [AASRE] into its program of accreditation" because that office "hesitates to approve another accrediting agency" (Commission Minutes, June 1954, p. 4). The Commission debated the merits of the request but took no action because it felt that ATS, AASRE, and ABHE each had its own distinctive role to play in theological education.

[86] A year later the Commission received a request from [ABHE] for a "Council of Cooperation" between it and ATS. The Commission voted that "this matter not be considered," since ABHE worked with undergraduate schools and ATS worked only with graduate schools (Commission Minutes, December 1953, p. 2).

[87] Another first occurred in 1952 when the Commission "voted: that we join with… the Middle States Association in joint accreditation of the Moravian Theological Seminary as an experiment in this sort of procedure" (Commission Minutes, June 1952, p. 1). The second such "joint visit" was approved later that same year (Commission Minutes, December 1952, p. 2). The practice of joint visits with regional accreditors was common until the late 2000s, when the U.S. Department of Education effectively banned the practice by requiring that all accrediting agencies act "separately and independently" (see Policies and Procedures, III.B.1 and Footnote 8).

The new Standard 10 began with a five-paragraph set of "ideals" about the library as "the study center of the school." The new Standard then included sections on the library in the life of the school, library administration, the book collection, building and equipment, and finances. It was the most detailed of all the standards, with some very specific quantitative requirements (e.g., a minimum floor space of 125 square feet per library worker, seating for 35-50% of the student body, and a total library budget of not less than $10,000 or $35 per student, "whichever is greater").

The 1954 Biennial Meeting was in Chicago, the third of four ATS meetings in that city.[88] Charles Taylor, dean of the Episcopal Theological School, was elected as president. Walter Roberts, president of United Theological Seminary,[89] was elected as Executive Secretary and chair of the Commission on Accrediting. Roberts would be the last ATS Executive Secretary, which was a part-time position created in 1935 with the calling of Lewis Sherrill (see Endnote 5). In 1956, the Association was reorganized with the hiring of Charles Taylor as ATS's first Executive Director, the Association's first ever full-time leadership position.

As noted on the previous page, the 1954 Bulletin (21) was the first to include the new Library Standard, which was renumbered from Standard 4 to Standard 10. The 1954 Biennial Meeting devoted five sessions to library topics (Bulletin 21, 1954, p. 38), since the meeting was a "joint conference" with the new American Theological Library Association[90] (Bulletin 21, 1954, p. 127). A new Standard 9 on Entrance Standards was added, which had previously been printed separate from the 1936 Standards. The 1954 Bulletin still clarified, as before, that the Entrance Standards were "added for information" (p. 10). Right after the newly expanded ten Standards, the Standards for Theological Degrees beyond the BD were printed (pp. 15-16), as they had been since 1948. With the dissolution of the Committee on Theological Degrees in 1952 (see p. 33 above), no new standards on degrees would be adopted until 1958. Partly in response to the lack of approved additional degrees, the 1954 list of Notations added three more notations, including one (#33) that for the first time noted that some graduate programs of an accredited school "do not lead to a recognized degree [and therefore] are not accredited by this Association" (Bulletin 21, 1954, p. 25).

In 1954 another new notation (#34) was added that warned "more than 15% of the students in this school are from colleges unaccredited by the regional accrediting agency" (p. 25). That new notation underscored how far theological school admissions had come since the first Standards in 1936. The 1936 Standards had three notations addressing the admission of students without a college degree, allowing up to 74%. By 1954, two of those three notations had been removed over time, so that only the notation allowing up to 24% remained. The addition of Notation #34 in 1954 underscored the importance of limiting admissions not only to *college graduates* but to graduates of *accredited* colleges.

A rather alarming report at the 1954 Biennial Meeting was from the Executive Secretary on "Proposals of the National Commission on Accrediting Concerning Joint Accreditation" (Bulletin 21, 1954, pp. 50-52).

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[88] Appendix A below lists all the cities in which ATS has held its biennial meetings, from 1918 to 2024. Pittsburgh has hosted the most with seven, followed by Toronto with five, and Chicago and Atlanta, with four each.

[89] United Theological Seminary resulted from the 1954 merger of Bonebrake Graduate School of Theology (Dayton, OH) and Evangelical School of Theology (Reading, PA), which appears to be the first recorded merger of two ATS accredited schools—both charter members of the Commission since 1938. When notified of this proposed merger in 1953, the Commission "voted that we offer our hearty congratulations… and that the United Theological Seminary be listed in due time (as of July 1, 1954) as an accredited member [of ATS] without notations" (Commission Minutes, December 1953, p. 4). Though this was the first, 18 of the original 46 schools accredited in 1938 would undergo mergers in the coming decades (see Appendix C).

[90] ATS and ATLA, founded in 1947 largely under ATS auspices, met jointly from 1948 to 1958, with periodic joint meetings for a few decades thereafter. The author's first ATS Biennial Meeting was in Denver in 1980, when it met jointly with ATLA.

The 1954 report noted that "the National Commission came into existence in 1949… for the purpose of dealing with the 'threat' of accreditation to American education" (pp. 50-51). The 1954 report further noted that the college and university presidents who founded the National Commission "have been vocal in exposing the tendency to multiply [accrediting] agencies and the evils of outside encroachment upon the autonomy and freedom of college and university administrations" (p. 51). The National Commission found that a significant percentage of the nearly 300 (!) accrediting agencies are guilty of "the dictation of educational policy" (p. 51).[91]

In response to these concerns of the National Commission, the ATS Executive Secretary, Oren Baker, who served also as chair of the ATS Commission on Accrediting, reported that he had reviewed these issues and concluded, on the one hand, that "the multiplicity of accrediting agencies is confusing and may be called an 'evil' or threat to the best interests of higher education… [but, on the other hand,] the chief charge against these agencies—pressuring colleges and universities on behalf of professional interests—is totally inapplicable" to ATS because ATS uses accreditation "as a means of stimulating a school in self-evaluation and improvement—in terms of its own objectives" (Bulletin 21, 1954, pp. 51-52).

The ATS Commission on Accrediting reported in 1954 that it had given "serious consideration [to] a proposal to re-examine all accredited schools…periodically," much like regional accrediting bodies were beginning to do (Bulletin 21, 1954, p. 63). However, "no action was taken on this matter and no recommendation is being brought" (p. 63), though a policy would be adopted in 1956 (see p. 38 below).[92]

The 1954 meeting also heard a report from the Committee on Fraudulent Schools and Colleges (Bulletin 21, 1954, pp. 70-73). The Committee noted that it "has not been very active [since] there have been few reports of [theological] institutions suspected of being fraudulent" (p. 70). This issue was first discussed at the 1938 meeting when a paper was presented that "gave names and facts" but it was "regarded as dangerous to publish such materials for fear of libel suits" (p. 72). The Committee hoped the upcoming survey of theological education might address such schools. The Committee reminded the members that "we now have working in the field of theological education three accrediting agencies" (see p. 33 above), with the hope that the work of all three agencies toward quality theological education might mean "the elimination of the problem with which our committee has been dealing" (p. 73).

One of the more significant reports at the 1954 Biennial Meeting was Richard Niebuhr's preliminary report on the upcoming "Survey of Theological Education" (Bulletin 21, 1954, pp. 119-126). Major funding for the survey, the first since Brown and May's 1934 study, had been secured by ATS leaders in 1953 from the Carnegie Foundation in the amount of $65,000, worth nearly $750,000 today (see Bulletin 22, 1956, p. 60). ATS leaders chose as director of this study Richard Niebuhr,[93] Sterling Professor of Theology and Christian Ethics at Yale from 1931 to 1962 and author of the classic 1952 book, *Christ and Culture*. Though ATS leaders played a significant role in getting this study funded, selecting the director,

[91] By comparison to the 300 accreditors in 1954, in 2024 there are only 90 accrediting agencies in the U.S. (see p. 2 above). For more on the National Commission on Accreditation, see p. 45 below on the 1966 Biennial Meeting.

[92] Interestingly, the Commission decided later that year not to re-inspect a certain member school, even though it had been invited by the Middle States Association to join it in doing a re-inspection. The Commission declined because "we have not followed that practice" (Commission Minutes, December 1954, p. 2).

[93] Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962) was the younger brother of Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), professor of theology at Union (NY) from 1928 to 1960 and one of America's leading public intellectuals for decades during the 20th century. Both grew up in little Lincoln (IL) where their father pastored St. John's German Evangelical Synod Church. The author served in a seminary in that little town for more than thirty years, though that was decades after the Niebuhr's time there in the "land of Lincoln."

and setting some parameters for it, Niebuhr noted that ATS leaders agreed that "an independent group should carry on the research… and report *to* [ATS] but not *for* it" (Bulletin 21, 1954, p. 121). Three ATS executive officers (Charles Taylor, Walter Roberts, and Lewis Sherrill) would serve as an advisory committee to Niebuhr and his independent group doing this study, which he described as "a more normative than descriptive study" (p. 123). A full report on his study, its results, and its implications for theological education would be shared at the 1956 Biennial Meeting (see p. 39 below).

One other important report at the 1954 ATS meeting was on the Rockefeller Brothers Fellowships. The Rockefeller Brothers Fund had proposed to ATS a "three-year experimental venture in recruitment for the ministry, through a program of theological fellowships, and for whose implementation they were willing to contribute the sum of $100,000 per year"[94] (Bulletin 21, 1954, p. 57). "Each year the fund would select a number of very highly qualified graduates of the nation's better colleges—young men with real professional and academic promise—and give them a year at a major divinity school to consider the ministry as a possible place for their talents" (Miller, *Piety and Profession*, p. 666).[95]

The period of 1940-1955 witnessed many revisions—to the ATS Constitution, the ATS Standards, and the categories of ATS membership. It was an era when ATS accreditation came of age and found its place in the larger world of higher education, a world with increasing threats and challenges. It was a time that brought the Association to the dawn of a new age and a time to reinvent itself by reorganizing itself.

[94] The total of $300,000 over three years for the Rockefeller Brothers Fellowship was later expanded to $500,000, worth more than $5 million today (Bulletin 23, 1958, p. 58), though the 1958 Bulletin lists the Sealantic Fund as the source of those gifts (see Footnote 97).

[95] Miller adds that "among those who received the first round of grants was a young novelist and Princeton graduate, Frederick Buechner, who fulfilled the fund's goals admirably" (*Piety and Profession* p. 667). For more on Buechner (1926-2022) as a prolific American novelist and theologian (39 books), see www.frederickbuechner.com.

Chapter 4. Reorganizing the Standards and ATS (1956-1969)

The 1956 Biennial Meeting proved to be a pivotal point in ATS history. It is no wonder that the new Executive Director began his report at the 1956 Biennial Meeting by claiming that ATS is now "walking with Destiny," adding that "there has never been a meeting of [ATS] that called for so many momentous decisions as does this Biennial Meeting" (Bulletin 22, 1956, p. 48). The 1956 meeting began Lewis Sherrill's last term as chair of the Executive Committee, serving from 1948 to 1957 (see p. 14 above). More significantly, the 1956 meeting began Charles Taylor's first term as Executive Director, ATS's first. Taylor was the outgoing ATS president and dean of Episcopal Theological School. He was nominated at the 1956 meeting by Lewis Sherrill, on behalf of the Executive Committee, and received unanimous approval with a "standing vote of confidence" (Bulletin 22, 1956, p. 91).

The Executive Committee had long lamented the heavy burden carried by the Executive Secretary—all on a part-time basis. Only the lack of funds had prevented ATS from hiring someone full-time, which had been the goal since the position was planned in 1932 (see p. 10 above).[96] The funds were now available. In fact, the 1956 meeting would be the last time an ATS treasurer would report only a four-figure balance: $7,005 (Bulletin 22, 1956, p.79). By 1958, the Association's assets totaled $845,117, worth more than $9 million today (Bulletin 23, 1958, p. 58). ATS's much improved financial situation was due mostly, again, to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who gave $20 million in 1955 (worth over $200 million today) "for the improvement of Protestant theological education" through the Sealantic Fund (Bulletin 22, 1956, p. 63).[97] Between 1956 and 1958 the Sealantic Fund gave ATS alone $225,000, worth more than $2 million today to fund the newly expanded ATS structure (Bulletin 23, 1958, p. 59).[98] Much had changed since the 1954 report on ATS's "meager assets," when the Executive Secretary reported only "two filing cabinets of [ATS] files, back bulletins, school catalogs, 47 reference books, and one second-hand typewriter," plus a cash balance of $5,038.30 (see Endnote 5). The 1956-58 biennium put ATS on the financial map.

Concomitant with the call of ATS's first executive director and the inflow of hundreds of thousands of dollars into ATS coffers came the need for a new Constitution and the first ever Bylaws, along with its first Articles of Incorporation (all reprinted in Bulletin 22, 1956, pp. 29-37).[99] ATS was incorporated in the State of New York, with "the office of the Corporation to be located in the city of New York" (p. 29).[100]

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[96] The 1956 Bulletin (22, p. 69) included a report on "Negotiations for a Full-Time Executive Director" that recounted some of this history and reminded the members how badly such a position was needed. North Central (HLC) appointed its first full-time director only three years prior in 1953 (Newman, *Agency of Change*, p. 176).

[97] Rockefeller had created the Sealantic Fund in 1938 to advance liberal Protestant theological causes; it merged with the Rockefeller Brothers Fund in 1973 (The Rockefeller Foundation and Sealantic Fund). Other major gifts to ATS between 1956 and 1958 included $425,000 (worth more than $4 million today) from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund for the Faculty Fellowship program and $97,619 (worth nearly $1 million today) from Lilly Endowment Inc. for "various projects" (Bulletin 23, 1958, pp. 52 and 57). The latter gift was the first of many from that Endowment.

[98] Bulletin 22 (1956, pp. 66-67) reported that the Sealantic Fund would give ATS $225,000 over a 10-year period "for an expanded program" on two conditions: (1) that ATS become incorporated and (2) that the Fund would approve the personnel to administer the programs funded by these grants. However, Bulletin 23 (1958, p. 59) records the $225,000 as a one-time gift.

[99] The new Bylaws addressed mostly procedural matters, (e.g., quorum, proxies, etc.). It also introduced a 16-level set of annual membership fees, ranging from $50 to $500, as well as raised the "inspection fee" to $250 (Bulletin 23, 1958, pp. 35-37).

[100] While the 1956 Articles of Incorporation showed New York City as the location of the ATS office, it ended up in Dayton (OH), where the new ATS president served at United Theological Seminary. It moved to Vandalia (OH) in 1973 and to Pittsburgh in

The 1956 Constitution updated the 1944 Constitution (see p. 27 above), with an expanded description of ATS meetings and ATS officers (including the new Executive Director). It also altered slightly the composition of the Commission on Accrediting, keeping three ATS officers, adding the chair of the Executive Committee (replacing the Executive Secretary position), and keeping the six others appointed by the Executive Committee. For the first time, the Commission chair would now be elected by the Commission.

The 1956 meeting was also full of other firsts, including the first "re-editing of the Standards for Accrediting" (Bulletin 22, 1956, pp. 56-57). The re-editing incorporated the "Standards for Theological Degrees beyond the B.D." into the standards themselves, as a new #5, rather than listing them afterwards, where they had been almost an afterthought (Bulletin 22, pp. 6-7).[101] The re-editing also expanded "1. Standards of Admission," the first such expansion[102] since 1936. The revised #1 clarified that undergraduate credits should not be counted for graduate credit, that any new student not meeting the pre-seminary curriculum should be treated as "deficient in preparation" with that deficiency "made up as soon as possible," that any new student graduating from an unaccredited college be accepted only on probation or after passing a proficiency exam, and that any transfer student have "a letter of honorable dismissal and recommendation from the institution last attended" (Bulletin 22, pp. 5-6). With this expansion, the Commission tightened the definition of a seminary as a graduate professional school, something it had wrestled with since the 1934 Brown and May study.

Another first was the expansion of the Standard on Inspection. That six-line standard nearly tripled in length and was renumbered from 8 to 9, just before 10 on Library Standards. Most of the addition dealt with procedural matters related to applications for accreditation. Supporting that expansion was a new policy on "Reinspection of Accredited Schools (Bulletin 22, 1956, p. 12). For the first time, the Commission mandated that accredited schools "shall be reevaluated every ten years" and that "the Executive Director shall create guidance materials for self-study by the schools and for the assistance of the Commission on Accrediting in appraising the standing of the schools" (p. 12). That was the first time in ATS history that accredited schools would be required to undergo periodic (decennial) self-study and review, a practice that was becoming common among regional accrediting agencies in the 1950s (HLC adopted that policy in 1957; Newman, *Agency of Change*, p. 191). The new policy also added that the Executive Committee would create a new Board of Review, to which schools might appeal Commission accrediting actions (p. 12). Two schools did make appeals in 1958 (see p. 40 below).

The new Executive Director reported on behalf of the Commission that three new schools had been accredited (Bulletin 22, 1956, p. 79). That brought the total of accredited schools to 79, though there were also another 44 associate members (Bulletin 22, 1956, p. 19-20).[103] He also reported that the

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1991. The selection of Dayton was based on a motion by the Executive Committee to locate the ATS office "near the population and church membership center of the United States and that the final determination be left to the Executive Committee" (Bulletin 22, 1956, p. 92). The motion passed 41 to 18. A special committee had reviewed the location issue and reported that the Indiana/Ohio line represented roughly the dividing point of ATS schools, with 64 east and 57 west (Commission Minutes, June 1956, p. 2). Dayton was only 30 miles from that line.

[101] The 1956 meeting also noted that the new Executive Director position and significant new funding had created an opportunity for finally "strengthening advanced theological studies… by authorizing a permanent Committee on Advanced Theological Studies" (Bulletin 22, 1956, pp. 73-74). Their first report and a new standard would come in 1958 (see p. 39 below).

[102] The 1936 Standard on Admissions had undergone a slight revision in 1946 when the following phrase was added: "An accredited Theological Seminary or College [replaced in 1956 by "accredited theological school"] should require for admission to candidacy for its degrees the degree of A.B., *based upon four years of work beyond secondary education*…" (see p. 29 above).

[103] The 1956 Bulletin (p. 4) was the first to list "Conditions for Associate Membership," including at least four full-time faculty and 25 students.

Commission had added one new notation dealing with "faculty… insufficient in size for the programs of study and/or the number of students enrolled" (Bulletin 22, p. 51). That new notation was primarily in response to previous concerns raised at earlier ATS meetings in the 1950s over whether to establish a minimum student/faculty ratio. It was also noted that the Commission had not yet had time to establish notations regarding the new library standards (p. 53).

Finally, the 1956 Biennial Meeting devoted two sessions to Niebuhr's first volume that had just been published on his study of theological education (Bulletin 22, 1956, pp. 99-112). That first volume, co-authored by Daniel Day Williams and James Gustafson, was entitled *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry: Reflections on the Aims of Theological Education* (Harper and Row, 1956).[104] Its three chapters focused on the church's purpose, emerging new concepts of ministry, and "the idea of a theological school." When asked how this study had changed their minds, Williams responded that he began their work thinking the problem with theological education was "complacency but now he believed it to be the need for a new direction… the increase of love of God and man" (Bulletin 22, 1956, p. 101).

The 1958 Biennial Meeting in Boston was a return to the same city where ATS had begun 40 years earlier. The 1958 Standards introduced, for the first time, a set of new "Standards for the Doctorate in Religion and Theological Studies" (Bulletin 23, 1958, pp. 11-13). In reality, these new standards were not for a new kind of doctoral degree but were more explicit requirements for the existing PhD degree (and ThD) that had been mentioned only briefly in all versions of the Standards since 1936. These new standards were proposed by the new Committee on Advanced Theological Studies, established in 1956 (Bulletin 23, 1958, pp. 74-75, and Footnote 101 above). They were intended to "strengthen" the academic doctorates offered by 33 ATS schools and to provide guidelines for any schools who might want to offer an academic doctorate.[105]

The new standards for the doctorate had seven sections, including one on "admissions" (a BA or a BD, if the former a qualifying exam was required, plus reading knowledge of French and German), one on the "faculty" (recognized for continuing scholarly activity, with at least two per field, devoting at least one-third of their time to the doctoral program), and one on the "library" (doctoral study should be offered only where "a library of good university standard" is available in the immediate vicinity).[106]

The 1958 Bulletin published the first policy on the Establishment of New Schools "for the use of theological educators, denominational boards, and any concerned for the establishment, moving, or uniting of schools" (Bulletin 23, 1958, p. 14).[107] The policy noted that ATS recognized that "in the near future the establishment of new theological schools will clearly be necessary."[108] The policy advocated for "analysis on a broad scale" and for "careful consideration of the location of new schools in relation to

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[104] The second volume was published in 1957, *The Advancement of Theological Education* (Harper and Row). The other volume was a collection of essays on the ministry in different periods, *The Ministry in Historical Perspective* (Harper and Row, 1956).

[105] It was no accident that Niebuhr concluded in his 1957 book, *Advancement*, that "the greatest need… was for gifted, concerned, thoughtful, and experienced scholars and teachers" and that ATS "needed to shift their emphasis to the development of excellent doctoral programs in theology" (cited by Miller, *Piety and Profession*, p. 703).

[106] The 1958 Standards also raised the minimum number of full-time faculty from four to six (Bulletin 23, 1958, p. 7).

[107] Footnote 89 above notes that United Theological Seminary was ATS's first merger in 1954. This new policy in 1958 undoubtedly anticipated many more "uniting of schools."

[108] "The two most important trends Niebuhr found [in his 1957 study were that] "the number of theological schools and the number of theological students were constantly rising… [with] twenty-seven new seminaries … founded over the last thirty years" (Miller, *Piety and Profession*, p. 688).

geographical and population factors, proximity to other educational institutions, and the possibility of increasing cooperation among the schools for the maximum use of their resources" (Bulletin 23, p. 14).

The 1958 meeting also reported on several major gifts to ATS (discussed above on pp. 35-36). The gifts from Rockefeller's Sealantic Fund and from Lilly Endowment Inc. totaled some $9 million in today's dollars (Bulletin 23, 1958, pp. 52-63). The 1958 treasurer's report (Bulletin 23, p. 63) also listed $110,000 (over $1 million today) from the Sealantic Fund for the American Theological "Library Association" for a "Microtext Fund" and for an "Index Fund" (see p. 30 above). As noted above, these gigantic gifts put ATS into a whole other world financially than it had experienced in its previous 40 years (see p. 47 below).

The 1958 Commission on Accrediting reported that it had voted to accredit two new schools, to deny one, and to drop one from the list of accredited schools.[109] The latter two schools (Bangor and Temple) appealed those decisions to the new Board of Review, created in 1956 (see p. 38 above). The Board upheld both decisions of the Commission (Bulletin 23, 1958, pp. 78-79).[110] The Commission also reported in 1958 that it had voted "to reinspect Queen's Theological College, Kingston, Ontario," the first ATS school to be reinspected under the new reinspection policy adopted in 1956 (see p. 38 above). The outgoing ATS president also reported that new "Guides for Self-Study" had been developed by the new Executive Director, along with a "Proposed Program for Visitation Teams" (Bulletin 23, 1958, p. 129).

These visitors would be doing reinspections "not as a 'policing' operation to see whether a school still deserves accreditation [but with] humility of minds in search of truth and gentleness of hearts dedicated to a high common purpose" (Bulletin 23, 1958, p. 129; see also Endnote 6). The 1950s was also the time when regional accrediting agencies in the U.S. were developing guidelines for visiting teams. In her 2009 article, Accreditation in the United States: How Did We Get to Where We Are?, Barbara Brittingham (former president of the New England Association) made this observation: "Between 1950 and 1965, the regional accrediting organizations developed and adopted what are considered today's fundamentals in the accreditation process: a mission-based approach, standards, a self-study prepared by the institution, a visit by a team of peers who produced a report, and a decision by a commission overseeing a process of periodic review" (pp. 14-15). The 1958 Commission also reported that it would review all notations, including the "problem of notations in relation to Canadian Schools" (Bulletin 23, 1958, p. 55).[111]

The 1958 ATS meeting was the first to hear a "Report on the Committee on the Canadian Colleges" (Bulletin 23, 1958, pp. 81-90). Their lengthy report began by describing how "for some years [we] have been expressing uneasiness about [ATS] annual reports and about some of the presuppositions upon with the forms rest" (Bulletin 23, p. 81). The Committee "recalled that [ATS] had Canadian and United States membership from the beginning" (p. 81). Nine Canadian colleges had attended the first ATS

[109] One of the two newly accredited schools was Fuller Seminary, accredited in 1957 after several reviews and inspections. Leon Pacala observed that Fuller was only the third evangelical school to be accredited by ATS, the first two being Calvin in 1944 and Asbury in 1946 (*The Role of ATS in Theological Education: 1980-1990*, p. 7). Three SBC seminaries were accredited before Fuller (Southern in 1938, Southwestern in 1944, and New Orleans in 1954), but many viewed those schools in that era as more mainline. The Commission had expressed concerns since Fuller's first application in 1951 over some of their faculty being critical of other (mainline) ATS schools (Commission Minutes, December 1951, p. 5). ATS valued a spirit of cooperation and respect.

[110] Temple University School of Theology was a 1938 charter member. When the Commission met in December 1958, it considered placing the school on "probation," which would have been the first use of probation. However, the Commission decided instead to drop the school from the accredited list (Commission Minutes, December 1958, p. 3); it became Conwell Seminary in 1960 and merged with Gordon in 1970 (see Appendix C). The first probation came in 1960 (see p. 44 below).

[111] The 1958 meeting heard a report on the Revision of Notations (Bulletin 23, 1958, p. 80). That report (printed on pp. 26-28), which renumbered the notations (N1.1, N1.2, N.2.1, N2.2, etc.), clarified that notations "are not to be thought of as punitive but as an educational tool… [for schools] to notice other practices and to improve their own" (p. 26).

Conference in Cambridge in 1918, and for many years Canadian schools were represented in all important ATS functions, from reading papers, to serving as officers, to being on the Commission. The Committee expressed its concern that "over the years there has been a tendency to forget these facts" (Bulletin 23, 1958, p. 82). The Committee was particularly concerned over the name given the organization in 1936, the American Association of Theological Schools, since "the adjective 'American' conveys the narrower meaning of 'United States'" to most (Bulletin 23, p. 82).

The bulk of the Canadian report in 1958 focused on the ATS annual report forms, which tended "to be based on the nomenclature and assumptions" of U.S. members, rather than Canadian, though the latter represented 10% of the membership in 1956. Of particular concern were the new library forms regarding costs, since most all Canadian members were embedded in universities without separate library budgets. The report also raised concerns over Notation 32 on a majority of faculty teaching undergraduates, since that scenario was quite common in the university-embedded context of most Canadian member schools (see Footnote 111). The report concluded that "in all its deliberations the committee became more deeply aware that the function of the Association has never been to impose uniformity" (Bulletin 23, 1958, p. 89). The Association voted to receive the report with the intention of further discussion (Bulletin 23, p. 107). It would be 14 years, however, before ATS took concrete action (see p. 54 below).

What is somewhat striking about the 1958 meeting was almost no discussion of Niebuhr's just published book, *The Advancement of Theological Education* (Harper and Row, 1957). To be sure, the 1954 and 1956 meetings had devoted space to his study while it was still underway, but there were no sessions in 1958 on his results, in stark contrast to the 1924 study by Kelly and the 1934 study by Brown and May, which were discussed at length at the ATS Conferences in 1924 and in 1932 and 1934.[112] While the 1958 ATS meeting was strangely silent, Miller devoted an entire chapter ("Mr. Niebuhr Speaks: Seminaries Advance") to Niebuhr's study in his *Piety and Profession* (pp. 669-705).

Miller noted that the word "Advancement" in the title of Niebuhr's 1957 book was intentional. Much progress in theological education and accreditation had been made in the last few decades. For example, while Kelly's study in 1924 listed only 44% of seminary students with a college degree (see Footnote 23 above), Niebuhr showed that percentage had nearly doubled to at least 80% (*Advancement*, p. 8, cited in Miller, p. 686), thanks in large measure to accrediting standards. Seminary enrollments had also increased, from just over 10,000 to more than 25,000 (Miller, p. 686). Financially, too, the news was much improved. "On a per student basis, [seminary] endowments were among the largest in American higher education" in the mid-1950s (Miller, p. 687). The word "Advancement" also pointed intentionally to what Niebuhr believed to be a bright future, a *kairos* moment (Miller, p. 687). New seminaries were being added, enrollments were growing, and new buildings were being built, with "a full two-thirds of the schools [having] done some major construction projects, with married student dormitories the most common addition and libraries the next most common" (p. 689). Still, all was not well. As Miller observed (p. 690), "1957—the year report was published—marked the beginning of a series of articles announcing the end of the religious boom" of the Fifties. In fact, the last part of Niebuhr's study "pointed toward a coming crisis of enrollment, … though the Vietnam War kept seminary enrollments artificially high from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s" (Miller, p. 699). But for the moment, the Niebuhr study "was a victory party for the American seminary" (Miller, p. 704).

On a more somber note, the 1958 Biennial Meeting included a memorial tribute to Lewis Sherrill. His death on January 28, 1957, "removed the leader who [since 1930] had played the most significant part in

[112] Niebuhr had issued numerous "bulletins" and "memoranda" to ATS members during the course of his study, which meant many of the study's results had been "fed back to theological schools" prior to the 1958 meeting (Bulletin 22, 1956, p. 62).

shaping the function and development of this Association" (Bulletin 23, 1958, p. 95; see also pp. 14-15 above). One address at the 1958 meeting was a history of ATS's first forty years, given by Walter Roberts, outgoing ATS president and former Executive Secretary and COA chair (Bulletin 23, 1958, pp. 122-130).

The 1950s ended on a troubling note that presaged other coming controversies in the 1960s and beyond among ATS schools.[113] The troubling note was sounded at the June 1958 Commission meeting, when the outgoing Commission chair (the first elected by the Commission and also incoming ATS vice president) "was asked to comment on the circumstances which led to the dismissal of 13 teachers from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary," where he served as president. "He spoke at length on the situation… and gave assurances that the crisis had not arisen over theological, racial,[114] or academic freedom issues" (Commission Minutes, June 1958, p. 2). The Baptist Press reported that the 13 professors constituted nearly half of the faculty and were dismissed by Southern's board over irreconcilable differences with the president. Southern's own history indicates the central issue was that these faculty were "pressing for more aggressive adoption of liberal scholarship" (The History of the SBTS).[115]

At their June 1958 meeting, the Commission authorized a special committee to visit the school in fall of 1958, which they discussed at their next meeting in December 1958. In December 1959, the Commission voted to impose four notations on Southern instead of placing the school on probation. The Commission also asked the school to make a report on, among other things, their progress to "strengthen morale" (Commission Minutes, December 1959, p. 4).[116] This was the first instance of the Commission requiring a report on campus "morale," but it would not be the last as the "Lawson Affair" in 1960 would quickly and not quietly demonstrate (see Footnote 114 and p. 44 below).

The 1960 ATS Biennial Meeting was the first and only ATS meeting in Richmond (VA). As the 1960s dawned, ATS enrollment declined, down 6% since 1958, from 22,523 to 21,088 (Bulletin 24, 1960, p. 17). The 1958 enrollment of 22,523 proved to be an ATS peak until 1966, when enrollment totaled 23,959 (Bulletin 28, 1968, p, 44). Niebuhr's 1957 prediction of a "coming crisis of enrollment" (see p. 41 above) never quite reached that level, but ATS schools did experience five straight years of decline, with an 8% drop between 1958 and 1963. From 1964 to 2004, however, ATS schools experienced almost 40 straight years of enrollment increases, quadrupling from 21,025 to 80,773.[117]

The 1960 Bulletin published the first set of "Procedures Related to Accreditation" (Bulletin 24, 1960, pp. 18-20). The first part added to the "Conditions for Associate Membership" published in 1958 with two new sections: "Steps to Associate Membership" and "Maintenance of Associate Membership." The

[113] In that "troubling" vein, the Commission Minutes for December 1959 (p. 6) listed the first set of "warning letters" that were ever sent to member schools, six of them. The issues were not major (e.g., faculty-student ratio and library expenses), but it was the first time the Commission felt the need to issue "warnings" to member schools. The sanction of "warning" does not appear again until 1996 (see Footnote 235) and then again in the 2020 revision of the Policies and Procedures, III.G (see p. 20 above).

[114] An infamous racial issue was to emerge in 1960 over the so-called Lawson Affair at Vanderbilt Divinity School, when a Black seminary student was dismissed for participating in nonviolent protests against segregation in Nashville (see p. 44 below).

[115] A retrospective article in 2019 entitled the 1958 Lexington Road Massacre argued that these faculty "wanted a school in which professors were free from theological constraints imposed by the popular sentiments of the denomination." In his *Piety and Profession*, Miller states that the 13 faculty were dismissed for questioning the president's authority (p. 692).

[116] The Commission considered Southern's situation again in June 1960, after having received the school's 45-page report (Commission Minutes, June 1960, p. 3). In December of 1961, the Commission voted to remove all notations on Southern (Commission Minutes, December 1961, p. 6).

[117] The only period of decline in those 40 years was from 1984 to 1988, when enrollment dropped for four straight years, though only by 1.7%, from 56,466 to 55,475 (ATS Fact Books and Annual Data Tables). Only three other years between 1964 and 2004 saw any declines at all, and all were very small: down 55 in 1993, down 609 in 1995, and down 276 in 1997 (see Appendix D).

second part had the same three sections for Accredited Membership (i.e., Conditions, Steps, and Maintenance). The third part dealt with "Enforcement of Standards for Accredited Members," including reinspections that might result in one of three decisions: sustain accreditation (with or without notations), impose probation, or withdraw accreditation. The option of probation was further explained with seven specific procedures. The fourth and final part dealt with "Appeals: The Board of Review," which had been established in 1956 (see p. 38 above).

The 1960 Bulletin also published the first set of "Procedures for Self-Study and Counseling for Theological Schools" (Bulletin 24, 1960, p. 29). However, those new procedures did not come from the Commission, but from the Association. The new procedures were purely optional for any member school (not just accredited members) and could "be undertaken by any school at any time… and derive[d] only from a school's will to excellence." The resulting self-study reports did not even go to the Commission. Schools completing these self-studies could also use various "counseling" resources of the Association, such as team visits and consultants, but those were also not from the Commission. Instead, the Commission followed its 1956 policy (see p. 38 above) on "Reinspection of Accredited Schools." That policy mandated that accredited schools "shall be reevaluated every ten years." The 1956 policy also added that "the Executive Director shall create guidance materials for self-study by the schools," which are referenced in the 1960 Procedures but not described or explained.

The 1962 Bulletin (25, pp. 93-94) provided some clarification to this confusion over these two types of visits. In 1962, the Commission on Research and Counsel reported that the Association visits "have been of an entirely different nature from those of the Commission on Accrediting" (p. 93). The Association visits began in 1958 as a direct follow-up to the Niebuhr report, who recommended such visits separate from the mandatory accrediting ones. The 1962 report noted that since 1958, the Association had conducted 61 such visits, mostly with two-person teams, funded by a grant from the Lilly Endowment (Bulletin 25, 1962, p. 94).

The 1960 Bulletin also listed for the first time a set of new ATS policies: one on "Academic Freedom and Tenure in the Theological School" and one on "Institutional Procedures with Respect to Faculty Resignations, Leaves, and Retirements" (Bulletin 24, pp. 34-42). Again, as with the new procedures described in the preceding paragraphs, these Association policies were not mandatory ones required by the Commission for accredited schools but were instead voluntary statements presented by the Executive Committee "as presenting patterns and norms for advisory use" by member schools (Bulletin 24, p. 34 and pp. 66-67). These proposed policies generated considerable debate and discussion (recorded on pp. 98-105 of Bulletin 24) and were not officially adopted until the 1962 meeting, after several revisions (Bulletin 25, 1962, pp. 38 and 95). Part of the impetus for these two new Association policies may well have been two situations that the Commission had to deal with in the 1950s: the 1952 special visit to Asbury for firing a faculty member (see p. 33 above) and the 1958 special visit to Southern after it dismissed 13 of their faculty (see p. 42 above).

The 1960 Standards remained unchanged, but the Committee on Advanced Theological Studies proposed new "Standards for Advanced Degrees for the Pastoral Ministry" and new "Standards for Advanced Degrees for the Teaching Ministry" (Bulletin 24, 1960, pp. 43-50). The first set of standards were for ministry-related degrees that should be called Master of Sacred Theology and Doctor of Sacred Theology (p. 46). The second set were for teaching-related degrees that should be called Master of Theology and Doctor of Theology, though a school that was "an integral part of a university [could offer them as] the MA and PhD degrees" (p. 49). These proposals met with an "extended discussion" (pp. 95-97), partly over lingering concerns that the BD should really be a Master's. The Committee responded that "there was nothing much that could be done about the MA degree since it was not under the

jurisdiction of seminaries" (p. 95), with the understanding that only regionally-accredited universities could offer the MA. Some questioned the need for additional degrees, especially a professional doctorate for the pastoral ministry. In the end, both proposals were "received for further study and referred to the schools" for further discussion in 1962 (Bulletin 24, 1960, pp. 43 and 97).

The 1960 Bulletin noted the hiring of Jesse Ziegler as ATS's first Associate Director, who began in July 1959 and would later become Executive Director in 1966 after Charles Taylor's retirement. The Executive Committee also reported that ATS had received a gift of $225,000 [worth $2.3 million today] spread over three years for "assistance in the recruitment and training of a stronger Negro [sic] ministry" (Bulletin 24, 1960, p. 68). That announcement in June 1960 came in the wake of a national controversy over race involving a charter member school.

In March 1960 a Black seminarian named James Lawson was expelled from Vanderbilt University Divinity School, following his arrest for participating in nonviolent protests over discrimination at lunch counters in Nashville. His expulsion by the university board came two months before his graduation and without any hearing or consultation with faculty. In response, most of the divinity school faculty threatened to resign if Lawson was not reinstated. The board responded to that threat by stating they would close the divinity school if the faculty resigned. Later other university faculty also threatened to resign, including many in the medical school, which caused the board to reconsider. The story, referred to as the Lawson Affair (see Footnote 114), received national coverage in major news media.

In June 1960 (Commission Minutes, p. 1), the Commission authorized a "committee of inquiry" to investigate the "tone" at Vanderbilt Divinity School. That was a direct reference to Standard 7 on General Tone and Quality, which had been greatly expanded in 1956 to cover a host of "intangibles," including "the integrity of the Christian witness before the world." In December 1960, the Commission heard the report of the "committee of inquiry" and voted to place the school on probation for one year, the first use of probation in ATS Commission history.[118] As the Commission's letter to the university made clear: "a school cannot endure such adversities… without jeopardizing the quality of its work… and its accredited status" (Commission Minutes, December 1960, p. 4). A lot was at stake, not only in terms of social justice but also the ability of the Commission to enforce its standards for quality and equality before a watching world.[119] That was made clear in this excerpt from the Commission's letter: "Since events at Vanderbilt were so widely reported, it was impossible to consider these matters as having no relation to the welfare of theological education generally."[120] Vanderbilt responded in ways deemed appropriate by the Commission and in December 1961 the school's probation was removed.[121]

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[118] The second ever probation came in 1962 when the Commission placed Meadville Theological School on probation for two years (Bulletin 25, 1962, p. 73). At the same Meeting, the Commission made public its removal of Vanderbilt's one year probation, which had included Notation 6.1 on faculty not exercising "effective control over… the academic life of the school."

[119] Ironically, at the June 1960 Biennial Meeting the Commission on Financial Affairs reported that it had had "conversations with the representatives of the Sears, Roebuck Foundation about the possibility of their production of a motion picture presenting the story of theological education in a popular way" (Bulletin 24, 1960, p. 88). Nothing else was ever reported.

[120] The newly elected chair of the Commission in December 1960 was Stanley Frost, Dean at McGill, the first Canadian to serve as COA chair (Commission Minutes, December 1960, p. 1). Frost had also been elected as vice president of ATS in June 1960.

[121] *Vanderbilt Magazine* ran a retrospective in 2002 entitled Days of Thunder: The Lawson Affair, which it termed a "defining event" in Vanderbilt's history. That article noted that the Divinity School "suffered loss of prestige… and was placed on probation for a year by [ATS]." Lawson ended up transferring to and graduating from Boston University School of Theology, another ATS school. He served as a Methodist pastor in Los Angeles for 25 years before retiring in 1999 and continues to be an icon in the Civil Rights Movement. Lawson returned to teach at Vanderbilt as a Distinguished Professor from 2006 to 2009. In 2021, the Divinity School honored him by launching the James Lawson Institute for the Research and Study of Nonviolent Movements.

The 1962 Biennial Meeting was in Toronto, the third of five in that city (see Footnote 88). The preface to the 1962 Bulletin mentioned that the ATS Commission was "the body recognized by the National Commission on Accrediting [NCA] as the agency for the accreditation of graduate schools in which students are prepared for Protestant ministries" (Bulletin 25, 1962, p. iii). The Commission Minutes for December 1960 record that ATS's application for membership in NCA had been approved (Minutes, p. 3). ATS first encountered NCA in 1954 (see discussion on p. 35 above) when it reported that "the National Commission [founded by U.S. college and university presidents] came into existence in 1949… for the purpose of dealing with the 'threat' of accreditation to American education" (Bulletin 21, 1954, pp. 50-51). NCA dealt with that "threat of accreditation" by becoming "the first national organization to develop criteria and recognize accrediting agencies" (EQAC's Accreditation in the U.S.). NCA would eventually evolve into the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), which still recognizes the ATS Commission on Accrediting.[122] ATS would encounter NCA again in 1962 (see p. 46 below).

The 1962 Standards of Accreditation introduced a number of firsts. They were the first revision to include an explicit reference to women. The preface to every set of Standards since 1936 had included this statement: "[ATS's] interest in having a list of accredited institutions grows out of its concern for the best possible preparation of men for a successful ministry" (changed to "effective ministry" in 1956). In 1962, that prefatory statement was revised to read: "[ATS's] interest in having a list of accredited institutions grows out of its concern for the best possible preparation of men *and women* for effective *ministries in the Church*" (Bulletin 25, 1962, p. 22). It was a small start. It would be 16 years before the 1978 Standards added a separate standard on Responsiveness to Minority and Women's Concerns.

The 1962 Standards significantly expanded several existing standards. Standard 1 on Admissions added an explicit reference to "or its counterpart in Canada" after a reference to "one of the regional accrediting associations" and added a paragraph to ensure that schools operate "at a predominantly postgraduate level" by not allowing more than 20% of "non-graduates in the regular school program." Standard 2 on Duration of the Course of Study introduced a new requirement that "a theological school should have no fewer than 5 days of work per week in an academic year comparable in length to that prevailing in accredited colleges and universities in the region." Standard 3 on Fields of Study and Balance of Curriculum added a new statement on degree programs in Christian Education and a new requirement on educational field experience.

The 1962 Standard 4 on Faculty tripled in length, with new requirements on teaching load (preferring 9 hours per week to the 12 hours stated since 1936), as well as new requirements on faculty size, scholarship, salaries, and sabbaticals. For the first time this standard required that "faculty should be free to seek the truth and communicate [their] findings," citing ATS's new policy on "Academic Freedom and Tenure in Theological Schools" (proposed in 1960 and adopted in 1962). This new standard and policy on academic freedom arose most likely out of specific situations that had occurred at Southern in 1958 (see p. 42 above) and at Vanderbilt in 1960 (see p. 44 above), two charter members of ATS.

The 1962 Standards added two new standards. Standard 5 on Administration and Control was the first ever on governing boards, which received considerable discussion at the meeting and was eventually approved only after an amendment from the floor (Bulletin 25, 1962, p. 142). The former Standard 5 on

[122] NCA merged with FRACHE (the Federation of Regional Accrediting Commissions of Higher Education) in 1974 to form COPA (the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation). COPA was replaced in 1994 by CORPA (the Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation). CORPA was dissolved in 1997 and replaced by CHEA, which is now the longest-lived of any of its predecessors (Department of Education, Accreditation in the U.S.).

Equipment and the former Standard 6 on Finances were combined in 1962 to form one new Standard 7 on Facilities and Finances.

New Standard 6 on Student Life and Work was a lengthy new addition that began: "Students must enter profoundly into the life of the school if they are to benefit significantly from its undertakings." The new standard required that "a significant majority of the student body should be in residence at the school during the year," a reflection of how far seminaries had come since Brown and May's 1934 study that found most seminarians were commuters (see discussion on p. 13 above). As Miller observed in commenting on that 1934 study: "The great age of the 'residential' seminary was in fact in the future, after the GI Bill [of 1944] and national prosperity [in the 1950s] made it possible for students to pick up and go to school where they liked rather than where it was most convenient" (*Piety and Profession*, p. 480). The "great age of the 'residential' seminary" was now here. The Commission even voted at its June 1962 meeting to publish a statement "regarding a norm for remunerative work" by students and send it to all member schools (Commission Minutes, June 1962, p. 5). That statement discouraged schools from allowing students to work more than 20 hours per week "to assure that adequate and uninterrupted time is available to all students for effective attention to the academic enterprises of theological education" (Minutes, p. 5).[123]

The 1962 Standards, however, did not include the standards on professional master's and doctoral degrees that had been proposed in 1960. The Committee on Advanced Theological Studies that had proposed them in 1960 reported in 1962 that they had received very little feedback from the schools on these proposed advanced degrees in pastoral ministry and that what little they had received was negative. They interpreted the "silence of the schools" as meaning "the association is not likely to look upon [these proposals] with favor" (Bulletin 25, 1962, p. 111). That proved prophetic because after considerable discussion the members voted down the proposed new standards on a professional doctorate and new professional master's degrees (Bulletin 25, 1962, p. 138).[124]

While the 1962 Biennial Meeting adopted revised Standards, the 1964 gathering approved a significantly revised and expanded set of Notations (Bulletin 26, 1964, pp. 15-19). The seven sections from 1962 were expanded to 12 sections, with 37 new notations. The original seven sections added new notations on Christian Education, field education, music, faculty salaries, and academic freedom. A new section was added on "General Tone and Quality" (see 1960 Vanderbilt case on p. 44 above), and three new sections were added on degrees beyond the BD. The new notation on Christian Education stemmed not only from the addition of Christian Education programs to the 1962 revision of the Standards (see p. 45 above), but also to ATS's decision to "take over the [accrediting] functions" of the American Association of Schools of Religious Education (Bulletin 26, p. 74). The National Commission on Accrediting (NCA, see p. 45 above) had asked ATS to do that to avoid "two accrediting agencies operating in this [same] area" (Bulletin 26, pp. 74-75).[125] ATS agreed to create a "special category" of ATS membership for three particular schools of religious education.

[123] The Commission had added a new notation in 1958 that "in this school, there is a serious diversion of student attention from academic to remunerative pursuits" (Bulletin 23, 1958, p. 28). That notation lasted until the 1996 revision.

[124] The Executive Committee also proposed changes in 1962 to the 1956 Constitution regarding membership categories, including deleting Affiliate Members. After the proposed changes were discussed, the membership voted to delay approval until 1964 after further revisions (Bulletin 25, 1962, p. 132).

[125] The Commission met with the director of the NCA in December 1963 to discuss this possibility. At that meeting, the NCA also suggested all inspection reports by visiting teams be sent to the school before submitting them to the Commission, so that the school might correct any factual errors. The Commission agreed (Commission Minutes, December 1963, pp. 5-6) and voted later to approve that as an ATS Commission policy (Commission Minutes, December 1965, p. 12).

One of the most momentous announcements at the 1964 Biennial Meeting in Fort Worth was the Executive Committee's report on "Possible Relationship to Roman Catholic Schools" (Bulletin 26, 1964, p. 68). An *ad hoc* committee was appointed to respond to "an inquiry by two Roman Catholic schools about the possibility of membership in the Association," which would be discussed at the 1966 meeting. That report was followed by a lengthy report on "The Role of [ATS] in Dealing with Schools in Difficulty" (Bulletin 26, pp. 68-70), in which the Executive Committee reminded the membership that "its member schools will proceed in a spirit of true fraternity… and affirms that this basis of cooperation gives neither to the Association nor to its agencies the right or desire to intervene in theological or doctrinal disputes which may arise from time to time within the member schools" (Bulletin 26, p. 69).

The 1964 meeting approved a revised Constitution that had been proposed in 1962 (Bulletin 26, p. 107; see pp. 49-55 for text of new Constitution). The major changes were that new Associate Members could be elected only by the full membership (previously the Executive Committee did), the category of Affiliate Members was deleted (first introduced in 1952), new Accredited Members could be approved only by two-thirds of the full membership (previously the Commission approved them), all members had full voting rights except for accreditation which was restricted to accredited members, and the Commission on Accrediting expanded from six to nine members (summarized in Bulletin 24, 1962, pp. 130-131). Regarding the last change, until 1964, the Commission had four ex officio members (ATS officers) and six members at large appointed by the Executive Committee. Beginning in 1964, the Commission had nine members with no ATS officers. The nine were nominated by the Executive Committee but elected by a two-thirds vote of the members to six-year terms.

The 1964 Biennial Meeting also paid tribute to Harold Duling of Lilly Endowment Inc., "a true friend" of the Association (Bulletin 26, 1964, p. 78). Since the first Lilly grant in 1957, Duling had helped ATS secure "over half a million dollars" from the Endowment, worth more than $5 million today. While Rockefeller funds had helped launch and organize ATS in the first half of the 20th century—from ATS's first ever grants in 1928 (see p. 9 above and Endnote 7) through the 1956 grants from the Sealantic Funds that funded ATS's first Executive Director, the Lilly Endowment would become ATS's major funding partner in the second half of the 20th century and the first quarter of the 21st century (see below pp. 59, 62, 67, and 72, as well as Footnote 205).

The 1966 Biennial Meeting saw the passing of the Executive Director baton from Charles Taylor to Jesse Ziegler, upon the former's retirement after ten years as ATS's first Executive Director (Bulletin 27, 1966, p. 89). Ziegler, who had been ATS Associate Director[126] since 1959, was a minister of the Church of the Brethren and taught psychology and Christian education at Bethany Biblical Seminary. He had a PhD from Catholic University of America in clinical psychology.[127]

Ziegler's Catholic connection would stand him in good stead since the 1966 meeting saw the first Roman Catholic seminaries admitted to ATS membership, following the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). The Executive Committee reported in 1966 that it had "called a consultation with thirteen

[126] Ziegler's replacement as Associate Director was David Schuller, who was hired in 1967 (Bulletin 28, 1968, p. 108). Schuller (1926-2002) had taught at Concordia Seminary since 1955. In 1969, Ziegler announced to the Commission that Schuller would now be the staff member working with the Commission (Commission Minutes, December 1969, p. 1). He retired from ATS in 1989 as director of the Readiness for Ministry program, discussed on pp. 61-62 below (2002 Schuller Obituary).

[127] Biographical information from Spring 2001 *In Trust* article, ATS Pioneer Jesse Ziegler Dies. One of Ziegler's first comments as new Executive Director was to report to the ATS membership in 1966 that "about sixty years ago when the Carnegie Foundation wrote to representatives of the professions to inquire whether they wished to be studied, medicine replied affirmatively, law negatively, and theology not at all" (Bulletin 27, 1966, pp. 92-93).

theological schools of the Roman Catholic Church" and that eight of those schools and one Orthodox school (St. Vladimir's) were being recommended for ATS membership (Bulletin 27, 1966, p. 88). The ATS membership "voted to recognize with gratitude and satisfaction the historic action of admission of Roman Catholic and Orthodox seminaries" (Bulletin 27, p. 76). The 1966 meeting also saw the first plenary presentations by Roman Catholic and Orthodox leaders (Bulletin 27, p. 68).[128] The Orthodox leader was the dean of St. Vladimir's, admitted to ATS membership in 1966 (Holy Cross Orthodox Theological School was admitted in 1968; Bulletin 28, 1968, p. 37).

The 1966 meeting, after hearing a lengthy "Report on Degree Nomenclature"[129] (Bulletin 27, 1966, pp. 125-136), voted to allow member schools either to retain the BD nomenclature or to use "the designation for this basic master's degree [of] Master of Divinity" (Bulletin 27, 1966, p. 77). A few months later the Commission recorded that it interpreted that second option to mean that if a school chose to call its first professional degree a master's, it must use the nomenclature of MDiv, not any other kind of master's (Commission Minutes, December 1966, p. 7). At the same time, the membership voted to appoint a committee to "develop standards for the professional doctorate at the earliest possible date" (p. 77). The 1966 report described seven regional consultations on degree nomenclature since the 1964 meeting, an 80-page study document that collated member comments, and the use of internal and external consultants. It was a *thorough* report that laid the groundwork for the first major revision of the Standards in 1972, when the MDiv and DMin degrees were incorporated into the Standards.

The 1966 Biennial Meeting also approved the Commission's "Proposed Program of Self-Study and Reevaluation" (Bulletin 27, 1966, pp.105-106). Reevaluation had been first mandated in 1956 (see p. 38 above) and numerous "reinspections" had been reported since then, but the 1966 program was the first time the plan became fully operational, with specific procedures. This was also the first time that the size of the team was expanded from the previous one or two visitors to a policy that stated: "Each reevaluation team shall consist of from two to four members, at least one of whom shall be a member of the Commission on Accrediting," with travel expenses covered and "local hospitality expenses [to] be borne by the school visited" (Bulletin, 27, p. 106).[130]

Two of the most significant benefits of the new requirements on self-study and evaluation visits were highlighted by Miller in his 2008 history of ATS, *A Community of Conversation* (see Footnote 6). The first benefit related to requiring self-studies: "For the first time, broad cross sections of the schools were involved in reaching conclusions about the state of the institution and its future [so that] the self-study process created, both in theory and often in practice, a community of improvement" (Miller, p. 14). The second benefit related to evaluation visits: "The creation of a broader and better-networked community of theological educators… increased the awareness of common problems and raised the possibility that they might have common solutions… [and] was an invaluable way of providing exchanges of perspective across confessional boundaries" (Miller, p. 14).

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[128] The 1966 meeting also included "representatives from the U.S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare [who] were introduced" (Bulletin 27, 1966, p. 79). Though not mentioned in the 1966 Bulletin, the first Higher Education Act [HEA] was signed into law in 1965 as part of President Johnson's Great Society legislation. The 1965 HEA greatly increased federal money for higher education, which had previously been limited mostly to veterans (see Footnote 84). Title IV of that 1965 HEA provided student assistance through scholarships, low-interest loans, and work-study programs.

[129] The report was from an eight-member committee chaired by Seward Hiltner (1910-1984), long-time professor of theology and personality at Princeton, of whom it was said, "He put the 'theology' into practical theology" (Seward Hiltner article in *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*).

[130] The 1966 Biennial Meeting also had a report on the ATS journal *Theological Education* that was launched in 1964 with funding from Lilly Endowment Inc. (Bulletin 27, 1966, pp. 98-102).

The 1966 Report of the Commission on Accrediting recommended that the membership approve the accreditation of three new institutional members, as well as the Presbyterian School of Christian Education and the Schools of Religious Education and Schools of Music at New Orleans Baptist and Southwestern Baptist.[131] The Commission also reported that it would interpret the notation on "inadequate faculty" as meaning fewer than one third of the faculty had earned doctorates or fewer than two-thirds had two years of graduate study beyond the BD (Bulletin 27, 1966, p. 105).

The Commission Minutes for December 1966 recorded that the ATS Commission was in dialogue with regional accrediting agencies about protocols for joint visits and that ATS would "maintain a posture of readiness to cooperate" with those agencies (Minutes, p. 6; see also Footnote 87 for the first example of an ATS joint visit in 1952). A year later the Commission introduced the first policy on "recusals." That policy stated that any Commission member whose school was under review "shall be expected to excuse himself during" that deliberation and decision (Commission Minutes, December 1967, p. 1).

The 1968 Bulletin included an Introduction for the first time that gave a brief history and overview of the activities of the Association and the Commission, including ATS's "single focus 'to promote the improvement of theological education'" (Bulletin 28, 1968, pp. 1-2). The 1968 Bulletin also included the first reference to "Self-Study Schedules in Preparation for Reevaluation" (p. 7), something first raised in 1956 (see p. 38 above). It was included in an updated Procedures for Self-Study and Resources for Counseling that for the first time clearly distinguished between voluntary visits for associate schools and mandatory visits for accredited schools "on a normal ten-year cycle" (Bulletin 28, 1968, p. 8).

Another first in 1968 was the revision of the Standards to incorporate "clusters" or "groups of schools."[132] This new focus on clusters was in response to the Curriculum of the Seventies project (see p. 57 below) that stressed, among other things, "the development of partnerships with universities and other seminaries" (Miller, *Piety and Profession*, p. 752). The 1968 Standards also introduced a new Standard 10 on Conditions and Nomenclature for Advanced Degrees and a new Standard 13 on Graduate Studies in Church Music. Most controversially, Bulletin 28 included new standards on "The Doctor's Degree in Ministry." Those standards came with an asterisk (literally), which noted that the membership voted at the 1968 Biennial Meeting that these new doctoral standards were to be "provisional standards… to encourage experimentation and to be applied in a counseling manner, rather than in an accrediting manner, for the next biennium" (Bulletin 28, 1968, p. 21).

The 1968 Bulletin later described the proposed standards on a professional doctorate as the result of "an unrequested assignment involving difficult and unpopular work" (p. 108) that included "a comprehensive commentary on [those] standards that has been circulated to the member schools" (p. 110). The 1968 Report of the Committee on Standards for the Professional Doctorate was rather lengthy and described how the proposed standards had come to be, with work on professional doctorate standards begun as early as 1942 (Bulletin 28, pp. 125-132). At this point, however, neither the Committee's report nor the proposed standards had given the degree a name. The nomenclature of Doctor of Ministry did not come until 1970 (see p. 52 below).

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[131] The Commission consulted with the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) in developing new standards in sacred music for ATS schools (Commission Minutes, December 1966, p. 5).

[132] In meeting with the Commission in June 1967, Ziegler, as new Executive Director, "indicated the pressing need to develop standards suitable for evaluation of clusters as contrasted with separate schools" (Commission Minutes, June 1968, p. 8). The first cluster to be accredited was the Graduate Theological Union in 1969 (Commission Minutes, May 1969, p. 5).

The 1968 Bulletin was also the first to distinguish between "Notations for Associate Schools" and "Notations for Accredited Schools" (Bulletin 28, 1968, pp. 25-31). The former had only 15 notations, modified versions of the much longer list of 55 notations for accredited schools. The Notations for Associate Schools was used only internally by the Commission, with none listed for Associate Members in the Bulletins (the internal use of Notations for Associate Members lasted until 1996; see p. 90 below). The 1968 list of Accredited Members (Bulletin 28, pp. 33-36) included the first Roman Catholic schools to be accredited: Maryknoll and Weston (Saint Meinrad was not listed even though it was also accredited in 1968).[133] The 1968 Bulletin noted the admission of 15 more Roman Catholic and Orthodox schools as Associate Members (pp. 84-85). The 1968 list included a separate category for Schools of Religious Education (only the Presbyterian School of Christian Education), and it included the first probation to be published in the list (for Drew; see p. 44 for first use of probation in 1960).

The 1968 Commission on Accrediting reported a very busy biennium during which "members of the Commission have invested more days than at any time since the Commission of the late 1930's" (Bulletin 28, 1968, pp. 107-108). The primary reason for their heavy workload was the new policy enacted in 1966 that required regular reinspections—at least every ten years, with visiting teams that included members of the Commission.[134] More than a dozen visits were made that biennium (Bulletin 28, pp. 116-118), along with the complexities of accrediting Roman Catholic and Orthodox schools for the first time, as well as creating standards for Schools of Religious Education and Schools of Music.[135] Adding to the Commission workload was a new policy adopted in May 1969 that only a Commission member could chair a visiting team and that the chair was the one responsible for writing the team report (Commission Minutes, May 1969, p. 7). That policy was quickly relaxed in December 1969 (Commission Minutes, December 1969, p. 2).[136]

At its December 1968 meeting, the Commission also heard a report on MA degrees, including a concern from the Council of Graduate Schools that the MA be reserved for "scholarly research and teaching-oriented degree programs and not [be] utilized as a professional degree" (Commission Minutes, December 1968, p. 9). The Council recommended that ATS encourage schools to use "specific titles for professional degrees, such as Master of Christian Education, Master of Church Music, etc." (p. 9). That appears to be the origin of ATS's policy to differentiate between academic and professional MA degrees, with the former called simply MA or MA (___) and the latter called Master of __ or MA in ___, a policy that lasted until the 2020 revision of the Standards. One of the last things that the 1968-1970 Commission did was to ask the Executive Committee to "appoint a committee to present a revised set of standards for accrediting to the 1972 meeting of the Association" (Commission Minutes, December 1969, p. 7). The 1972 revision would prove to be the first major redevelopment of the Standards since their inception in 1936.

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[133] The 1968 Commission included the first Roman Catholic, Joseph Devenny, dean of Weston College (MA), a Jesuit seminary that later merged with Boston College School of Theology and Ministry (Bulletin 28, 1968, p. 40). See also Footnote 186.

[134] The frequency of visits was about to get even heavier with a new policy on reevaluating schools with doctoral programs every five years (Commission Minutes, December 1968, p. 2). On top of that, the same Commission meeting voted to recognize a new category of "Candidate for Accreditation," which was then "conveyed to the Office of Education of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare as a statement of official policy" (Commission Minutes, December 1968, p. 5).

[135] Interestingly, in the midst of its busy workload that biennium, the Commission recommended to one school that its "administration is strongly urged to consider relocation" (Commission Minutes, June 1968, p. 4). This seems to be the first instance of the Commission considering location as an issue. At that same Commission meeting were observers from the National Commission on Accrediting (Minutes, p. 7).

[136] The May 1969 Commission meeting was also the first to report that one visiting team chair was ill, so he "phoned in his report" (Commission Minutes, May 1969, p. 4), a sort of predecessor to the Zoom meetings of the 2020 pandemic era.

Chapter 5. Redeveloping the Standards (1970-1979)

The period of 1970-1979 witnessed major changes in the ATS Standards, including their first wholesale redevelopment. The 1970s also saw the development of entirely new standards, including the first DMin degree standard (in 1972) and the first standard on minority and women's concerns (in 1978). During that decade, ATS launched the ill-fated Curriculum of the Seventies project to address predictions of enrollment declines, which never really materialized. During that decade, ATS promoted clusters to address predictions of financial crises, which also never quite materialized. And during that decade, the Commission spent more time on one school (see pp. 57-58 and 60 below) than on any other in its history. It was a turbulent time.

The 1970s began with a bang that jarred U.S. higher education to its core. Just six weeks before seminary leaders met in Claremont (CA) for the 1970 Biennial Meeting, the nation was rocked by the so-called "May 4 Massacre." Around noon that Monday, 28 of 70 Ohio National Guardsmen (called in to Kent State University to respond to growing campus protests over the Vietnam war) fired 67 shots in 13 seconds, killing four students and wounding nine others.[137] The shootings led to massive protests at colleges and high schools across the United States that involved more than 4 million students (Student Strike of 1970).

The ATS Executive Director opened his 1970 biennial report this way: "Theological education like all other education faces its most serious challenge… in a period when there is widespread embrace of violence" (Bulletin 29, 1970, p. 125). In giving its final report on the Doctor of Ministry at the 1970 meeting, the Committee on the Professional Doctorate began by acknowledging "the view seriously voiced by some students in sharp criticism of [ATS] spending time, effort, and funds on questions of degree nomenclature when 'the world is burning at the doorstep of the seminary'" (Bulletin 29, p. 186).

The 1970 meeting was the first to host a panel of students, who submitted two resolutions to the members, based on their belief that "the present political situation in the U.S. demands our immediate and sustained attention" and that ATS "has the responsibility to enable faculty, students, administrators, and staff members to work for change through nonviolent established political means."[138] The five students on the panel—Catholic and Protestant—resolved: (1) that ATS member schools send at least one student to every Biennial Meeting and (2) that every key committee or commission at ATS have at least one student representative with voice and vote (Bulletin, 29, pp. 104-105).

The membership voted to refer both resolutions to the Executive Committee. For its part, the Executive Committee responded: "These are troubled days for all of higher education, but they are also days of great promise. The enterprise of theological education needs to find a clear sense of direction as the shape and style of ministry undergoes revolutionary change" (Bulletin, 29, p. 114).

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[137] The May 4 Shootings at Kent State University: The Search for Historical Accuracy (Kent State University website).

[138] Dan Aleshire, former ATS Executive Director, relates a poignant story from his student days that exemplified those difficult days. In his book, *Beyond Profession: The Next Future of Theological Education* (Eerdmans, 2021, p. 10), Aleshire wrote: "Following the shooting of student protestors at Kent State University, the seminary I attended designated a day of prayer. One class I had that semester was led by a professor we regarded as especially wise. He came to the lectern, and after a moment of silence said, as best I can remember: 'My namesake (the son of another professor) is in Sweden because he could not participate in this war. My own son is in the Mekong Delta today. You tell me how to pray.' With that he left the room. Students sat in silence for a time, then left quietly, one by one. That moment remains profoundly powerful for me."

Part of those "days of great promise" was welcoming 29 new Associate Members at the 1970 Biennial Meeting—a biennial record that has never been broken[139] (Bulletin 29, 1970, pp. 95-96). Twenty-one of those 29 were Roman Catholic schools, with more than 50 of those schools joining ATS between 1966 and 1972. The 1970 meeting also approved a change in membership criteria to allow Jewish members, with one joining in 1972 (Hebrew Union of Cincinnati).[140]

The Bulletin for the 1970 Biennial Meeting included the first "Criteria for Clusters" (see p. 49 above), which was to be used as a "working paper" for the Committee to Revise Standards and Procedures for Accrediting (Bulletin 29, 1970, pp. 22-26). The "need" for clusters grew out of the 1968 Report of the Resources Planning Commission (Bulletin 28, 1968, p. 175), which called attention to the growing economic challenges (crises?) facing theological education. One way to address the decreasing lack of resources as ATS schools entered the 1970s was for seminaries to "pool their treasures" by partnering in various ways, especially through clusters. Hence, the need for Criteria for Clusters, which were later incorporated into the 1972 major overhaul of the Standards. Clustering proved to have an immediate appeal, with 18 of them, involving 99 ATS schools, formed by 1972 (Bulletin 30, 1972, Part 6, p. 70). The concept, however, did not provide long-term financial solutions, and very few still exist.

As the 1970 Report on Resources Planning Commission warned: "It would be a mistake to assume that the clustering of seminaries will alone provide the panacea for the ills that beset theological education, … clustering is no way to provide validation for the continued existence of a seminary that really ought to go out of business" (Bulletin 29, 1970, p. 171). The Executive Director reported in 1970 that ATS schools were "going through an agony of soul-searching as we struggle with the redeployment of resources at hand for theological education," warning of coming bankruptcies of some schools (Bulletin 29, 1970, p. 127).[141] One of the key reasons for financial difficulties was "the disastrous factor [of] rocketing energy prices which within a few years [in the early 1970s] tripled and quadrupled" (Ziegler, *ATS Through Two Decades*, p. 16). Such dire predictions about finances proved to be overstated (see p. 56 below).

The most long-awaited item on the 1970 agenda was the introduction of a new professional doctorate in ministry. After decades of trying, the membership finally had a professional doctorate—almost. The 1970 document proposed by the Committee on the Professional Doctorate was not yet a new standard but a set of "provisional guidelines" for a new degree to be called the Doctor of Ministry (DMin), with which schools might experiment and by which the Commission might evaluate them. The proposed DMin would be a professional degree and be built upon the Master of Divinity (MDiv), which would finally replace the Bachelor of Divinity (BD). One section of their 9-page report (Bulletin 29, 1970, pp. 186-194) was even titled, "The Future of MDiv programs and the Discontinuation of the BD Nomenclature."[142]

The Committee reported in 1970 that their recommendations "signal a move long overdue toward truly professional programs in the practice of ministry in church, community, and society" (Bulletin 29, p.

[139] Between 1966 and 1972, 80 schools joined ATS, of which 55 were Roman Catholic and two were Orthodox. Adding 80 schools in six years is an ATS record that has never even been approached. The closest is the period of 2012-2018 when 35 new ATS members were added; in 1990-1996, 34 new ATS members were added (see Appendix D).

[140] Hebrew Union withdrew in 1978 without achieving accreditation with the ATS Commission. No other Jewish seminary sought membership in ATS until the Academy for Jewish Religion (NY) joined in 2018 and became accredited in 2020.

[141] Miller, in *A Community of Conversation* (p. 28), noted the "deepest irony" in the 1968 report by ATS academics on the Curriculum of the Seventies, which called for several financially nonviable options that were "in many ways, utopian" and never really realized by ATS schools (see p. 56 below).

[142] The MDiv nomenclature was first adopted in 1966, but schools were still allowed to use BD if they preferred (p. 48 above).

187). One of the Committee's most lasting recommendations was that the new Standards (to be ready for adoption in 1972) provide for the accreditation of not only institutions but also each of the degree programs they offer (p. 193). Starting in 1972, the ATS Commission on Accrediting would intentionally function as both an institutional and a programmatic accreditor. The Commission had been functioning in that dual role by default since 1938, given that the first 46 accredited schools included eight schools embedded in universities, with their accreditation focused primarily, but not exclusively, on their graduate programs in theology. However, in 1986 the ATS Executive Committee requested that COPA recognize it as an institutional accreditor, creating difficulties for some ATS schools (see p. 73 below).

The 1970 Biennial Meeting also "voted to appoint a committee to revise standards and procedures for accrediting during the next biennium" (Bulletin 29, 1970, p. 97). That revision would prove to be a complete rewriting of the Standards, which had stayed fairly intact, though greatly expanded, since their initial publication in 1936. Regarding accreditation, the Executive Director noted other "marked changes that are taking place" (Bulletin 29, p. 129), including an increasing number of ATS schools in the U.S. who were seeking regional accreditation[143] and more attention to "due process because of the increasing amount of litigation regarding actions of accrediting associations" (Bulletin 29, p. 130). The due process concern would soon be on everyone's mind at ATS as the crisis at Concordia Seminary (MO) came to the fore at the 1972 and 1974 Biennial Meetings (see pp. 57-60 below).

The 1970 Biennial Meeting was the first to elect an African American as ATS president, Allix James, president of Virginia Union University (see A Remarkable Life, *Richmond Free Press*, October 2, 2015). The second was James Costen in 1994 (see p. 84 below). The 1970 Treasurer's report noted the addition of "full-time staff to work on Black Religious Experience and Theological Education" (Bulletin 29, 1970, p. 151). A Committee on the Black Religious Experience had been appointed in 1968 (see their report in Bulletin 29, pp. 183-185).[144] The 1970 Treasurer's report also added an expense line item for the first time for "data processing," partly due to a new *Fact Book on Theological Education* that ATS began publishing in 1970.[145]

The 1972 Bulletin began with a new Constitution that incorporated two changes. One was to bring back the category of Affiliates. That category, first introduced in 1952 and deleted in 1964, originally applied to degree-granting theological schools outside of North America. The 1972 Constitution revived the category of Affiliates but redefined it as non-degree-granting organizations. Affiliates were not considered members; they had voice but no vote (Bulletin 30, 1972, Part 1, pp. 5-6).[146] The biggest

[143] In his book, *ATS Through Two Decades* (p. 11), former ATS Executive Director Jesse Ziegler, wrote that a key reason ATS schools sought regional accreditation in the 1960s was because of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO; see also History of the Registrar). Formed in 1949, AACRAO began publishing in the 1950s a widely used list of credit transfer practices, called *Credit Given*, based on the practices of state universities, which generally accepted only regionally accredited credits. U.S. seminaries not regionally accredited were excluded from that influential list.

[144] In June 1970, the Committee on the Black Religious Experience asked the Commission on Accrediting to relax the standard that limited to 5% the portion of seminarians admitted without a college degree, which the Commission did not agree to do (Commission Minutes, June 1970, pp. 6-7) but did incorporate that request into the 1972 Standards (see p. 54 below).

[145] The Fact Book was published annually from 1970 to 2002, after which it was replaced by the ATS Annual Data Tables (see Bulletin 29, 1970, p. 134 and ATS resources website). The 1970 Treasurer's report budgeted for "one Magnetic Tape/Selectric Typewriter [MT/ST] at $6,295" (Bulletin 29, p. 151), worth $50,000 today. The IBM MT/ST in 1964 "marked the beginning of word processing" (History of Information). IBM even hired Jim Henson (who later created the Muppets) to make a 5-minute video, Paperwork Explosion, in 1967 to promote the machine.

[146] The 1972 Bulletin was the first to be divided into parts: Part 1 Constitution and Bylaws; Part 2 Officers, Committees, and Commissions; Part 3 Procedures, Standards, and Criteria for Membership; Part 4 Directory (usually one for each year of that biennium); Part 5 ATS Policy Statements; Part 6 Biennial Meeting; Part 7 Membership List (see Footnote 212); and Part 8 Long-Range Plan (1978-1996). In 1998 the Bulletin was reduced to three Parts (see Footnote 242).

change in the 1972 Constitution was changing the Association's name, from the American Association of Theological Schools to the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada.[147] This change had been raised by Canadian members since at least 1958 (see p. 40 above), though it had been the Association's name since a new Constitution was adopted in 1936. The new name adopted in 1972 made it clear that the Association was a binational organization, much like the original name adopted in the first Constitution in 1922 (the Conference of Theological Seminaries and Colleges in the United States and Canada).[148] The 1972 Biennial Meeting also approved several new Procedures Related to Membership (Bulletin 30, 1972, Part 3, pp. 3-8), including new requirements on self-studies (to take six to eighteen months), requirements for accrediting clusters, procedures on approving new degree programs (the first instance of what is now called "substantive change"[149]) that required a visit for every new degree (HLC started requiring visits for every new degree in 1950, Newman, *Agency of Change*, p. 186), and a revised set of probation procedures (used in the Concordia case; see pp. 57-58 below).

One of the most profound changes adopted at the 1972 Biennial Meeting was a wholesale rewriting of the Standards for Accrediting. The first change in the 1972 Standards was a major revision of the Preamble, which used that title for the first time. The opening lines of the new Preamble (Bulletin 30, 1972, Part 3, p. 9) described the challenging times that the Association was facing in the 1970s:

> These standards are written in a time of great uncertainty and change, with new modes of thought and action surfacing each day. They do not purport to have final solutions, or even contain the best route to solving many of our problems. Diverse groups need to be included and consequently a whole spectrum of thought and intent must be embraced. At the same time, it is important to open new horizons into the future while preserving the best from the past. The standards are not meant to dictate, rather to challenge; not to close doors, rather to open them.

A primary way the 1972 Standards sought to "open doors" was to greatly expand the existing standards. The nine original Standards from 1936 (printed on 2 pages) had grown by addition to encompass 14 Standards on 16 pages by 1970. The 1972 Standards, however, doubled their length to encompass 18 standards on 32 pages (Bulletin 30, 1972, Part 3, pp. 9-39). For the first time, the Standards were divided into two categories: nine General Institutional Standards and nine Degree Program Standards, reflecting the recommendation made in 1970 that ATS accredit both institutions and degrees (see p. 53 above).[150]

The nine General Institutional Standards, began with a new Standard on Students, moved from sixth to first place, reflecting ATS's focus on students in the 1970s (see p. 51 above). The new Student Standard also incorporated relaxed admission requirements for older students[151] ("men of mature years") and for persons who "have been deprived—as the result of racial or ethnic discrimination—of the educational

[147] The Association of Theological Schools did not begin capitalizing the "The" in its name until a constitutional amendment was approved in 1974 (Bulletin 31, 1974, Part 6, p. 28).

[148] The Executive Committee reported in 1972 that the "Proposal for Name Change" was "in response to a number of proposals from representatives of Canadian schools" (Bulletin 30, 1972, Part 5, pp. 39-40).

[149] The first recorded use of "substantive change" by the Commission was in its June 1976 meeting regarding a U.S. seminary wanting to open a site in Canada. The Commission voted that the school could "not claim an extension of its accreditation to cover the Canadian project," but considered it a "substantive change" requiring separate Commission approval (Commission Minutes, June 1976, p. 9).

[150] The first Commission Minutes to reflect that change were in January 1973, where the Commission "voted to continue accreditation of" and then listed that school's degrees (Commission Minutes, January 1973, pp. 2 ff.).

[151] This focus on non-traditional students may have stemmed from what other accreditors were doing in that area at that time. Just a few months later, the Commission did "a careful review of the 'Statement on Accrediting Non-Traditional Programs' prepared by FRACHE" and voted to adopt it in principle (Commission Minutes, June 1973, p. 5; see also Footnote 122).

achievement assumed by the standards" (see Footnote 144). The new General Institutional Standards continued to reflect ATS's focus on students by adding a new Standard of Employment Opportunities in Priority Setting (Bulletin 30, 1972, Part 3, p. 15). That standard required a "prudent use of resources and a humane and responsible attitude towards students" based on a "careful and continuing assessment of vocational opportunities related to various degree programs and the establishment of priorities in institutional resource allocation in the light of such studies." This new standard was the first use of "assessment" in the Commission's history but see Standard on Evaluation below.

The new Faculty Standard removed previous quantitative measures: minimum number of faculty and maximum teaching load. The former Standard on Administration and Controls was renamed Governance and Administration and doubled in length, with new requirements for board accountability and board membership. The Finances Standard added a new requirement on long-range budgeting ("over a five- to ten-year period"), reflecting the economic challenges facing ATS schools in the 1970s (see p. 52 above and p. 56 below).

For the first time, the 1972 Standards had a new Standard on Evaluation that required "regular and ongoing evaluation of students, faculty, administration, and governing board in reference to the institution's goals and objectives," as well as "evaluation of the curriculum and of the educational methodology," so that a school could "develop a flexible style in which changes in program flow naturally from the data produced by evaluative procedures" (Bulletin 30, 1972, Part 3, pp. 14-15). One longstanding standard that was deleted in 1972 was the one on General Tone and Quality, which had existed since 1936 and had been expanded in 1962. No explanation was given for its deletion. In the increasingly litigious decade of the 1970s, the Commission may have felt that it dealt with too many "intangibles which are difficult to measure" (Bulletin 25, 1962, p. 26; see also p. 44 above).

The ninth General Institutional Standard was on Nomenclature. From a focus only on the BD in the original 1936 Standards, the 1972 Standards now included standards for four categories of degrees, which were detailed in the nine Degree Program Standards that followed the General Institutional Standards. The four categories were these: (1) programs primarily related to ordination (MDiv, ThM, DMin); (2) programs primarily related to religious education (MRE, EdD); (3) programs primarily in academic theology (MA, MTS, ThD, PhD); and (4) programs primarily related to church music (MSM, MCM, SMD, DMA). Most of the nine Degree Program Standards were new, including a new 5-page Standard on the MDiv that for the first time had explicit requirements in three areas: Goals and Objectives, Program Content and Duration, and Resource Requirements. That three-fold pattern was repeated in all nine Degree Program Standards (Bulletin 30, 1972, Part 3, pp. 17-39).

The new DMin Standard in 1972, adapted from the "provisional guidelines" approved in 1970 (see p. 52 above), provided two options: an "in-sequence" DMin that "may be awarded as a first professional degree" requiring at least four years and addressing both MDiv and DMin objectives, and an "in-ministry" DMin that required at least one year beyond the MDiv. The former option was a recognition of professional doctorates that several ATS members had been offering since the early 1960s (Claremont in 1962 and University of Chicago Divinity School in 1964).[152] The new DMin would occupy much of the time and resources of the Commission for the next few biennia (see p. 58 below).[153]

[152] See ADME website, Chronology of Doctor of Ministry Education, and also Robert Duffett's 1986 PhD dissertation at the University of Iowa, The History and Development of the Doctor of Ministry Degree…

[153] A key reason why the DMin took so much of the Commission's time was the Commission's policy to "make a visit to every school that proposes a DMin program," of which there more than 40 (Commission Minutes, January 1972, p. 3).

The 1972 Standards, as noted before, represented the first wholesale redevelopment of the Standards in 36 years, since they were first adopted in 1936. A ten-member Committee on Revision[154] had been appointed in 1970 to guide the redevelopment project, aided by the appointment of "nine task forces that did preliminary drafting" (Bulletin 30, 1972, Part 6, pp. 22-23), involving somewhere between 75 and 100 different people (p. 25). In his 1972 report, the Executive Director listed three overall goals for the revision: "to provide for flexibility and innovation on the part of member schools, for rigor and evaluation of quality of education without resorting to counting books or earned degrees, and for the protection of the credibility of the theological education enterprise with its publics at a time of great flux and ferment" (p. 26).

Two lengthy sessions at the 1972 Biennial Meeting were devoted to discussing and adopting the revised Standards. Nearly 20 amendments were offered from the floor, of which 16 were approved (Bulletin 30, Part 6, pp. 17-20).[155] The membership also approved changes in the Procedures Related to Membership that required any school "seeking accreditation for one or more of its degree programs shall [also] meet the general institutional standards" (p. 20). The procedures on probation were expanded, including a time limit of at least 12 months but not more than 24 months, at which point the Commission could either "sustain or withdraw a school's accreditation," and if the latter, "the Commission may not restore accreditation until at least five years after the beginning of probation" (pp. 21-22). Those new procedures were about to be tested in the case of Concordia Seminary (see pp. 57-58 below).

The Executive Director alluded to the Concordia case indirectly in his 1972 report, which included a section on "Internal Tension in Schools." That section described how "the theological education enterprise is currently characterized by a greater amount of internal tension within schools between boards and faculties, administrators and faculty, faculty members and constituencies than at any time we have seen" (Bulletin 30, 1972, Part 6, p. 27).

Adding to that feeling of tension in 1972 was the final Report of the Resources Planning Commission that gave it first report in 1968 (see p. 52 above). Their six-page report focused on "The Nature of the Crisis," which they deemed was primarily financial, with "a recent study of all accredited theological schools [disclosing] that about half of them now are running deficits, with the number of schools and the size of deficits on the increase each year" (Bulletin 30, 1972, Part 6, p. 69). Their report indicated that the current financial crisis had been coming for some time but by the end of the 1960s "the financial crunch was in full force" due not only to inflation but also these five factors hitting ATS schools: "(1) too much plant, (2) [too many] programs, (3) too many faculty, (4) too few students, and (5) no new sources of income" (p. 70). Their warning on financial challenges may explain why the Preamble to the 1972 Standards used the word "resources" eight (!) different times, including the need for schools to "develop cooperative uses of resources" (Bulletin 30, 1972, Part 3, p. 9).

On the other hand, the financial "crisis" that the Resources Planning (RP) Commission predicted in the 1970s never quite happened. In fairness, the Carnegie Commission had also "erroneously forecast a depression in higher education" in 1972 (Newman, *Agency of Change*, p. 213). When the RP Commission began its work in 1968, its assumption was that ATS student enrollment would continue to decline

[154] The Committee on Revision was chaired by James Gustafson (1925-2021), one of the co-authors of the 1957 Niebuhr study, who, like Niebuhr, served as Professor of Christian Ethics at Yale Divinity School (Yale Divinity School website).

[155] The complicated nature of the approval process for the 1972 Standards may explain why the 1972 Biennial Meeting was the first to follow *Robert's Rules of Order* and to appoint a Committee on Reference and Counsel to handle amendments (Bulletin 30, 1972, Part 5, pp. 14-15).

through the 1970s, as it had in the late 1950s and early 1960s (see p. 42 above).[156] What the RP Commission was not expecting was ATS enrollment doubling between 1966 and 1980 (from 23,959 to 49,611). While some of that growth came from adding new ATS member schools (140 in 1966 vs. 194 in 1980), not all of it did. In fact, a study of the same 161 schools between 1970 and 1980 showed that their enrollment grew 52%, from 30,242 to 45, 838 (ATS Fact Book, 1980, p. 2).

The Resources Planning (RP) Commission offered two primary solutions to the coming financial crisis (which never quite came). First, the RP Commission promoted more ecumenical cooperative ventures, especially consortia. And while the number of consortia increased rapidly in the early 1970s (with 18 of them, involving 99 ATS schools, formed by 1972; see p. 52 above), many did not last and very few still exist. Second, the RP Commission promoted the Curriculum of the Seventies, produced by a seven-member task force of young scholars located primarily in university-based divinity schools. Their report (published in *Theological Education* in Spring 1968) called for a rather radical revolution in theological education, based on three different levels involving nuclei, centers, and clusters, mostly attached to universities. The difficulty was that the task force proposal required about 90 faculty per cluster, teaching about 775 students, mostly in small group settings, which was estimated to be 20-30% more expensive than existing ATS school structures (*Theological Education*, Summer 1968, p. 790). The Curriculum of the Seventies never took root. The added irony is that the RP Commission spent $131,154 (worth more than $1 million today) from the Rockefeller Sealantic Fund to propose solutions that were not financially viable to a financial crisis that never quite happened (though see also Bulletin 38, 1988, Part 6, p. 40).[157]

Still, in the early 1970s, the predictions were dire for ATS schools. In its 1972 report, the Commission on Accrediting acknowledged that "the Association was requesting of it decisive leadership," including "a need for more sophisticated methods of evaluating the quality and effectiveness of seminaries…" with schools "undergoing almost continuous change in curriculum, patterns of governance, and experiments in contextual education" (Bulletin 30, 1972, Part 6, p. 63). The Commission responded through an incredible outpouring of work. In addition to proposing radically new Standards in only two years, the Commission visited 23 schools, accredited 12 new schools, offered two in-service training sessions for team chairs,[158] and approved a policy whereby a school might be accredited "by virtue of affiliation with" other schools, especially in a consortial arrangement (Bulletin 30, 1972, Part 6, pp. 63-67). A major motivation for the new training sessions stemmed from the last paragraph of the new Preamble to the 1972 Standards: "The formal character of the standards requires that those who shall use them for purposes of evaluation of degree programs be carefully and sensitively trained in how to apply them in order to avoid unfairness and idiosyncrasies in judgments" (Bulletin 30, 1972, Part 3, p. 9). The Commission clearly understood, especially during the challenging 1970s, that accreditation relied not only on sound Standards but also on sound judgments by those interpreting those Standards.

One of the most challenging episodes in ATS Commission history was also announced during the Commission's 1972 report: "Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, placed on probation from June 2, 1972, to

[156] The reports from the Resources Planning Commission were published in 1968 in four different issues of the ATS journal, *Theological Education*. The Spring 1968 issue reported on the Curriculum for the Seventies. The Summer 1968 issue reported on Redeployment of Resources. The Summer 1968 issue had two supplements: (I) Cooperative Structures and (II) Economics and Organization of Theological Education. The second supplement was the technical study by Warren Deem that predicted falling enrollments in the 1970s (Supplement II, pp. 5-6). See also Endnote 8.

[157] The Sealantic Fund grant is reported in the Summer 1968 issue of *Theological Education* (p. 754).

[158] The first training session in December 1970 involved resource leaders from two regional accreditors, Middle States and North Central. That session resulted in several changes to ATS visits, including longer visits, larger teams, and the use of "readiness visits" by the team chair six weeks before the team visit (Bulletin 30, 1972, Part 5, pp. 65-66).

June 1, 1974" (Bulletin 30, Part 5, p. 67). Between January 1972 and June 1974, the situation at Concordia would occupy significant portions of all six Commission meetings.[159] In his book, *Piety and Pluralism*, Miller devoted twelve pages to "The Case of Concordia: The Missouri Synod Controversy" (pp. 209-220), to which the reader is referred for details. Ziegler, ATS Executive Director at the time, devoted three pages to it in his *ATS Through Two Decades* (pp. 149-151).

According to Ziegler, the Concordia case, which resulted in nine (!) notations[160] and two back-to-back probations, involved charges of denominational overreach, abuses of academic freedom, claims of interference in doctrinal issues, threats of litigation, an appeal to the ATS Board of Review, and bitter feelings by some toward the Commission for not withdrawing Concordia's accreditation (see p. 60 below). The situation at Concordia, the largest Lutheran seminary in the world at that time, involved a theologically conservative denominational president involving himself in the internal affairs of the more theologically liberal seminary, especially its board, president, and faculty. For that, the Commission put Concordia on probation, for the first time, in June 1972.

While some progress was made, things came to a head when the president was suspended, for the second time, in the spring of 1974. The second suspension resulted in a massive student walkout, accompanied by a supportive walkout by 45 faculty, who together soon formed a new seminary: Seminex—the Seminary in Exile (which lasted until 1987 as Christ Seminary—Seminex). All of that also caused the Commission to put Concordia on probation, for a second time in a row. It was a difficult time for the Commission, with some believing they did too little and some that they did too much. Regardless, the Concordia case occupied more time for the Commission than any other school situation in its history, including the Asbury suspension in 1952 (see p. 33 above), the Lawson Affair in 1960 (see p. 44 above), and three Southern Baptist seminaries in the 1990s, though those three did take considerable time (see pp. 77, 79, 84, and 86 below).

During that same biennium (1972-1974), the Commission also addressed numerous other issues. One was a rewriting of the Notations to conform to the new 1972 Standards. A draft prepared for the June 1973 Commission meeting showed 34 notations in ten categories, corresponding primarily to the nine new General Institutional Standards (Commission Minutes, June 1973, addendum; see p. 60 below). The January 1974 Commission meeting, the first held in the new ATS offices[161] in Vandalia (OH), addressed growing concerns over the rapid increase in DMin programs. The Commission's discussion "centered on the wide variation evident in interpreting the DMin Standard" and "reflected increasing concern about the credibility of the degree and the accreditation process itself" (Minutes, January 1974, p. 4). The Commission's concern was so great it voted to impose a moratorium on all new DMin programs to permit full attention to the existing DMin programs, including "an inspection or reinspection visit to all DMin programs prior to April 1, 1975" (p. 4).[162] That was the first and only recorded instance of a Commission "moratorium," which lasted more than a year and required a letter to all member schools informing them of their decision (letter appended to January 1974 Commission Minutes).

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[159] In the middle of that period in January 1973, Jesse Ziegler announced that Marvin Taylor would assume the ATS staff role to work with the Commission on Accrediting, which had been handled by David Schuller since 1969 (see Footnote 126 and Commission Minutes, January 1973, p. 11). Taylor (1921-1986) had been the academic dean at Saint Paul School of Theology (KS) and was hired in 1970 as an ATS Associate Director. He retired from ATS in 1984 (Marvin Taylor obituary from *NY Times*, June 7, 1986, p. 49).

[160] The nine notations included four in the first probation and five in the second (Commission Minutes, June 1974, pp. 2-5).

[161] The ATS move from Dayton to Vandalia, 10 miles north, is described under the 1974 Biennial Meeting (see p. 59 below).

[162] At that same meeting, the Commission voted to "alter ATS procedures (to bring our practices parallel to the regionals) to reevaluate newly accredited schools after five years and thereafter each ten years" (Commission Minutes, January 1974, p. 8).

The June 1974 Commission meeting also approved a new complaint policy,[163] partly in response to concerns raised by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW, predecessor to the U.S. Department of Education) over "an obligation to the various publics which [ATS] serves" (Commission Minutes, June 1974, p. 12). The Commission voted to study changes to its procedures on "publishing adverse accrediting actions and the right to a hearing" (Minutes, p. 13), also in response to HEW Proposed Guidelines for Institutional Listing. In addition, the Commission reviewed an initial draft of "A Guide to Institutional Self-Study," prepared by Marvin Taylor (see Minutes, p. 15, and Footnote 159).

The 1974 Biennial Meeting broke new ground by electing the first ever women to the Commission on Accrediting (Bulletin 31, Part 2, pp. 3-4): Maria Grossman, librarian at Harvard University, and Sara Little, Professor of Christian Education at Union (VA). Grossman was one of three public members, a new category for the Commission, required by recent guidelines from the U.S. Office of Institutional Eligibility and Accreditation (see Commission Minutes, January 1973, p. 10).[164] That change involved a revision in the 1972 Constitution to expand the number of Commissioners from nine to twelve: nine ATS school members elected by the membership (as before) and three public members elected by the membership (Bulletin 31, 1974, Part 6, pp. 24-25).

The 1974 meeting also "voted to establish a Committee on Women in Theological Education," the first in ATS history, as well as the hiring of an ATS staff person to work with that committee, pending funding (Bulletin 31, Part 6, p. 31; see also p. 91 below). Those were both recommendations of the Task Force on Women in Theological Education that had been appointed by the Executive Committee after the 1972 Biennial Meeting (Part 6, pp. 38 and 120). That new committee and a new staff person were additions to the previously established Committee on the Black Religious Experience appointed in 1968 (see p. 53 above), which had an ATS staff liaison, and the new Task Force on Hispanic/American Concerns, with staff representation (Part 6, p. 50). The Executive Director's 1974 report also described a "change in the nature of theological students [with] almost everyone reporting a new seriousness of purpose, a new kind of commitment to hard study, a deeper belief in the church and in the ministry, [and] oftentimes a new leaning toward an evangelical stance," though "it is not yet clear what the cessation of the Vietnam war will be on seminary enrollment" (Bulletin 31, 1974, Part 6, p. 39).[165]

The Executive Committee reported in 1974 that the ATS staff had redeployed David Schuller from accrediting to directing the new Readiness for Ministry project (see Footnote 159). The Study of Readiness for Ministry was funded in 1972 by a $480,000 grant from Lilly Endowment Inc., worth more than $3.5 million today, one of the largest gifts to date to ATS (Executive Committee Minutes, December 1972, p. 2). At that same Executive Committee meeting in December 1972, approval was given to purchase property at 42 East National Road, Vandalia (OH) for new ATS office headquarters. Bulletin 31 included a detailed report on "New Association Headquarters" (1974, Part 6, pp. 64-70), complete with floor plan for the two-story, historic home. It was chosen for its proximity to Dayton International Airport, as well as being near the center of the ATS membership (see Footnote 100). The purchase and renovation were funded by the Lilly Endowment at a cost of $80,000 (worth nearly $600,000 today).

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[163] The new complaint policy was printed in the 1974 Procedures Related to Membership, section V (Bulletin 31, 1974, Part 3, p. 8).

[164] The ATS Executive Committee also welcomed its first three new public members, one of whom was Warren Deem, a financial consultant who was part of the Resources Planning Commission authorized by ATS in 1966 (see Footnote 156 and p. 52 above).

[165] Until 1967, all U.S. males in graduate school were deferred from military service. With the Military Selective Service Act of 1967, graduate students were no longer exempt, except those in seminary. The draft was terminated in 1972 (Remembering Conscription in the United States).

The Commission on Accrediting reported in 1974 that it had accredited 11 new schools and reevaluated 21 others, including participating in 15 joint visits. The Commission's biggest challenge that biennium had been dealing with the rapid increase in DMin programs, which had grown from 688 students in 1971 to 2,458 in 1973 (Bulletin 31, 1974, Part 6, p. 82). Commissioners and ATS staff had visited 40 of the 44 schools offering the DMin. As noted earlier (see pp. 57-58 above), the Concordia case had occupied a significant amount of the Commission's time since 1972. In fact, the 1974 Biennial Meeting devoted seven (!) full pages to debating a series of resolutions from the floor on Concordia, that occurred during a specially called evening session (Bulletin 31, 1974, Part 6, pp. 19-22 and 25-27). To reinforce the seriousness of this situation, the membership voted: "What has happened at Concordia, St. Louis, [has] weakened theological education in North America. This Association has been damaged" (Part 6, p. 22).

The Commission also announced at the 1974 Biennial Meeting a new set of Notations to correspond to the new Standards adopted in 1972 (Bulletin 31, 1974, Part 6, pp. 84-85). The new notations totaled 29, but that number would soon be dwarfed by an additional 39 notations just on the DMin (Bulletin 32, 1976, Part 6, pp. 73-76). To help address the Commission's ever-growing workload, at its January 1975 meeting, the Commission adopted its first ever Operating Manual (Commission Minutes, January 1975, pp. 1 and 9). The Commission also voted then to limit to two years the time that a "preaccredited" school had to complete its initial self-study (Minutes, p. 5).[166] The same January 1975 Commission meeting heard a report from the Executive Director on the establishment of a new regulatory agency for U.S. accreditors, COPA (the Council on Postsecondary Accrediting). The Director also announced that the ATS Commission chair had been elected to serve on the new COPA board (Commission Minutes, January 1975, p. 8).[167]

The January 1975 Commission meeting approved new "Reporting Procedures" for use by all evaluation teams as they prepared their reports. The new procedures required all team reports to include a section on degree program goals and objectives (Minutes, p. 8). The June 1975 Commission meeting recorded a number of "Show Cause" orders regarding why preliminary accreditation should not be withdrawn, the first recorded use—at least to that extent—of "Show Cause." That same meeting ended with a discussion on "equity" in making accreditation decisions, especially regarding "Show Cause" orders (Commission Minutes, June 1975, p. 14). That appears to be the first time the Commission formally reviewed its accreditation decisions at the end of a meeting to ensure "consistency and fairness" for all schools involved.[168]

The 1976 Biennial Meeting was back in Boston for the third and final time (see Appendix A). Part 5 of the 1976 Bulletin 32 included four new ATS policies: ATS Guidelines for Retrenchment, Evaluation of Faculty and Administrators, Ethical Guidelines for Seminaries, and Goals and Guidelines for Women.[169] The first

[166] The Commission had voted in December 1966 to follow the model of the regional accrediting agencies and permit new schools to receive "provisional accreditation," also called "preaccreditation" (Commission Minutes, December 1966, p. 8). This practice was different from granting "provisional accreditation" to *new degrees* (see Footnote 170), which also followed the regionals that required a program to have graduates before "full" accreditation (Newman, *Agency of Change*, p. 202).

[167] In his *ATS Through Two Decades* (pp. 10-11), Ziegler expressed concerns over the new COPA agency, including the "guerrilla war" that COPA carried on with the U.S. Office of Education's Division of Eligibility and Agency Evaluation. Since the ATS Commission was recognized by both, Ziegler felt this put ATS in an awkward position and on less friendly terms with COPA than it had been with NCA (see Footnote 122).

[168] The current Board of Commissioners has a policy on "Consistent and Fair Decisions" (Policies and Procedures, VI.A.1) that has been part of Commission policies for decades, though updated in the 2020 revision.

[169] These four new policies were in addition to policies adopted by ATS in 1960 (see p. 43 above), including one on academic freedom that was updated in 1976 (Bulletin 32, Part 6, pp. 126-134).

policy dealt with financial exigency, the second with accountability for faculty and administrators while preserving academic freedom. The third policy included attention to grievances, minorities, women, and anti-Semitism (recall that the Munich Massacre occurred in the previous biennium at the 1972 Olympics). The fourth new policy on women came from the Committee on Women in Theological Education appointed at the 1974 Biennial Meeting. It was their attempt to address issues of "affirmative action" relating to Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act in the U.S. and Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972. Recognizing the doctrinal diversity on the issue of women in church leadership, the policy was crafted as a series of questions. Interestingly, the Executive Committee proposed, and the membership approved, a resolution at the same meeting to "establish a Committee on Government Relations" (Bulletin 32, 1976, Part 6, pp. 28-29 and 50-51). The Committee disbanded in 1978 and deferred to the Executive Committee to handle that area (Bulletin 33, 1978, Part 6, pp. 89-90).

At the 1976 Biennial Meeting and at the request of the Commission on Accrediting, the membership "voted to establish a task force to function during the biennium [1976-1978] to examine existing DMin programs, both in-sequence and in-ministry, in order to determine if the two types are sufficiently similar to warrant the granting of the same degree and to use the same accrediting standards" (Bulletin 32, Part 6, p. 32). The membership also approved some modest changes in the DMin Standard approved in 1972 (Bulletin 32, 1976, Part 6, pp. 32 and 117-121). The Commission reported two challenges in accomplishing its work.

The Commission's first challenge was the decision in 1972 to accredit not only each institution but also each degree program offered. Adding to that was the Commission's decision to require at least a "partial" visit to review each new degree.[170] The second challenge had been "the rapid expansion of the DMin degree, which is now found in more than seventy percent of accredited institutions" (Bulletin 32, Part 6, p. 68). In light of that second challenge, the Commission had announced in January 1974 a "moratorium on DMin accrediting decisions [which] came to a close in June 1975" (Bulletin 32, Part 6, p. 68; see also p. 58 above). To respond to the wide variances among the new DMin programs, in 1976 the Commission established 39 (!) notations just for the DMin (Bulletin 32, Part 6, pp. 73-76).

A key change at the 1976 Biennial Meeting was a proposal by the Executive Director to expand the goals of the Association, which "from its beginning and throughout its history [has had] as its central purpose… to promote the improvement of theological education" (Bulletin 32, 1976, Part 6, p. 37). The director announced that the long-range planning committee had adopted, in support of that central purpose, four primary objectives regarding ATS and theological education: providing a forum, serving as an advocate, providing information, and enabling its binational identity (Bulletin 32, Part 6, pp. 150-159; see also p. 63 below).

One of the ways in which ATS began fulfilling those new objectives was to host conferences for seminary presidents and other key seminary leaders, beginning in 1975. These "management seminars" were primarily the brainchild of Warren Deem, a skilled business leader and the first public member of the Executive Committee, appointed in 1974 (see Footnotes 156 and 164). Miller, in his *Piety and Plurality* (pp. 54-57), devotes an entire section to "The Influence of Warren Deem" on ATS (see p.67 below).

[170] After 1972, when the Commission began accrediting both individual degrees and entire institutions, the Commission used the terminology of granting "preliminary" approval to *all new degrees* (contrast Footnote 166). The first recorded instance of that is in the January 1973 Commission Minutes regarding new DMin programs (Minutes, p. 5). Starting in June 1981, the Commission changed terms to "accredit" institutions and "approve" degrees, though "preliminary" approval of new degrees remained until 2010 (see p. 110 below).

The 1976 Biennial Meeting heard a final report on the Readiness for Ministry Project (Bulletin 32, 1976, Part 6, pp. 97-100), funded in 1972 by the Lilly Endowment for $480,000, worth $3.5 million today (see p. 59 above). This project, led by David Schuller of ATS (Footnote 126), surveyed some 7,000 people (clergy, laity, faculty, and seminarians) from 47 denominations in the United States and Canada. The researchers[171] identified 445 items, which were winnowed down to 64 key characteristics deemed most effective for ministry and developed into an assessment tool for graduating seminarians. It was a monumental amount of research. In his *Piety and Plurality*, Miller called it "the most ambitious attempt to improve the efficiency of theological schools in the 1970s" (p. 57). Miller added, however, that "Jesse Ziegler's dream that it might become the principal element in accreditation, in retrospect, seemed more than a step too far" (p. 58). Laudable as it was, this assessment was never used by ATS schools to the extent hoped. Only 70 schools used it in 1981 and that dropped to 49 by 1990 (Pacala, *The Role of ATS in Theological Education*, p. 128). A key reason was that it "took considerable time to administer and to interpret" (Miller, *Piety and Plurality*, p. 58). It was later simplified in 1988-1990 as Profiles of Ministry, but its decreasing use over the years led to its eventual retirement in 2018, after nearly 40 years.

Between June 1976 and June 1978, the Commission met four times, as was its usual practice. Among the variety of issues addressed were these: to remind schools that only ATS-approved graduate degrees could be offered, based on a school's request for approval of an Associate degree (Commission Minutes, January 1977, p. 6); to clarify for schools that self-studies for joint visits still had to address ATS Standards (June 1977, p. 5); to draft a policy on extension education, especially in light of sites in "foreign countries" (June 1977, pp. 10-11); to adopt new guidelines for visiting teams (June 1977, p. 11); and to implement a new work model whereby the Commission split into three "work" groups at its meetings to review reports and make preliminary recommendations before its plenary sessions (June 1977, p. 11). One of the more interesting actions of the Commission in that biennium was to "place [name of seminary] on probation because the general tone of the school impairs capacity to provide significant theological education and ministerial training." The Commission voted that this school's probation would be removed only if "the seminary shall demonstrate that the atmosphere of turmoil and polarization no longer adversely affects the educational enterprise" (Commission Minutes, June 1978, pp. 4-5). The 1970s were challenging times in theological education.

Before turning to the 1978 Biennial Meeting, it is worth noting a first for ATS at the 1976 Biennial Meeting. That was the first time that an evangelical was elected ATS president. Jesse Ziegler, ATS Executive Director at the time, wrote in his *ATS Through Two Decades* in a section on Evangelicalism: "What would have seemed impossible in the mid-1950s became reality in 1976 when David Hubbard, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, was elected president of ATS and filled its highest elective office for a biennium with distinction" (p. 8). For its first 26 years ATS had only Mainline Protestant members; Fuller was only the third Evangelical school admitted to ATS in 1950, after Calvin in 1944 and Asbury in 1946 (see Footnote 109). By 1960, only 12 (10%) of the 126 ATS members were evangelical, including all six Southern Baptist seminaries.[172] The 1970s began with 19 evangelical members (10% of 182 members) and ended in 1980 with 39 (20% of 197 members), doubling in number and percentage. By 2000, more than 70 (30% of the 243 members) were evangelical. By 2010, nearly 90 (35% of 261 schools) were. By 2020, 120 (44% of the 272 member schools) were classified as evangelical.

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[171] Dan Aleshire, former ATS Executive Director (1999-2017), was one of the researchers for this project, which was carried out by the Search Institute of Minneapolis where he worked from 1975 to 1978. The results of this massive project were published in 1980 in a 582-page book, *Ministry in America: A Report and Analysis, Based on an In-Depth Survey of 47 Denominations in the United States and Canada, with Interpretation by 18 Experts* (Harper & Row).

[172] As noted in Footnote 109, Southern Baptist seminaries were considered more Mainline until around 1960, after the so-called 1958 Lexington Road Massacre at Southern Baptist Seminary described earlier (see p. 42 above).

In 1978 the first woman was elected as Commission chair, Sarah Little of Union (VA).[173] Little had been one of the first two women elected to the Commission in 1974 (see p. 59 above).[174] The 1978 meeting also saw the first appointment of a Committee on Underrepresented Constituencies, joining the Committees on Black Religious Experience,[175] on Hispanic/American Concerns, and on Women in Theological Education (see Footnote 244). The 1978 Biennial Meeting approved a new Standard on Responsiveness to Minority and Women's Concerns (Bulletin 33, 1978, Part 3, p. 16), proposed by the Committee on Women in Theological Education (Part 6, pp. 24-25). This new standard mostly referred to two ATS policies: Ethical Guidelines for Seminaries, and Goals and Guidelines for Women in Theological Schools (Part 5, pp. 25-30), both approved in 1976 (see p. 60 above). The new standard required schools to "give evidence of appropriate sensitivity to the issues identified in these statements" (Part 3, p. 16).

The Commission reported in 1978 that the previous biennium workload had been "unusually heavy," due to two factors: (1) the second round of decennial visits began in 1976-1977, and (2) more seminaries were seeking regional accreditation, which required more frequent and more complicated joint visits (Bulletin 33, 1978, Part 6, p. 65). Pacala noted that "by 1980, 78% of ATS accredited schools were also regionally accredited" (*The Role of ATS in Theological Education*, p. 99). The Commission did 50 visits in 1976-1978, "double the volume of work ever done before in ATS history," with 49 visits scheduled the next biennium (Bulletin 33, 1978, Part 6, p. 65). Another factor was the "DMin explosion from seven programs to more than seventy in only five years" (Part 6, pp. 65-66).

Regarding the DMin, the DMin task force appointed in 1976 gave a 20-page report in 1978 (Part 6, pp. 91-112). They had been charged with reviewing the two types of DMin programs: in-sequence and in-ministry (see p. 55 above). They were asked to investigate whether those two types required two different sets of DMin standards, which the task force concluded did not. They did note that the in-ministry type was booming in enrollment, from 201 in 1969 to 4,491 in 1977, while the in-sequence type had declined from 499 to 448 and was now being offered by only two schools (Bulletin 33, 1978, Part 6, p. 99 and p. 106). Soon, the in-sequence DMin would disappear completely (see p.78 below). The DMin task force's report also included a very helpful history of the DMin degree (Part 6, pp. 100-106).

The 1978 Biennial Meeting would be Jesse Ziegler's last full meeting as Executive Director, retiring in 1980 during that Biennial Meeting. He was first hired as Associate Director in 1959 and became ATS's second Executive Director after Charles Taylor retired in 1966 (see Footnotes 126 and 127). Bulletin 33 in 1978 announced a search for a new Executive Director (Part 6, pp. 25-26). In his 1978 report, Ziegler described how during the past biennium ATS had completed its own "self-study" for continued recognition by the U.S. Office of Education (part of HEW) and by the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (Bulletin 33, 1978, Part 6, p. 29; see also Footnote 122). Later in his Executive Director report, Ziegler noted ATS's "puzzling relationship" with COPA and its "unduly hostile attitudes toward" the HEW Office of Education (Bulletin 33, Part 6, p. 34; see also Footnote 167).

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[173] Little was also the first woman to be awarded ATS's Distinguished Service Award in 1994 (see Endnote 9) and was featured in Biola's Database: Christian Educators of the 20th Century (see Footnote 41). ATS's first woman president in 1986 was Barbara Brown Zikmund, then academic dean at Pacific School of Religion and later president of Hartford Seminary. She wrote *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* (Westminster Press, 1998). She, too, received the Distinguished Service Award in 2004 (Endnote 9).

[174] The other woman elected to the Commission in 1974 was Maria Grossman of Harvard, a public member. In 1978, the membership voted to reduce the terms of public members from six years to two years, though they could be re-elected (Bulletin 33, 1978, Part 6, p. 19).

[175] In their 1978 report, the Committee on the Black Religious Experience expressed frustration that "severe restriction in the ATS budget for programs and activities" had led to not replacing the ATS staff person working with that committee (Bulletin 33, 1978, Part 6, p. 79).

At the 1978 meeting the Executive Committee also reported that both HEW and COPA requested all accrediting agencies to require their member schools to be "state-chartered institutions" (Part 6, pp. 50-51). The Executive Committee announced that it would not recommend that change "in light of the currently aggressive stance of a number of states in requiring state inspections and regulation and the infringement by the states on the control of education for ministers included in such action" (Part 6, p. 50).[176]

The 1978 Bulletin included a new Part 8, Long-Range Plan, the first ever for ATS (Bulletin 33, 1978, Part 8). The 1978 plan stated that "ATS will continue to operate under its basic charter, spelling out its primary purpose as 'to promote the improvement of theological education' [and that] the principal method of encouraging improvement is accreditation" (Part 8, p. 5). The plan also recommended that "given the centrality of accreditation to the purpose of ATS, a task force is created to review the whole enterprise of ATS accreditation in the 1978-80 biennium," including a review of the "composition and workload of the Commission on Accrediting" (Part 8, p. 9).

Toward that end, the January 1979 meeting of the Commission adopted a new "Manual for the Commission on Accrediting" that helped it to work more efficiently and effectively (Commission Minutes, January 1979, p. 1). It replaced the 1975 Commission Manual (see p. 60 above). A new policy the Commission adopted at that meeting was to require schools to share any evaluation team report with its faculty and trustees (Minutes, January 1979, p. 9). At its June 1979 meeting, the Commission toughened its stance on delinquent school reports by adopting a policy to place a school on probation if a required report on a Commission concern was not submitted (Commission Minutes, June 1979, p. 8). At that meeting, the Commission authorized a training program for team visitors that included three regional meetings of 1-2 days (Minutes, June 1979, p. 10; see also Footnote 158).

As the 1970s drew to a close, ATS was poised to enter a new decade with new leadership, a new vision, and a new plan to achieve its mission to improve theological education.

[176] The Executive Committee also announced in its 1978 report that Hebrew Union had withdrawn from ATS membership, ATS's only Jewish member (see Footnote 140) and that Unification Theological Seminary had applied, which the Executive Committee took "under advisement" (Bulletin 33, 1978, Part 6, p. 57; see also p. 74 below). One other matter the Committee noted was that the 1956 Articles of Incorporation had been updated to reflect incorporation within the State of Ohio, not New York (see Footnote 100).

Chapter 6. Rethinking the Standards (1980-1991)

The 1980s started in stark contrast to the 1970s. While the 1970s began with student unrest and warnings of enrollment declines, the 1980s began with this article in the *Washington Post*: Surge in Seminary Enrollments Paced by an Influx of Women. The reporter, Marjorie Hyer, noted the "record numbers of Protestants and Roman Catholics" enrolling in seminaries, with "an all-time high of 49,611" in ATS schools in the fall of 1980, a "63 percent increase in enrollment over the past decade." She further noted that "10,830 women students made up nearly 22 percent of the total enrollment, a threefold increase during the decade."

Another key factor in the surge, according to the reporter's interview with Marvin Taylor at ATS, was "the recent trend among many [ATS schools] to schedule night classes for employed persons," quite a change from the ATS perspective in the 1960s. As noted earlier (see p. 46 above), in 1962 ATS adopted a new Standard on Student Life and Work that began: "Students must enter profoundly into the [residential] life of the school if they are to benefit significantly from its undertakings." In 1962, the Commission even adopted a statement for all schools that discouraged students from working more than 20 hours per week "to assure that adequate and uninterrupted time is available to all students for effective attention to the academic enterprises of theological education."[177] The ATS student body was changing, and ATS would respond in diverse ways to those changes in the 1980s.

Some of the more significant changes in the Standards were approved at the 1980 Biennial Meeting in Denver. Chief among those changes were numerous revisions to multiple standards that required ATS schools to "give due attention to" minority and women's concerns and to "adequate representation of women and persons of differing racial, cultural, or linguistic identity" (see Bulletin 34, 1980, Part 6, pp. 70-77).[178] The membership also approved the first "Criteria for Extension/Satellite Credit Offerings and Degree Programs" (pp. 78-82), which were referenced in a new Standard IX on Educational Programs Conducted Off-Campus (Bulletin 34, 1980, Part 3, p. 21). The concept of extension education had been raised as early as 1940, but it referred then to on-campus, non-credit offerings for lay people (see p. 24 above). The new standard and criteria in 1980 were the first to allow off-campus offerings.

In addition to approving new and revised Standards, the membership in 1980 also approved significant changes to accrediting procedures (summarized in Bulletin 34, 1980, Part 6, pp. 60-69). The Task Force on Accrediting Procedures, appointed in 1978,[179] brought 12 recommended changes (Bulletin 34, 1980, Part 6, p. 60). The 12 recommendations focused on ATS maintaining both institutional and programmatic accreditation, extending Commission meetings from two days to three days, keeping Commissioners on evaluation teams, training for visitors, keeping visits at four days (Sunday evening through Wednesday noon), and not allowing schools to send representatives to Commission meetings. The task force also recommended keeping the practice of not having the evaluation team share its recommendations with

[177] The Commission added a notation in 1958: "In this school, there is a serious diversion of student attention from academic to remunerative pursuits" (Bulletin 23, 1958, p. 28). That notation lasted until 1996. By 1980 the "great age of the residential seminary" (Miller, *Piety and Profession*, p. 480) had begun to diminish (see Endnote 11 for rise of extension education).

[178] The membership also approved a recommendation in 1980 from the Executive Committee not to have any future ATS Biennial Meetings in any state that had not ratified the Equal Rights Amendment (Bulletin 34, 1980, Part 6, p. 19). However, the 1986 Biennial Meeting was in Kansas City, and Missouri was one of 15 states that did not ratify the ERA.

[179] The Task Force included two public members from COPA, the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (Bulletin 34, 1980, Part 6, p.60). For discussions on COPA, see pp. 60, 63, and 64 above, as well as Footnotes 122 and 167.

the school, but in the interest of fairness, did recommend that ATS staff send the school the team recommendations *after* the visit to give the school time to respond *before* the Commission met to take final actions on that visit.[180] All 12 recommendations were approved by the membership, who also approved an amendment to the ATS Constitution defining a third category of membership (candidate for accreditation) in addition to accredited and associate members (Bulletin 34, 1980, Part 6, p. 83).

One of the more significant changes to the ATS Constitution in 1980 was to give back to the Commission the authority to admit new accredited members. The Commission had that authority when it was birthed in 1934, but in 1964 the membership approved a change in the Constitution that gave the Commission the authority only to recommend new accredited members to the membership and gave only to the membership the authority to grant accredited member status (see p. 47 above). The Task Force on Accrediting Procedures[181] recommended that the Commission have full and final authority to add accredited members, though all applicants for associate membership still needed two-thirds approval by the membership (Bulletin 34, 1980, Part 6, pp. 83-84). The Task Force recommendation was approved by the members and incorporated into Article IV. 2(a) of the Constitution (Bulletin 34, 1980, Part 1, p. 4).

The 1980 Biennial Meeting included the "introduction and installation of the new Executive Director" (Bulletin 34, 1980, Part 6, p. 7). Leon Pacala had been chosen to replace the retiring Jesse Ziegler, who had served in that role since 1966. Pacala (1926-2009) was an alumnus and president of Colgate Rochester Divinity School, with a PhD in philosophy from Yale. He served as ATS Executive Director until his retirement in 1991. Miller, in *Piety and Plurality* (p. 252) states that Pacala "began his term of office by appointing a Transition Committee to set priorities for his administration." They set six, including reviewing and updating the Standards, supporting faculty research and scholarship, identifying and deliberating basic issues confronting theological education, enabling executive leadership to acquire training, promoting financial development efforts, and considering the issues facing theological libraries (Pacala, *The Role of ATS in Theological Education*, p. 19). It was no accident that the 1980 Biennial Meeting, Pacala's first as Executive Director, met jointly with the American Theological Library Association in Denver.[182] All six of those priorities would define Pacala's tenure at ATS.[183]

Between the 1980 and 1982 Biennial Meetings, the Commission on Accrediting addressed a number of issues reflecting the recently revised Standards and an increasingly diverse ATS membership. It began by electing its first African American chair, Shelby Rooks, then president of Chicago Theological Seminary (Commission Minutes, January 1981, p. 1). At that meeting, the Commission issued its first "show cause notification" to a school for violating the 10%/20% rule[184] regarding non-college graduates" (Minutes,

[180] At the very next Biennial Meeting in 1982, the Commission reported that some schools "were greatly disturbed because the final accrediting actions by the Commission were substantially different from recommendations" made by the team (Bulletin 35, 1982, Part 6, pp. 84-85). The Commission reminded the members that it had to look at larger issues than did individual teams.

[181] It seems likely that the two public members from COPA on that Task Force suggested that recommendation, since all other accrediting agencies gave that authority to their commissions on accrediting, not to their membership (see Footnote 179).

[182] The Denver Biennial in 1980 was the first one attended by the author, who was serving then as a theological librarian.

[183] The 1980 Biennial Meeting also approved a recommendation of the Executive Committee to explore relocating the ATS office from Vandalia (OH), with preliminary consideration given to Washington DC, Kansas City, Chicago, Atlanta, and St. Louis (Bulletin 34, 1980, Part 6, p. 57). Interestingly, all of those locations (except Washington DC) were in states that had not ratified the Equal Rights Amendment (see Footnote 178), as 15 of the 50 U.S. states did not, preventing its adoption (ERA FAQ, Q #4, congress.gov). The 1982 Biennial Meeting announced that all relocation plans were on hold (Bulletin 35, 1982, Part 6, pp. 60 and 74).

[184] The "10%/20% rule" referred to Standard 1 on Students (section A.3.a) that limited to 10% the number of non-college graduates in professional degrees or certificates, as long as the number of all such students did not exceed 20% of the school's total enrollment (Bulletin 34, 1980, Part 3, p. 15).

January 1981, p. 5). In keeping with the newly approved revisions to the Standards that addressed women's and minority concerns (see p. 65 above), the Commission established three new notations on diversity (Commission Minutes, January 1981, p. 10). Six months later, the Commission adopted a mostly revised set of notations (Minutes, June 1981, pp. 17-19) that totaled 36 in 14 different categories, corresponding mostly to the Standards revised in 1980. In January 1982, the Commission expanded them again, adding 11 more, bringing the total to 47 notations, including the first ones on institutional mission and on responsiveness to minority and women's concerns (Minutes, January 1982, pp. 11-12).

At its June 1981 meeting (Minutes, p. 16), the Commission approved a new policy on ecclesiastical degrees offered by Roman Catholic seminaries. The policy basically stated that such degrees were outside ATS jurisdiction, but that the Commission would review them for accreditation—under the ATS Standards—if asked by the school. Any Roman Catholic school offering ecclesiastical degrees had to clearly indicate in its publications whether or not those degrees were accredited by ATS. At that same June 1981 meeting (Minutes, p. 11), the Commission approved an experimental policy to allow clergy on ATS evaluation teams, with the school's permission/request.[185] Also at that meeting, the Commission adopted its first formal evaluation of visiting teams: one form for the school being visited to complete and one form for the team chair to complete (Commission Minutes, June 1981, pp. 13-15). In January 1982, the Commission adopted a new policy that required schools to notify the Commission if it added new "tracks" to an already approved DMin degree (Commission Minutes, January 1982, pp. 12-13).

The 1982 Biennial Meeting began with the new Executive Director, Leon Pacala, naming his first two years (1980-1982) "a biennium of transition… a time of new beginnings, new understandings, renewed commitments, and clarified purposes and priorities of the Association" (Bulletin 35, 1982, Part 6, pp. 31 and 39).[186] Dr. Jackson Carroll[187] had written a "Transitional Study" (*Theological Education*, Autumn 1981) that reminded the membership of ATS's central purposes, which Pacala reaffirmed: "accreditation remains the primary function" (Bulletin 35, Part 6, p. 32). Pacala's executive report listed the priorities that would guide his tenure (summarized on p. 66 above). He thanked Lilly Endowment Inc. for its continued support of theological education, including three new grants that totaled nearly $2.5 million, worth more than $8 million today.

One of those three Lilly grants had been given to establish the Program for Theological Education Management. Their first report was published in Bulletin 35 in 1982 (Part 6, pp. 116-118). One of the first things they did was establish the Institute for Theological Education Management, later renamed the Warren Deem Institute in honor of ATS's first public member on the Executive Committee, a business consultant noted for promoting better management among ATS schools (see p. 61 above, as well as Footnotes 156 and 164).[188] Pacala's tenure would be noted for helping ATS executives, especially presidents, be better informed about key management principles and practices.

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[185] In 2010, the Commission began requiring clergy ("ministry practitioners") on evaluation committees, per Department of Education regulations. The Department rightly observed that if ATS schools were preparing students for ministry professions, there ought to be some ministry professionals involved in the evaluation, as was the practice for other professional accreditors.

[186] One of the more significant transitions in 1982 was that was the first year a Roman Catholic was elected ATS President, Vincent Cushing, president of Washington Theological Union (Bulletin 35, 1982, Part 2, p. 1). That year the Commission also chose a Roman Catholic for the first time as its chair, Jean-Marc LaPorte of Regis College (see also Footnote 133).

[187] Jackson Carroll was then Mackenzie Distinguished Professor at Hartford Seminary (1974-1993). He joined the faculty at Duke Divinity School in 1993 (see Duke website). His research publications are voluminous, including a seminal study on seminaries that was co-written with Dan Aleshire, Barbara Wheeler, and Penny Long Marler, Being There: Culture and Formation in Two Theological Schools (Oxford University Press, 1997).

[188] In the Autumn 1982 issue of *Theological Education*, William Baumgartner published "A Retrospective Study of the Institute for Theological Education Management" (pp. 39-54).

The 1982 Biennial Meeting in Pittsburgh advanced another priority for ATS under Pacala: a focus on globalization, then called "internationalization." A Committee on Internationalization of Theological Education, appointed in 1980, gave their first report at the 1982 Meeting (Bulletin 35, Part 6, pp. 98-110). They preferred the term "ecumenical" over "internationalization," since the latter seemed detrimental to "the so-called Third World" and since the former had "solid New Testament roots to designate an old reality… to denote the 'whole inhabited world'" (Part 6, p. 98). The Committee's one recommendation from its rather lengthy report was "to survey member schools concerning their programs and plans for the development of an *ecumenically* significant curriculum," using that highlighted term as denoted above (Part 6, p. 104). That focus on globalization would result in the first ever standard on globalization by the end of the decade.

At the 1982 Biennial meeting, the Commission on Accrediting reported that it had conducted 48 reevaluation visits and 8 initial accreditation visits, along with nine "special accreditation visits" that are today called "focused visits" (Bulletin 35, 1982, Part 6, pp. 76-78 and 86-88). The Commission's 1982 report was the first to list "special visits" as a separate category. The Commission also recommended new criteria for Associate Members since it was the Commission's responsibility to review all new Associate applications and to recommend qualified ones to the membership. The new criteria, which were approved, nearly doubled the length of the existing criteria and added much more detail to the six criteria, which still exist. The expansion added more information about an applicant's "openness to the community of theological schools" and its ability to support its educational programs, with new criteria on facilities, libraries, governance, and finances (Bulletin 35, 1982, Part 6, pp. 93-95).[189]

The Commission also reported in 1982 that it had reviewed the Notations for Candidate and Associate Members (published in Part 7 of Bulletin 35, 1982, p. 27), which had existed since 1968 (see p. 50 above). The Commission reported as well that it had reviewed the "General Notations," imposed on Accredited Members, of which there were now 47 (Part 7, pp. 19-20) and the "Doctor of Ministry Notations," of which there were 40 (Part 7, pp. 21-23). Some notations were imposed "relatively automatically by statistical information submitted as part of the Autumn Reports" (Commission Minutes, January 1983, p. 14), the first record of that occurring. Whenever a visiting team recommended notations, the Commission decided to require teams to begin including in their reports evidence for recommending those notations (Commission Minutes, June 1984, p. 12).

Between the 1982 and 1984 Biennial Meetings the Commission dealt with both new and old issues. One old issue was an ongoing concern about the sheer mass of paperwork that the Commission had to examine for each meeting, wondering if there might be "ways to reduce the volume of printed materials submitted to the Commission" (Commission Minutes, January 1983, p. 13). With the new Standard IX on Educational Programs Conducted Off-Campus approved in 1980 (see p. 65 above), the Commission adopted a new policy that "when member schools are engaged in significant amounts of extension education, staff should arrange for accrediting teams to include visits to an appropriate/sufficient sample of these sites as a regular part of full institutional evaluations" (Commission Minutes, January 1983, Supplement, p. 2). One such site for one school was deemed large enough that the Commission voted to list the main campus and the extension site in two different listings in the ATS Membership Directory and to impose notations on the off-campus site that it did not impose on the main campus (Commission Minutes, June 1984, p. 4).

[189] In its Supplemental Report in 1982, the Commission proposed a change to the MDiv Standard that allowed the simultaneous or sequential pursuit of both an MDiv and an MA or MRE, provided that two degrees required "no less than a total of four years of full-time study" (Bulletin 35, 1982, Part 6, p. 89). The proposal "produced considerable discussion" but was finally approved (Part 6, p. 22).

One of the more interesting Commission actions about extension sites was recorded in the June 1984 Commission Minutes (p. 10). An ATS school raised a concern with the Commission over a "competitor" school offering a non-residential MDiv off-campus, which they deemed a violation of ATS Standards. The Commission agreed. This may have been the first recorded instance of how ATS member schools "policed" one another, especially among schools that could be viewed as "competitors."[190]

The 1984 Biennial Meeting was back in Pittsburgh (see Appendix A), as had been the 1982 gathering, the only instance of the same city hosting back-to-back Biennial Meetings. The theme that year was "The Search for Unity in Our Pluralism" (Bulletin 36, 1984, Part 6, p. 3). In his 1984 report, the Executive Director called attention to the theme, noting that the Association "is constituted by a kind of pluralism that is unprecedented in kind or degree in its history" and that ATS "has come of age" to a level of "maturity" (Part 6, p. 32). If "maturity" can be characterized by adults agreeing to disagree, then that theme seemed appropriate, given the considerable disagreements that arose during the discussion and debate on revised Standards at that meeting. The Committee on Reference and Counsel handled 27 different amendments from the floor to the proposed revisions, with only three of the 27 defeated (Part 6, pp. 25-30). It was a very busy two days for that Committee (see Footnote 155).

One of the more controversial new Standards proposed in 1984 was for a new Doctor of Missiology degree. After five different amendments just on that one standard, the membership finally "voted to table the motion to accept the Doctor of Missiology degree as amended until the next biennial meeting in June 1986" (Bulletin 36, 1984, Part 6, p. 30). A significantly revised DMin Standard was also proposed and approved in 1984. It essentially removed the "in-sequence" option and left only the "in-ministry" option (see pp. 55, 61, and 63 above). The complete list of proposed revisions in 1984 to all the Standards was 36 pages (!) and sent to the membership before the 1984 Biennial Meeting (published in Bulletin 36, 1984, Part 6, pp. 123-158). The most significant revision in 1984 was adding a new Standard 1 on Institutional Purpose, the first ever ATS standard requiring schools to have a clearly stated mission that guided each school's goals, plans, and resource allocations (Part 6, p. 129). A significantly revised Preamble to the Standards also highlighted the importance of mission as a basis for evaluations. The 1984 Preamble emphasized the Commission as both an institutional and a programmatic accreditor, with a reminder that every accrediting action was "primarily a decision about the theological school as an institution" (Part 6, p. 127).

Among the key revisions accepted by the membership in 1984 were these: revising the Standard on Students (moved from first to second place) by adding new admissions criteria for schools focused on "persons thirty-five years or older, who do not have a baccalaureate degree" (Bulletin 36, 1984, Part 6, p. 131); adding requirements on "the desirability of diversity in race, ethnic origin, age, and where the institutional mission allows, on gender" to the Standards on Students, on Faculty, on Governance and Administration, and on the Library, with attention also to more diverse library collections (Part 6, pp. 130, 133, 135, and 137-138); and requiring financial audits and accounting systems "generally used in North American higher education" (Part 6, p. 136).

In keeping with the revisions above, the membership also approved a revised Standard IX on Responsiveness to Minority and Women's Concerns that noted the importance of these issues "by their

[190] The June 1984 Commission meeting was the first one for William Baumgartner, new ATS staff liaison to the Commission, replacing the retiring Marvin Taylor (Commission Minutes, June 1984, p. 1). He was the first Roman Catholic member of the ATS staff, coming from the seminary department of the National Catholic Educational Association. In *The Role of ATS in Theological Education* (p. 134), Pacala called Taylor "the first full-time Associate Director for Accreditation (1973-1984)" and Baumgartner the second (1984-1991). Dan Aleshire was the third and last to fill that role solo (see p. 83 and Footnote 246).

frequent appearance within these standards" (Bulletin 36, 1984, Part 6, p. 140). Standard X on Educational Programs Conducted Off-Campus was strengthened and Standard XI on Employment Opportunities in Priority Setting (first introduced in 1972; see p. 55 above) was renamed Institutional Policies Regarding Placement.[191] That last standard also added a statement on acting "as advocate for those groups which have been disadvantaged by unjust discrimination in seeking employment because of race, ethnic origin, age, handicapping condition, or gender" (p. 141). Pacala described these revisions as "a shift in orientation… from equal opportunity to affirmative action" (*The Role of ATS in Theological Education*, p. 100). The focus on "pluralism" in all these revisions was apparent. Other revisions to the Procedures Related to Membership that were approved in 1984 were these: not allowing schools to announce a new degree until approved, requiring only a petition for all new master's degrees, requiring a petition and a visit for new doctoral degrees, and beefing up the requirements for self-studies (Bulletin 36, 1984, Part 6, pp. 124-126).

The 1984 Biennial Meeting also heard reports regarding the newly established Development and Institutional Advancement Program (DIAP, the longest-lived ATS leadership program, Bulletin 36, 1984, Part 6, p. 39); the Committee on Evaluation, which was chaired by Dan Aleshire and focused on the Readiness for Ministry project (Part 6, pp. 107-109); the Committee on Canadian Affairs "to ensure the two-nation nature of the Association" (Part 6, p. 110); the ATS-ATLA Library Project 2000, which was "virtually complete" with its final report on Theological Libraries for the Twenty-First Century (Part 6, pp. 95-97); and the Committee on Globalization of Theological Education, which issued a nine-page report with ten observations and three recommendations (Part 6, pp. 98-106). It was a busy biennial meeting.[192]

Between the 1984 and 1986 Biennial Meetings the Commission implemented a number of policies and practices that still continue after forty years. For example, the Commission began using the language of "accepting" reports deemed satisfactory and "receiving" reports that needed follow-up (Commission Minutes, January 1985, pp. 6 ff.). At the same meeting, the Commission recorded its first "recusals" of Commissioners who absented themselves from discussions of schools where they had been involved (a policy first introduced in 1967, see p. 49 above). The January 1985 meeting also noted that visiting teams "should be alerted to pay particular attention to the standard which reminds governing boards of their responsibility to assure freedom of the school to serve its given goals" (Commission Minutes, January 1985, p. 3). That reminder came from the Executive Committee who had heard member schools expressing their concerns regarding an increasing number of "assessments of theological schools by ecclesiastical agencies" (Bulletin 37, 1986, Part 6, p. 49).[193] A new policy on "The Accreditation of Theological Schools and Ecclesiastical Assessments" was printed in Bulletin 38, 1988, Part 6, pp. 151-154. The membership voted in 1988 to revise that draft, send it to the members for review, and bring it back to the 1990 Biennial Meeting for approval (Bulletin 38, Part 6, pp. 23-24), which it did (see p. 78 below).

The January 1986 Commission meeting appears to be the first one where multiple schools requested delays in their accreditation visits, which the Commission generally granted (Minutes, pp. 4-5). At that

[191] The 1978 Biennial Meeting had featured a keynote address on student placement by Jackson Carroll and Barbara Wheeler, who talked about how "placement is becoming a serious problem for many schools" (Bulletin 33, 1978, Part 6, p. 2).

[192] Perhaps to expedite things, the 1984 Biennial Meeting was also the first to feature "breakfast forums" and "luncheon sessions" on special topics (Bulletin 37, 1984, Part 6, pp. 3-6).

[193] Before joining the ATS staff in 1984 (see Footnote 190), Baumgartner was part of an ATS panel that reviewed how to respond to growing ecclesiastical assessments. He had been interviewed in the *St. Louis Review* in October 1981 about Roman Catholic seminaries' concerns over the "Holy See's decision to do an in-depth study of U.S. seminaries [which] has aroused a variety of hopes, fears, and speculations" (The Catholic News Archive, 2 October 1981; see also p. 78 below).

meeting, the Commission also decided to no longer use "show cause notification" (see p. 66), since it seemed to communicate that it "was a more serious type of action than the imposing of a notation," which it was not (Commission Minutes, January 1986, p. 5). That meeting seems to be the first recorded instance of an accredited school receiving reaffirmation for only three years, coupled with seven notations (Commission Minutes, January 1986, p. 6). The Commission also wrestled with a petition from a school to begin a DMin program in Korea, in response to which the Commission "voted to invite representatives of [the school] to meet with the Commission" because of numerous concerns their petition had raised (Commission Minutes, January 1986, pp. 14-15). That may be the first instance of the Commission requesting school personnel to attend a Commission meeting, despite the policy against that approved in 1980 (see p. 65 above). It would not be the last (see pp. 76-77 below).

The June 1986 Commission meeting was the first time the Commission adopted a new policy related to "due process," whereby the Commission would not publish a notation in the ATS public directory for any school until that school had "an opportunity to respond to the action of the Commission, should it choose to do so, before the public notice of action is made" (Commission Minutes, June 1986, p. 3). The June 1986 meeting minutes were also the first to be formatted by categories of Commission actions, much like Commission minutes are still formatted, i.e., actions on visiting team reports first, actions on schools seeking initial accreditation second, actions on petitions third, and fourth and finally actions on school reports (Commission Minutes, June 1986). Sadly, the June 1986 Commission Minutes also included a tribute to and "Memorial Citation" for Marvin Taylor, ATS staff liaison to the Commission since 1973 (see Footnotes 159 and 190). Taylor had retired in late 1984, "only eighteen months prior to his death on May 29, 1986" (Commission Minutes, June 1986, pp. 1-2).

The 1986 Biennial Meeting in Kansas City was the first to elect a woman as president, Barbara Brown Zikmund, then academic dean at Pacific School of Religion.[194] The theme that year was "Global Challenges and Perspectives in Theological Education."Miller, in *Piety and Plurality*, notes that "globalization, as a basic issue, was one of [ATS's] great successes of the 1980s and 1990s" (p. 285) and "the event [that] more than any other contributed to globalization as [an ATS] standard was the 1986 address of Don Browning at the ATS biennial meeting" (p. 293). Browning, a professor at the University of Chicago Divinity School, gave the closing address that year, which "unleashed a wave of enthusiastic assent among those present" (Miller, p. 294).[195] Part of that enthusiasm may have stemmed from a "consultation on pluralism" that ATS had sponsored in April 1985, the first of many in the 1980s that drew "hundreds of professors in all the seminary disciplines [such that] few ATS activities have engaged so many people in virtually all the aspects of the theological enterprise."[196] Globalization[197] became both a mantra and a mandate for ATS in the 1980s, culminating with a new Standard on Globalization in 1990 (see p. 78 below).[198]

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[194] Zikmund was also the first president of WOCATI (see p. 78 below). For more on Zikmund, see Footnote 173. The 1986 Biennial Meeting was the first to list "Historical Highlights of the Association," along with a list of every ATS president since 1918 (Bulletin 37, 1986, Part 6, pp. 3-5).

[195] Miller adds that while Browning's address on globalization was received enthusiastically, "ATS meetings can never be confused with revivals" (*Piety and Plurality*, p. 294).

[196] Lesher and Shriver, "Stumbling in the Right Direction" (*Theological Education*, 1999: 3-16), cited in Miller, *Piety and Plurality*, p. 284).

[197] As noted earlier (see p. 68 above), ATS struggled with the right terminology for what began as "internationalization," then briefly became "ecumenical," but ended up by the mid-1980s as "globalization" (Miller, *Piety and Plurality*, p. 281)

[198] Ironically, the Committee on Globalization, appointed in 1980, recommended to the membership in 1986 that it be "formally dismissed from its responsibilities," but only so that "a follow-up group be appointed to develop a program of theological education and globalization within ATS" (Bulletin 37, 1986, Part 6, p. 27).

The 1986 Biennial Meeting finally saw the approval of a Standard on the Doctor of Missiology degree, having been tabled at the 1984 meeting after numerous amendments failed. Part of what made it more palatable this time was adding an introduction to the new DMiss Standard that explained the long history of this degree, especially among Roman Catholic seminaries (Bulletin 37, 1986, Part 6, pp. 139-140). A new degree standard for the Specialized MA and a revised academic MA degree standard (Part 6, pp. 142-147) were also approved. A lengthy "advice and counsel" statement on "Institutional Responsibilities and Off-Campus Educational Programs" (Part 6, pp. 149-154) was approved, as well. Those guidelines were the first to describe a "telecommunications" option for extension education, though the options listed in the 1984 statement focused on radio and television.

One of the more intriguing Executive Director reports was given at the 1986 Biennial Meeting. Pacala focused on the "identity" of the Association, which he described as having a "split personality."[199] He argued that ATS operated on both a "conference model [serving] as an agent of its member institutions," and on a "society model [serving] as an agent of the profession, theological education" (Bulletin 37, 1986, Part 6, pp. 35-36). The Association side focused on the "conference model," while the Commission side focused on the "society model" through accrediting standards that required ATS schools to "improve theological education."[200] Pacala added (Part 6, p. 36) that "in this regard, ATS differs significantly from its counterparts" since other professions (e.g., law and medicine) have two separate organizations, one for the "conference model" (an association) and another for the "society model" (an accrediting agency). By 2004, the U.S. Department of Education would mandate two separate organizations, though the connectedness between the two has never been broken (see Footnote 8). As evidence of the growing power of the "society model," i.e. ATS as an accrediting agency, Pacala noted that in 1980 fully a fifth of the ATS membership were not accredited members, while by 1986 that percentage had shrunk by half, only one tenth were not accredited (less than 10% are not accredited now).

The Executive Committee thanked Lilly Endowment Inc. at the 1986 Biennial Meeting for funding the "Basic Issues" program in the 1980s. Pacala specifically thanked Robert Lynn of the Endowment for two grants totaling $1.7 million, worth over $5 million today (*The Role of ATS in Theological Education*, p. 43). Pacala called the 1980s "the Lynn decade in theological education" (p. 43). At his retirement in 1989, *Newsweek* wrote, "Robert Wood Lynn has been one of the most important figures in American religion" (cited by Pacala, p. 69). The Lilly grants for "Basic Issues" led to a plethora of publications on the nature and future of theological education, including Edward Farley's *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (1983) and his *The Fragility of Knowledge*: *Theological Education in the Church and the University* (1988), Charles Wood's *Vision and Discernment: An Orientation in Theological Study* (1985), Joseph Hough and John Cobb's *Christian Identity and Theological Education* (1985), and, a few years later, David Kelsey's *To Understand God Truly: What Is Theological about a Theological School* (1992) and his *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (1993), all key works cited by Miller in his *Piety and Plurality* (pp. 255 and 267).

All of these Basic Issues publications lead to something of a "paradigm shift" in defining theological education, especially the role of ATS schools (and ATS Standards) in improving theological education. The longstanding definition, since Kelly's pioneer work in 1924, of theological education as professional

[199] Adding to the ATS "identity crisis" described by Pacala was the 1986 report of the Committee on Canadian Affairs on "the distinctive nature of the Canadian scene" and the need for ATS to be "more aware of Canadian sensitivities" (Bulletin 37, 1986, Part 6, pp. 113-114). One of their points, at this meeting on "global challenges" for a pluralistic membership, was that ATS required reporting on "ethnic groups… that are not particularly appropriate for Canadian students" (Part 6, p. 114).

[200] Miller described ATS in the 1980s as "increasingly becoming a three-pronged agency: a professional association for theological education, especially for presidents and deans; an organization for the serious discussion of theological education; and an accrediting agency" (*Piety and Plurality*, p. 293). The middle prong seemed to bridge the gap between Pacala's two.

education for ministers was giving way to more nuanced and more pluralistic definitions, with emphasis on the minister's own formation and on the "reflective practitioner" (Miller, pp. 263 and 276-277). That changing and expanding definition led not only to the DMin explosion (see p. 63 above) but also to a proliferation of MA programs, with new Specialized MA standards approved at that very meeting in 1986. It also led to new audiences for, and new modes of, theological education, per the revised statement approved in 1986, "Institutional Responsibilities and Off-Campus Educational Programs." Pandora's Box was now open.[201]

One of the more significant items reported at the 1986 Biennial Meeting was one by the Executive Committee. That Committee had requested that COPA formally recognize ATS as an institutional, not a programmatic, accreditor (Bulletin 37, 1986, Part 6, p. 51). That was in contrast to their action in 1970 when ATS had requested both recognitions from COPA (see p. 53 above). That decision had two major implications long-term.

First, that request acknowledged that the Executive Committee, not the Commission, had final authority on accrediting matters, since the request to COPA was made by the Executive Committee, not by the Commission.[202] That lack of final authority by the Commission over accrediting matters is what the U.S. Department of Education objected to a decade later, which led to the legal separation of the two organizations in 2004 (see Footnote 8). Second, ATS's decision to be recognized as an institutional, rather than a programmatic, accreditor created serious complications for a number of member schools that offered undergraduate programs (see later on this page).

Between the 1986 and 1988 Biennial Meetings the Commission wrestled with a variety of issues. For example, at its January 1987 meeting, the Commission voted to not allow schools to grant one degree as part of another, such as granting the ThM for DMiss work[203] (Minutes, p. 12); to have schools notify the Commission when the last student of a closed program graduated (Minutes, p. 13); and to defer approval of a DMin program based overseas, in light of the newly approved guidelines on extension education (Minutes, p. 14).[204] The Commission also met with representatives of a Southern Baptist school for an entire hour to discuss "the Commission's directive for the school to discontinue the offering of an undergraduate degree" (p. 19). The Commission decided to survey the membership to see how many schools offered undergraduate programs.

At is June 1987 meeting, the Commission reviewed the survey results and found that many ATS schools offered undergraduate programs, which they classified in four groups: Roman Catholic seminaries with distinct college departments, Canadian colleges with a longstanding BTh tradition, the six Southern

[201] Ironically, at its January 1987 meeting, the Commission "expressed concern for the proliferation both of degree programs and of sites" (Commission Minutes, January 1987, p. 2). The Commissioners spent a significant portion of that meeting discussing the new report on the DMin by Barbara Wheeler and Jackson Carroll. They described concerns over how quickly that program had grown and the lack of adequate standards "to support the quality of the program" (Minutes, p. 4).

[202] To be sure, for many years any changes to the ATS Standards that were brought to the membership for a vote were brought by the ATS Executive Committee, not by the Commission on Accrediting. For example, the Executive Committee recommended revisions to the DMin Standard in 1976 (Bulletin 32, 1976, Part 6, p. 52) and recommended a new Standard on Responsiveness to Minority and Women's Concerns in 1978 (Bulletin 33, 1978, Part 6, p. 56).

[203] At its January 1988 meeting, the Commission addressed a different, but related situation where a school asked if a student could "transfer credit from one degree to another," to which the Commission responded that ATS schools should "follow common principles" and "respect the integrity of [each] degree," with no more than "one year of credit [transferable] toward a two-year degree" (Commission Minutes, January 1988, p. 4).

[204] A year later in January 1988, the Commission approved an international DMin "as a pilot project," not to go beyond the first graduating class without "an appeal by the school to the Commission" (Minutes, p. 15).

Baptist seminaries that offered the Associate of Divinity, and a few schools in the Native American Theological Association. "After a lengthy discussion of different aspects of accrediting implications of this issue," the Commission asked the ATS staff to communicate to member schools with undergraduate degrees "the ATS policy in the context of COPA recognition in 1985 of ATS as an 'Institutional accrediting agency'" (Commission Minutes, June 1987, pp. 4-5). The Commission added that "compliance (divesture) will obviously require time according to individual situations and commitments, but that it should be accomplished by 1996" (Minutes, p. 5). No reference to that deadline is made in the Commission Minutes in the 1990s. The June 1987 Commission Minutes (pp. 25-26) also recorded the first individual complaint handled by the Commission, from a professor who had been denied tenure. The Commission reminded the complainant that it did not "adjudicate individual grievances," citing its Complaint Policy (Bulletin 37, 1984, Part 3, pp. 13-14).

The January 1988 Commission meeting heard a report from the Executive Director on his recent hearing before the U.S. Department of Education regarding ATS accreditation, which focused on outcomes (Commission Minutes, January 1988, pp. 2-3). The Commission also discussed consistent nomenclature for Specialized MA degrees (Minutes, p. 3) and a COPA statement on dual accreditation (Minutes, p. 5).

At its June 1988 meeting, the Commission permitted an applicant school to "fast track" its accreditation, since it would soon be receiving the programs and students of an accredited ATS school that was closing (Minutes, p. 27). That same meeting the Commission reviewed again the application materials from Unification Theological Seminary for Associate Membership, who had first applied in 1978 (see Footnote 176). They also reviewed the school's 15-page response to the Commission's earlier communication to the school that it did not meet the ATS Constitutional Provision regarding the requirement that schools be "engaged in educating leadership 'in the Jewish and Christian Faith'" (Commission Minutes, January 1988, p. 29). The Commission concluded again the school does not "conform to this constitutional provision" and, therefore, "had no basis to recommend to the Biennial Meeting that Unification Theological Seminary is eligible for membership" (Minutes, p. 29; see also pp. 79 and 108 below).

The 1988 Biennial Meeting in San Francisco stood out for something that didn't happen. It was the first Biennial Meeting since 1964, and only the second since 1950, when no new Standards were proposed and/or no existing Standards were revised (see also Footnote 256).[205] The Commission on Accrediting still had plenty to do that biennium, ending its report by noting that "our discussions have sometimes been heated, occasionally touched with humor, but always deeply committed to doing the very best we are able for each [member] institution" (Bulletin 38, 1988, Part 6, p. 80).[206] The next new Standard, on Globalization, would not come until the 1990 meeting, though the membership voted in 1988 to "adopt globalization as a major program emphasis during the decade of the 1990s" (Bulletin 38, Part 6, p. 25).

The membership at the 1988 meeting also "voted that ATS relocate its headquarters to Pittsburgh," based on a report from the ATS Facilities and Location Committee, elected in 1986 (Bulletin 38, 1988,

[205] Another first at the 1988 Biennial Meeting was ATS's first Distinguished Service Award "to acknowledge and honor persons who have contributed in extraordinary ways to the Association's mission… persons of exceptional vision, leadership, and influence who advance the causes of our enterprise in very significant ways to the benefit of all." That quotation is from the September/October 2004 issue of ATS *Colloquy* (p. 6), which honored Barbara Brown Zikmund as the 2004 recipient, who, as ATS president in 1988, presented the very first award to Krister Stendahl, academic dean of Harvard Divinity School. The second award went to Robert Lynn of the Lilly Endowment (see p. 72 above). Endnote 9 has a complete list of all recipients.

[206] One of the things the Commission did that biennium, as reported by the Executive Committee in 1988, was to "oppose the application by the American Association of Bible Colleges [now ABHE] for an expansion of accrediting scope to include graduate programs of theological studies" (Bulletin 38, 1988, Part 6, p. 52; see also Footnotes 86 and 87). ABHE finally received that expansion of scope in 2022 from the U.S. Department of Education (see USDE Institutional Accrediting Agencies).

Part 6, pp. 24, 48-49, and 98-100). That committee had considered five different cities: Atlanta, Chicago, Louisville, Pittsburgh, and Washington DC. They narrowed the new location down to Pittsburgh and Washington DC, but recommended Pittsburgh after a local foundation in that city offered to fund a new building and because it was near a major airport with "hub" status (a status it lost in 2004 when US Airways declared bankruptcy).[207]

The Executive Director's report (Bulletin 38, 1988, Part 6, p. 35) noted some troubling enrollment trends, with total ATS enrollment declining four straight years from 1984 to 1988, though by less than 2%. Pacala also noted the decline in full-time students, with their percentage decreasing ten points in a decade, from 78% in 1978 to 68% in 1988. Fortunately, the four-year enrollment decline was both modest and short-lived, with total ATS enrollment up 6% between 1988 and 1990 (see Footnote 117).

Pacala's bigger concern in 1988 was not the quantity, but the quality of students (Bulletin 38, 1988, Part 6, p. 35). Later in his report in a section entitled "Issues of quality in theological education," Pacala enlarged his discussion of quality by noting how a debate on that issue had been present throughout most of ATS's history (Part 6, p. 42). He described how the focus in the 1980s had shifted to "outcomes… with schools increasingly expected to demonstrate the effectiveness of their educational programs and services in terms of their results for the education and development of students" (Part 6, p. 42). That issue was also noted in the 1988 Executive Committee report on "recent emphases both from COPA and USDE on the importance of output measures" (Part 6, p. 50). The Committee on Evaluation in Theological Education reported at the 1988 Biennial Meeting that "many would date higher education's recent concern with evaluation and assessment to the [1986] publication of Derek Bok's [president of Harvard University] book, Higher Learning, [which] argues for the importance of assessing outcomes" (Part 6, p. 124). Outcomes assessment would become a dominant issue in the 1990s revision of the Standards.

Pacala reported as well in 1988 on "the new professionalism [that] has arisen throughout theological education" (Bulletin 38, 1988, Part 6, p. 36), citing the book, The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action, written in 1984 by Donald Schön, an MIT social scientist and business consultant. That book impacted a number of ATS leaders, with "reflective practitioner" becoming a key emphasis in the emerging definition of theological education (see p. 73 above). That new focus on "reflective practitioner" was reflected at ATS schools in very practical ways (no pun intended), including the "DMin explosion" (see p. 63 above) and the proliferation of Specialized MA degrees (see p. 73 above). Those were issues that occupied significant time for the Commission on Accrediting in the late 1980s.

The 1988 Biennial Meeting heard reports on the purchase of a new computer information system, funded by a grant of $125,000 from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation (Bulletin 38, 1988, Part 6, p. 54). That grant would be worth about $330,000 today. A key use of that system would be to implement recommendations of the Task Force on Management Information Systems and Services, authorized in 1984 (Bulletin 38, Part 6, pp. 139-144). The Task Force based its mandate on "the primary purpose of the Association as set forth by its Constitution… 'to promote the improvement of theological education'" (Part 6, p. 139). One key improvement spearheaded by that Task Force was a revised Fact Book that premiered in 1990 after a two-year delay and gave member schools and the public better information to evaluate theological education (Fact Book on Theological Education, 1988-89 and 1989-90, p. ix).

[207] The Executive Committee also considered Indianapolis, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Toronto (ATS Executive Committee Minutes, June 1987, p. 99). Two other reasons that Washington DC was not chosen was that the Executive Committee wanted a site that was politically neutral for Canadian sensitivities and in an area with a reasonable cost of living for ATS staff.

Between the 1988 and 1990 Biennial Meetings the Commission addressed an increasingly complex set of issues. At its January 1989 meeting, the Commission authorized new guidelines for self-studies and for visiting teams. Part of those guidelines focused on visiting off-campus programs, which the Commission, for the first time, divided into two types: those offering complete degrees and those offering credit courses but not complete degrees (Commission Minutes, January 1989, p. 4). In addition, the staff differentiated between sites staffed by main campus faculty (in whole or in part) and sites staffed entirely by adjuncts.[208]

At that January 1989 meeting, the Commission approved a new Policy Statement on Disclosure and Confidentiality, reflecting COPA guidelines. That new Policy Statement was discussed and approved at the 1990 Biennial Meeting (see p. 78 below). At the same meeting, the Commission decided to review the "adequacy of standards relating to governing boards," which arose in the context of deciding a particularly troublesome case involving Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (Commission Minutes, January 1989, pp. 6 and 15-16), which arose again at the Commission's June 1989 meeting (see p. 77 below). The Southeastern situation involved the resignation of the seminary's president and dean in the fall of 1987 and considerable faculty turmoil in protest of new SBC policies on biblical inerrancy and the hiring of conservative faculty, policies that Southeastern's new and conservative governing board began to implement.[209]

The January 1989 Commission meeting also spent considerable time meeting with representatives from an applicant for Associate Membership from the state of Washington. After considerable discussion, a final decision was tabled until the June 1989 meeting (Commission Minutes, January 1989, pp. 26-28). The Commission eventually decided the applicant's programs were too "non-traditional" to conform to membership criteria (Minutes, June 1989, p. 3). At its June 1989 meeting, the Commission reviewed staff reports on two recent COPA workshops that raised issues about the legal liability of accreditors, an issue clearly on the Commissioners' minds amidst the complexity of various school issues with which they were dealing.[210]

The June 1989 Commission meeting devoted some time to discussing several areas of concern with the present Standards, especially those related to academic freedom, evaluation, and governing boards. The Commission also discussed the increasing number and complexity of joint visits with regional accreditors, which by 1990 constituted over 60% of all ATS visits (Bulletin 39, 1990, Part 6, p. 42).[211] At that same meeting, the Commission adopted a "Resolution of Appreciation" for the retiring William Baumgartner (Commission Minutes, June 1989, pp. 7-8). He had joined the ATS staff in 1984 to work in accrediting and retired in 1990, after mentoring his replacement Dan Aleshire, who joined the ATS staff

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[208] Later at that meeting, the Commission reviewed a school's petition to open a "second campus" out of state. The Commission decided that it could extend a school's accreditation to such a site, if it was "fully controlled by the home campus, with a percentage of degrees taught by the regular faculty," but that it would treat a site as "a separate campus… needing separate approval and listing in the membership directory [if that site had] its own faculty and resources" (Commission Minutes, January 1989, p. 23). At its June 1989 meeting, the Commission also required "state authorization" for any out-of-state sites (p. 27).

[209] For a more fulsome discussion of this complicated case, see Miller, *Piety and Plurality*, pp. 238-241.

[210] One COPA workshop was "a mock courtroom trial which raised issues of liability for accrediting agencies." The Commission felt that relevant "because CBN [now Regent] University has taken the American Bar Association to court on charges of discrimination, as reported in the May 24, 1989, issue of *The Christian Century*" (Commission Minutes, June 1989, pp. 3-4).

[211] At its January 1990 meeting, the Commission reviewed its joint-visit agreement with SACS and adopted new training guidelines for chairs of joint visits. Part of the complexity of doing joint visits with SACS was their "40 'must' statements," which occupied so much time of the visiting teams that ATS felt degree programs were being given insufficient attention.

in July 1990 (Bulletin 39, 1990, Part 6, p. 138). It is also worth noting that David Schuller, who began at ATS in 1967, also retired in June 1989 (see Footnote 126). He had worked briefly with the Commission on Accrediting. In addition to serving as Director of the Readiness for Ministry program (see pp. 61-62 above), he was Director of Program Services. His replacement in that role was Gail Buchwalter King (Bulletin 39, 1990, Part 6, p. 138). She may have been the first woman hired as a full-time ATS staff member at the director level.

The June 1989 meeting ended with a prolonged discussion of Southeastern Baptist Seminary. The Commission voted "that the seminary show cause for the next meeting… why it should not be placed on probation," including "steps that have been taken or are in process to redress the alienation of faculty from the governance of the institution" (Commission Minutes, June 1989, pp. 15-16). At its January 1990 meeting, the Commission met with Southeastern's new president and dean, the former president and dean having resigned (see p. 76 above). After a lengthy discussion, with and without the two representatives, the Commission voted to defer action until its June 1990 meeting but "expressed its deep concern for the future well-being of the school" (Commission Minutes, January 1990, pp. 7-9 and 26-27). At its June 1990 meeting, the Commission voted not to impose probation but to impose three notations (Commission Minutes, June 1990, pp. 26-27). The first notation was for faculty being "unduly diverted from their essential task" (N2.2), the second for the governing board exercising "inappropriate control over the administration and faculty" (N3.6), and the third for the "general tone of the school impairing the capacity to provide significant theological education and ministerial training" (N14.1).[212]

The June 1990 Commission meeting also had a second discussion of the "Ten Percent Rule" in admissions that had first surfaced at its June 1989 meeting. That rule did not permit more than 10% of a seminary's students enrolled in its master's degree programs to not have a bachelor's degree and a cap of 20% of all students enrolled in all programs (including certificates and diplomas) without a bachelor's degree or the Commission would impose a notation (see Standard II.A.2.a in Bulletin 38, 1988, Part 3, p. 21). That rule proved particularly troublesome for Canadian members, who were often attached to universities with significant enrollments of undergraduates in their final year or two, taking courses for dual credit. The Commission voted to approve two exemptions to the "Ten Percent Rule," including one for Canadian schools and one for students without a bachelor's degree who had been admitted provisionally, once their provisional status was removed (Commission Minutes, June 1990, p. 4).

The 1990 Biennial Meeting was Leon Pacala's last as Executive Director. He noted how much ATS had "increased in size, nature, and complexity through the decade" (Bulletin 39, 1990, Part 6, p. 31). He was the first to call attention to the decline of the MDiv, which had dropped from 53% of total enrollments in 1980 to 43% in 1990, adding that "the greatest increase [during that decade] occurred in the MA programs [especially] in specialized ministries" (Part 6, p. 35). One of his greatest accomplishments had been the "the establishment of a worldwide organization of theological school associations, the World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions" (Part 6, p. 32). WOCATI was "perhaps the most important consequence of the globalization movement" begun by ATS under Pacala's leadership, "when

[212] The Notations listed here are found in Bulletin 38, June 1988, Part 7 Membership List, pp. 23-28. Before 1972, Notations were published in the ATS Bulletins along with the Standards. Beginning in 1972, when the Bulletins were divided into multiple parts (see Footnote 146), the Notations were printed at the end of Part 7 Membership List, which differed from Part 4 Directory. As explained in Bulletin 38, 1988, Part 4 (p. 1): "The Directory is intended for general public use… [and] does not constitute an official membership list of the Association. Such a list as provided by the Commission on Accrediting is published annually in June, together with a January Supplement, and carries the title, Membership List." The bound volumes of Bulletins for 1974-1980 in the ATS Office do not include any Part 7 Membership Lists (and no Notations). Notations began to be printed in Parts 1 and 2 in 1998. Starting in 1998, the Bulletin was reduced to three Parts: Part 1 Constitution, Membership Procedures, Standards, and ATS Policies; Part 2 Membership List; and Part 3 Biennial Meeting. The last printed Bulletin with all three parts was published in 2012, with subsequent Bulletins published online. Notations ceased after the 2020 revision (see p. 20 above).

representatives of fifteen different theological associations met in Singapore" in 1987 and two years later established WOCATI in 1989 at Yogyakarta, Indonesia, with sixteen charter members (Miller, *Piety and Plurality*, p. 297). As Pacala himself said, "In many respects, WOCATI is an ATS invention" (Pacala, *The Role of ATS in Theological Education*, p. 62). Miller described it this way, "WOCATI is ATS without the Commission on Accrediting" (*Piety and Plurality*, p. 298). WOCATI's first president was Barbara Brown Zikmund, a long-time ATS leader, and the first Congress of the World Conference was hosted by ATS in Pittsburgh in June 1992 in conjunction with the ATS Biennial Meeting (Pacala, p. 62).

Capping Pacala's passion for globalization was the adoption in 1990 of new Standard IX on Globalization of Theological Education (Bulletin 39, 1990, Part 3, p. 31, and Part 6, p. 23). A standard with only three short sentences seemed almost anti-climactic after a decade of work, but the theme of globalization has never left the ATS Standards in the last four decades. Standard IX basically required schools to "give evidence of appropriate attention to the issues and concern for global theological education" (Part 3, p. 31). The Report of the Task Force on Globalization issued a 10-page report (Part 6, pp. 103-112) that described multiple ways in which schools and the Association could implement and advance globalization. It was a new day and a new dimension for theological education.[213]

The 1990 Biennial Meeting was held in Pittsburgh, the third time in ten years in that city. The location seemed appropriate because the membership had approved a resolution in 1988 to relocate ATS headquarters from Vandalia (OH) to Pittsburgh (see p. 74 above). The Executive Committee reported in 1990 that it had secured the funding, location, architectural plans, and had broken ground in April 1990; ATS would commence operations there in early 1991 (Bulletin 39, 1990, Part 6, pp. 39-40). The Commission held its first meeting there in June 1991 (Commission Minutes, June 1991, p. 1). Dan Aleshire's hire, as the new "Associate Director with accrediting responsibilities," was announced at the 1990 meeting, effective July 1, 1990 (Bulletin 39, Part 6, p. 41; see also p. 76 above).

A revised DMin Standard was debated and eventually approved at the 1990 Biennial Meeting, with numerous amendments from the floor (Bulletin 39, 1990, Part 6, pp. 23 and 142-147). The first DMin Standard had been approved in 1972, revised in 1976, and revised again in 1984. The 1990 revision eliminated entirely the "in-sequence" DMin (see pp. 55 and 69 above), expanded considerably the program goals, updated the content section, and changed the admission requirements from requiring two years of post-MDiv ministry experience to requiring three years (Part 6, pp. 142-147).

The 1990 Biennial Meeting approved a revised Policy on the Accreditation of Theological Schools and Ecclesiastical Assessments (Bulletin 39, 1990, Part 6, pp. 21 and 154-158), after the first policy had been approved at the 1988 Biennial Meeting.[214] The membership also approved a new Policy on Disclosure and Confidentiality (Part 6, pp. 21 and 86-89). That policy had been approved by the Commission on Accrediting at its January 1989 meeting to reflect new COPA guidelines (see p. 76 above). The new four-page policy listed rather specific guidelines on what the Commission could and could not disclose, what member schools could say about their status, what visiting teams could write in their reports, and what member schools could do with those reports. The Commission also announced at the 1990 meeting the first ever *Handbook of Accreditation,* designed for both evaluation teams and schools being visited (Part 6, p. 42). The successor to that *Handbook* is the Self-Study Handbook, greatly reduced and revised.

[213] The Executive Committee announced at the 1990 meeting that Pew Charitable Trusts granted ATS $525,000 (worth nearly $1 million today) to support the work of the Task Force on Globalization (Bulletin 39, 1990, Part 6, p. 43).

[214] The ecclesiastical assessments policy responded to two primary ATS concerns: Roman Catholic seminary concerns over the "Vatican Visitations" from 1982 to 1986 and Methodist seminary concerns over that denomination's decision to conduct "institutional assessments" for all UMC seminaries (Pacala, *The Role of ATS in Theological Education*, pp. 91-95).

One other significant item that the membership approved in 1990 was a change in the Constitution brought by the Committee on the Constitutional Provision for Membership, appointed in 1988 (Bulletin 39, 1990, Part 6, pp. 149-153; see also p. 74 above). The Committee, after polling the membership, affirmed that voting members of the Association should be limited to graduate theological schools preparing leaders for Jewish and Christian communities of faith, though non-voting affiliate members could be from other faith traditions (see p. 53 above). In *The Role of ATS in Theological Education*, Pacala called this the "threshold issue" for ATS membership, stemming primarily from the application for associate membership by the Unification Theological Seminary (see p. 74 above and Footnote 176). The Unification application would come up again at the 2008 and 2010 Biennial Meetings (see p. 111 below).

Between the 1990 and 1992 Biennial Meetings the Commission dealt with numerous situations that reflected the changes made at the 1990 Biennial Meeting, while also addressing other emerging issues. For example, the January 1991 Commission meeting reminded two schools, requesting specialized DMin programs, that the newly revised DMin Standard allowed only MDiv graduates to be admitted (Minutes, pp. 15-16). The Commission also spent time on such matters as "contact time" between faculty and students, particularly for extension education (Commission Minutes, January 1991, p. 22 and January 1992, pp. 22 and 24). The difficulties at Southeastern Baptist (see pp. 76-77 above) resurfaced in January 1991 (Minutes, pp. 24-25), in June 1991 (Minutes, p. 42), and again in June 1992 (Minutes, pp. 11-13), at which point the Commission decided to place the school on probation and impose six notations.[215]

At its January 1991 meeting, the Commission reviewed a school's report on increasing women and minority representation, the first recorded instance of that issue in the Commission Minutes (Minutes, p. 26; see also pp. 66-67 above). At that June 1991 meeting, the Commission also reviewed a letter from the Committee on Underrepresented Constituencies, noting that of the Commission's 208 visitors, only 22 (11%) were women and only 13 (6%) were persons of color (Minutes, p. 3). The Committee "voted to receive the letter, note the importance of inclusion, and request the chair to respond" (Minutes, p. 3). It should be noted that the June 1991 meeting was the first time the Commission began using "evaluation committee" instead of "visiting team" (Minutes, p. 40). So, that term is used hereafter in this history.

Also at its June 1991 meeting, the Commission welcomed Jim Waits, Executive Director-Elect, and said goodbye to Leon Pacala, who was retiring (Minutes, p. 1; see also p. 82 below). In the same meeting, the Commission reminded a school that its plans for "off-campus video courses… must conform to relevant standards for off-campus and distance learning" (Minutes, p. 26; see also p. 72 above). In that same meeting, the Commission reminded another school that "ATS guidelines concerning external, or distance learning, programs have been developed with the assumption of an extension site in which there is a faculty member and some [kind of in-person] class configuration… [since] the standards assume that graduate professional education requires the presence of peers for a community of inquiry and faculty who can… cultivate interaction" (June 1991 Minutes, p. 30). The Commission expressed concern over any "program of video correspondence courses," since no correspondence work had ever been allowed by the Commission, dating back to 1940 (see p. 24 above), though no ATS Standard "specifically forbade" that model (Commission Minutes, January 1992, p. 27)—until 2012 (see p. 114 below).

[215] Southern Baptist Seminary was reviewed by the Commission in June 1991 for similar issues revolving around governance (Minutes, p. 25). In his *Piety and Plurality*, Miller devoted several pages to Southern's controversy (pp. 241-244), which, like Southeastern, involved a newly conservative governing board endangering what ATS believed to be issues of academic freedom for the faculty. In *The Role of ATS in Theological Education*, Pacala also devoted several pages (pp. 95-98) to "the ominous challenge to the integrity of theological schools posed by the Southern Baptist Convention" during the 1980s. Pacala was especially concerned over the "trustee challenges [from Southeastern Seminary] to the Association's jurisdiction… and threats of legal actions against ATS if it were to intrude in any way" (Pacala, p. 96).

Regarding "distance learning,"[216] in January 1992, the Commission "discussed at some length the draft of proposed revisions in the current standards regarding [extension] education programs" (Minutes, p. 25). The minutes of that meeting included a two-page summary of the discussion (Minutes, pp. 26-27), which argued for the "profound benefits for on-campus theological education, which offsets the sacrifice [of] pulling up stakes and moving." The Commission worried "if distance learning models make theological education more accessible, there is a risk of losing the core campus base in theological education" (Minutes, p. 26). Extension/distance education was becoming a key concern (see Endnote 11).

The January 1992 Commission meeting included a report from Dan Aleshire, as the fairly new Associate Director with accrediting responsibilities (see p. 78), on the U.S. Congress's reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, first signed into law in 1965 (see Footnote 128). He expressed concern over the Department of Education's increasing regulation of accrediting agencies and its increased attention to "default rates and educational outcomes issues" (Minutes, p. 2). Those issues would also occupy the Commission's time in the 1990s and beyond. Aleshire also gave a rather comprehensive, though preliminary, report on an "ATS Accrediting Practices and Procedures Study," which had been authorized in June 1991 and would be finalized by June 1992 (Commission Minutes, January 1992, pp. 28-30). In addition, Aleshire reviewed a "Prospectus for a Proposal to Review, Revise, and Implement Revisions in the ATS Standards and Criteria for Accrediting," which he felt would "likely require four years of work… by 1996" (Minutes, pp. 31-32). And that is just how long it took to complete the second redevelopment of the ATS Standards in 1996, the first since 1972 (see p. 56 above and pp. 87-88 below).

In that same January 1992 meeting, the Commission issued two "show cause" orders to two different schools as to why approval of their DMin degrees should not be withdrawn (Minutes, pp. 9 and 13), indicating again the tighter grip that the Commission was exercising in light of the newly revised DMin Standard (see p. 79 above). The Commission's "tighter grip" on schools in general was on full display when, after a "routine" reaffirmation visit, it voted to place the school on immediate probation, impose 11 (!) notations, and require a focused visit within a year (Commission Minutes, January 1992, pp. 13-15). The issues were a smorgasbord of inadequate faculty, inattentive governing board, insufficient staff, limited financial resources, and inadequate library. It may have been one of the harshest actions ever taken by the Commission, short of withdrawal of accreditation, which the Commission had not done since Temple in 1958 (see Footnote 110) and Asbury in 1954 (see p. 33 above).[217] Also, in January 1992, the Commission responded to its first complaint that it deemed had "standing," resulting in a focused visit (Minutes, pp. 24-25; see also p. 74 above).

At its June 1992 meeting, the Commission welcomed two guests, the Executive Director of the Northwest Association of Colleges and Schools, invited as an evaluator/consultant to the Commission, and a representative from "the U.S. Department of Education Agency Evaluation Branch, as part of a process by which ATS petitions for continued recognition by the Secretary" (Minutes, p. 1). That was also the meeting where the Commission gave a school only two years of "provisional accreditation" and imposed five notations (Minutes, p. 16), one of the toughest actions taken by the Commission on a school seeking initial accreditation. At that same meeting, the Commission voted to authorize a new

[216] The term "distance learning" in the early 1990s was used by the Commission to refer to classroom-based courses offered "at a distance" from the main campus, not to online learning, though see Footnote 228 for further clarification.

[217] Technically, the Commission voted to "suspend" Asbury in 1952, but it was removed from the accredited member list and placed on the associate member list in 1954. It was not listed again as an accredited school until 1960, since Commission policy at that time required a former member to wait five years before reapplying for accredited status. On at least one occasion after 2000, the Commission decided to withdraw accreditation from a member school, but that school withdrew "voluntarily" before the "involuntary" withdrawal was scheduled to take effect (see p. 112 below).

notation, imposed when a school failed to submit its Annual Report Forms (Commission Minutes, June 1992, p. 36). As its last action at that meeting, the Commission immediately imposed that new notation on four schools.

The decade of the 1980s had witnessed profound changes in the Association and in the Commission's Standards for Accrediting. It was a period that benefited substantially from the "Basic Issues" research that produced some of the deepest thinking about theological education in ATS history. It was a period that saw ATS address an increasing pluralism and rethink its standards regarding globalization, minority and women's concerns, educational delivery models, and a new definition of theological education that focused on the "reflective practitioner." The 1990s would witness even more profound changes.

Chapter 7. Redoing the Standards (1992-2003)

The 1992 Biennial Meeting in Pittsburgh was Jim Waits' first as Executive Director. Prior to joining ATS, he had been the academic dean at Candler School of Theology (1978-1991) and had been elected in 1990 as the ATS president.[218] Waits' Executive Director report was the shortest recorded in any ATS Bulletin, less than one page (Bulletin 40, 1992, Part 6, p. 37). He began his tenure by noting that "seldom has there been a time of greater potential or greater need in our larger ministry to the public" (Part 6, p. 37).

One of those "time[s] of greater potential or greater need in our larger ministry" was reflected in the fact that the 1992 Biennial Meeting was held jointly with the first ever Congress of the World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions (WOCATI; see pp. 77-78 above). Waits also noted the "splendid new facilities we now enjoy," with the ATS headquarters having been moved from Vandalia (OH) to Pittsburgh in February 1991 (see p. 78 above). The Committee on ATS Location and Facilities reported that the relocation project and new building on three acres "was completed within budget" at a total cost of just under $1.5 million, worth about $3.3 million today (Bulletin 40, 1992, Part 6, p. 100). The Vandalia property was sold for $138,000, the equivalent of $316,000 in today's dollars (Part 6, p. 39).[219]

Another one of Waits' "time of greater potential or greater need in our larger ministry" related to the membership's 1992 vote to "to approve the 'Quality, Accreditation, and Theological Education' project and its estimated budget… of $195,000," worth about $430,000 today—along with an 8% increase in annual dues (Bulletin 40, 1992, Part 6, p. 28). Seeking to answer one key question ("What is the good theological school?"), that project took four years and culminated in 1996 in a complete redevelopment of the Standards, the first wholesale redevelopment since 1972 and only the second in the Commission's history (see p. 56 above). To guide the project, the membership approved a 13-person "Steering Committee for the Review of Standards" (Part 6, p. 31) that included nine Mainline Protestants, three Evangelical Protestants, and one Roman Catholic (Katarina Schuth, who chaired the committee).

At the 1992 Biennial Meeting, the Executive Committee noted the "relatively large number of schools" applying for Associate Membership (Bulletin 40, 1992, Part 6, p. 40). Nine were inducted, the largest number since 1972 (see Appendix D). The Committee noted that the U.S. "Higher Education Reauthorization Bill raises considerable concerns for accreditation… with more stringent regulations from the U.S. Department of Education" (Part 6, p. 41; see Endnote 10). Those concerns would be reflected in three new Standards—all dealing with consumer protection—that were approved at the 1994 Biennial Meeting (see p. 85 below), right in the midst of the Standards redevelopment project.

The 1992 meeting did not approve any new or revised Standards, but it did approve a new set of "Criteria for Extension and Distance Learning Programs" (Bulletin 40, 1992, Part 6, pp. 103-109). The first set of criteria had been approved in 1980 (see p. 65 above), but the revision in 1992 doubled their length, adding more "adequate guidance for the evaluation of programs being implemented by member schools" (Part 6, p. 101). The "Distance Learning" portion of the new criteria referred to "independent external programs of study" (Part 6, p. 103), independent studies that might be aided by audio or video

[218] Waits left the ATS Executive Director position in 1998 to become president of The Fund for Theological Education (FTE), where he served until his retirement in 2003 (Emory website). The FTE, now called The Forum for Theological Education, was founded in 1954 to encourage excellence and diversity among candidates for the Christian ministry. The 1992 Bulletin included a report from FTE (Bulletin 40, 1992, Part 6, pp. 121-123), as did most ATS Bulletins.

[219] The Vandalia facility had been purchased in 1972 for $80,000, the equivalent of $600,000 in today's dollars (see p. 59 above).

(Part 6, p. 105). The revised criteria also divided extension education programs into four types (different from those listed on p. 76 above): sites where a complete degree could be earned, sites where only part of a degree could be earned, sites where courses were offered only occasionally, and "distance learning" offered primarily through one-on-one independent study (Bulletin 40, 1992, Part 6, p. 105; see Footnote 228). The revised "Criteria for Extension and Distance Learning Programs" would occupy an increasing amount of time during Commission meetings in the 1992-1994 biennium (see Endnote 11).

Between the 1992 and 1994 Biennial Meetings the Commission focused a fair amount of attention on several key issues, including extension education. For example, at its January 1993 meeting, the Commission dealt with two different schools' extension sites, imposing a "cease admissions" order on one school because its offsite MDiv did not meet the new extension criteria for residency and lifting a "cease admissions" order it had placed earlier on another school for a similar reason (Commission Minutes, January 1993, pp. 11 and 21-22). At that meeting, the Commission dealt with an appeal from a charter member school requesting that a notation it had recently imposed be removed. The Commission responded by appointing a three-Commissioner "sub-committee to hear the appeal," which appears to be the first instance of using this approach rather than the "Board of Review" established in 1956 (see p. 38 above and pp. 85 and 97 below). The notation was removed in June 1993 (Minutes, p. 16).

At every meeting between 1992 and 1994, the Commission heard an update from Aleshire on the "Quality and Accreditation Project," the four-year redevelopment of the Standards (e.g., Commission Minutes, January 1993, p. 2). At the January 1993 meeting, the Commission also began considering specific recommendations from the "Final Report of the Practices and Procedures Study," authorized in January 1992 (see p. 80 above). The Commission approved at that meeting five recommendations from that study, involving new policies on Complaints, Evaluation of Self-Studies, Advanced Standing with Credit, Conflict of Interest for Visitors,[220] and Focused Visits (Commission Minutes, January 1993, pp. 33-35). The second policy required visitors to include a section in each evaluation committee report on the adequacy of the school's self-study report. The Commission approved another new policy at its June 1993 meeting on Guidelines for Petitioning for Approval of New or Revised Degree Programs (Commission Minutes, June 1993, pp. 26-27). That set of petition guidelines from 1993 was revised in 1997 (Minutes, January 1997, pp. 43-44), with others added in June 1997 (Minutes, June 1997, p. 4).

The June 1993 Commission meeting also included representatives of a school regarding academic freedom, voting to "reconsider imposing a notation" and instead "require a focused visit" (Commission Minutes, pp. 2 and 20). At that same meeting, the Commission heard a staff report on concerns over the upcoming dissolution of COPA in 1994 (see Footnote 122) and the 1992 Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (see p. 82 above). Aleshire gave another update on "the Quality and Accreditation Project, including a description of the September 1993 consultation on 'The Good Theological School' in the spring 1994 edition of *Theological Education*" (Commission Minutes, June 1993, p. 2).

The January 1994 Commission meeting was the first for Michael Gilligan, newly hired Assistant Director of Accrediting. He had been academic dean of the Pontifical College Josephinum.[221] That meeting also saw one of the few times in Commission history when a school was reaffirmed for ten years with no reports required (Commission Minutes, January 1994, p. 13). The minutes of that meeting included a

[220] This was the first official policy allowing a school to object to a proposed visitor. One intriguing anecdote about a visitor conflict of interest involved an ATS staff person asking a school president if the proposed chair for that visit was acceptable. The president responded negatively because he said he had once "dated her." When the ATS staff asked the proposed chair to respond, she replied, "I don't remember ever dating him."

[221] Gilligan left ATS in 1998 to serve as program director for the Henry Luce Foundation, where he became president in 2002.

new category called "Staff Visits," somewhere between a required report and a focused visit (Minutes, p. 18). In light of the newly revised Criteria for Extension and Distance Learning Programs approved in 1992 (see p. 82 above), the Commission deferred action on a school's request to permit up to 15 semester hours to be completed via independent study (Commission Minutes, January 1994, p. 20), but decided at its next meeting to allow that—provided those 15 hours did not constitute more than one-sixth of the degree to which those hours were applied, per the new Criteria (Minutes, June 1994, p. 33).

During the January 1994 Commission meeting, Commissioners raised several questions for ATS staff to consider in the Standards redevelopment project, based on issues the Commission was encountering in its interactions with schools. Key questions raised dealt with what constituted an appropriate community of learning, what were legitimate models of distance education, how to distinguish between academic and professional degrees, and how to navigate gender and diversity issues in the context of confessional boundaries and institutional academic freedom (Commission Minutes, January 1994, pp. 31-32). At the January 1994 meeting, the Commission also approved a staff request to allow the Commission officers to act as an "executive committee of the Commission when decisions need to be finalized prior to the scheduled meeting," with all such decisions reported at the next Commission meeting (Commission Minutes, January 1994, p. 32). This is the first recorded instance of a Commission Executive Committee being empowered to act for the full Commission, though the Commission Minutes record no use of that authority until 2002 (see p. 96 below).

At its June 1994 meeting, the Commission approved new report deadlines (November 1 and April 1) and new fees for visiting international sites—to be based on actual travel costs, rather than on a flat fee that was assessed for North American visits (Commission Minutes, June 1994, pp. 2-3). That meeting also approved three new Standards that would be reviewed at the 1994 Biennial Meeting—all dealing with new U.S. Department of Education regulations (see p. 85 below). On a different matter, the Commission spent extensive time reviewing the situation at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (Commission Minutes, June 1994, p. 19). Southwestern's board had recently "unceremoniously fired Dilday [the president] and had him escorted physically from the campus" (Miller, *Piety and Plurality*, p. 245). Dilday had been a long-time ATS leader and former ATS president (1988-1990). The Commission authorized a second focused visit. Waits wrote in the *Christian Century* (1994, p. 308), "We view with utmost seriousness the dismissal of Russell Dilday from the presidency of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary… and I urge the trustees immediately to reconsider their action." The Commission would address this case again at its January 1995 meeting (see p. 86 below).[222]

The 1994 Biennial Meeting in Atlanta was one of the most unusual meetings of the Association. It began with a film[223] (a first), included a worship service at the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church[224] (a second first), issued a daily newsletter on topics discussed that day (a third first), and dedicated almost all of the

[222] At its June 1994 meeting, the Commission also considered a request by Dallas Theological Seminary for approval of its longstanding ThM degree, a four-year degree that combined the traditional three-year MDiv and one-year ThM degrees. The Commission "voted not to approve" the school's request "because the Commission is responsible for maintaining the public economy of approved degrees" (Commission Minutes, June 1994, p. 29). At its very next meeting, however, it reversed that decision and gave approval as an "exception," the first use of that term by the Commission (Minutes, January 1995, p. 14).

[223] The film was entitled, *Earthen Vessels: Challenges for the Good Theological School*, "produced in conjunction with the Quality and Accreditation Project to serve as a vehicle for beginning the conversation" (Bulletin 41, 1994, Part 6, p. 23).

[224] Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta had been pastored by Martin Luther King, Sr. and by MLK, Jr. The ATS president elected in 1994 was James Costen, a friend to both Kings. MLK, Sr. had participated in Costen's installation as pastor of the Church of the Master in Atlanta, the city's first interracial Presbyterian congregation (see African American Leaders in the PCUSA). At the time of the 1994 Biennial Meeting, Costen was president of the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta (Bulletin 41, 1994, Part 6, p. 29). Costen was only the second Black president of ATS; James was the first in 1970 (see p. 53 above).

meeting to eight working groups debating and discussing four framing questions (a fourth first). Those framing questions arose from this key question for the Standards redevelopment project: "What is the good theological school?" The 1994 meeting, which was the largest attended to date with nearly 300 participants, marked the halfway point in the four-year process to rewrite the Standards for Accrediting. The work group conversations each day resulted in four "Framework Statements" that informed the four task forces that would write the new Standards during the 1994-1996 biennium. The four statements addressed: (1) curriculum, formation, and cultivation of ministerial leadership; (2) teaching, learning, and the scholarly task; (3) institutional resources; and (4) administration and governance (Bulletin 41, 1994, Part 6, pp. 28-29).

The 1994 Biennial Meeting also approved revisions to the ATS Constitution and adoption of three new Standards to meet new U.S. Department of Education (USDE) regulations. The Constitutional revisions removed the Executive Committee from nominating Commissioners and from setting the Commission budget, giving those powers to the Commission for the first time—in response to USDE regulations that accrediting agencies be "separate and independent" (Bulletin 41, 1994, Part 6, pp. 34-40). The issue of "separate and independent" would continue to be a concern for the USDE until 2004, when ATS revised itself into two legally separate corporations: the Association and the Commission, with separate bylaws, budgets, and boards (see Footnote 8 and p. 100 below). The Constitutional revisions also introduced a new "Appeals Panel" and appeals process, removing that responsibility from the Executive Committee.

The three new Standards approved at the 1994 meeting addressed USDE concerns over schools accurately representing themselves to the public, having a process for addressing student complaints, and "demonstrat[ing] diligence in keeping student [loan] default rates at an acceptably low level" (Bulletin 41, 1994, Part 6, p. 41). Some of these changes also addressed concerns raised by the newly established CORPA, which had replaced COPA in 1994 (see Footnote 122). While it seems strange to adopt new Standards in the middle of a four-year process to rewrite all the Standards, the need to do so was urgent because the Commission had petitions before both organizations (USDE and CORPA) for continued recognition as an approved accrediting agency (Bulletin 41, Part 6, p. 70). The Commission also reported at the 1994 meeting that it had "approved a new edition of the *ATS Handbook of Accreditation*" (Part 6, p. 70) to address additional USDE and CORPA concerns. That Handbook had first been approved in 1990 (see p. 78 above).[225]

Between the 1994 and 1996 Biennial Meetings the Commission spent considerable time on two issues: (1) the Quality and Accreditation Project to rewrite the ATS Standards and (2) increasing concerns from USDE.[226] At its January 1995 meeting, the Commission hosted a USDE representative, who observed the meeting as part of the process for the Commission's petition for continued recognition with the Department. At that same meeting, the Commission reviewed and approved the USDE petition, drafted by the ATS staff, adopting numerous policy changes as a result. Those policies included limiting the number of years of candidacy, requiring all evaluation committee reports to "include an assessment of each school's performance with respect to the educational achievement of students," defining a "branch

[225] The 1994 Biennial Meeting also heard a report from the Joint ATS/ATLA Committee. That Committee had been established in 1993 by the ATS Executive Committee "to strengthen the relationship between ATS and ATLA, to identify areas of need in theological librarianship, and to address other issues of joint concern," one of which was to seek input from ATLA on a new library standard (Bulletin 41, 1994, Part 6, p. 120).

[226] The Commission also dealt with other matters, including the issue of professional vs. academic MA degrees (Commission Minutes, January 1995, p. 14) and complaints (Minutes, June 1995, pp. 29-30). The Commission also "discussed concerns about the collapse of the New Era Foundation for Philanthropy which adversely affected several ATS schools" (Minutes, June 1995, p. 2). For more on the New Era scandal for Christian organizations, see Foundation for New Era Philanthropy in Wikipedia and 25 Years Ago: John Bennett and the Foundation for New Era Philanthropy in *Ministry Watch*, May 21, 2020.

campus" as one offering at least 50% of a degree, requiring schools to publicize any upcoming ATS evaluation visit, considering the adverse actions of any other accrediting agency or of the USDE for an ATS member school, and not allowing notations to extend beyond three years (Commission Minutes, January 1995, pp. 3-4). The Commission approved additional policies at its June 1995 meeting on notifying USDE after appeals and adverse actions and on providing a "teach-out plan" for schools about to close (Minutes, June 1995, pp. 3-5). In addition, the Commission reduced then the time limit for notations from three years to two years, which it had just approved in January 1995.

The January 1995 Commission meeting hosted five representatives from Southwestern over concerns over their board's firing of the president in 1994. After considerable discussion, the Commission voted to place the school on probation (Commission Minutes, January 1995, pp. 12-13). The Commission had also placed Southeastern, another SBC seminary, on probation in 1991 for similar reasons (see p. 79 above). At its June 1995 meeting, the Commission reviewed a similar situation at Southern Baptist Seminary (see Footnote 215) but decided not to place the school on probation (Commission Minutes, June 1995, p. 28). At its January 1996 meeting, however, the Commission reviewed Southern again and imposed Notation N14.1 "General tone of the school impairs the capacity to provide significant theological education and ministerial training" (Commission Minutes, January 1996, pp. 11-12). At its May 1996 meeting, the Commission removed the probation it had placed on Southwestern, after a focused visit, though it did require another focused visit (Minutes, May 1996, pp. 21-22).

The January 1996 Commission meeting devoted six hours "to discuss *Draft Two* of the Redeveloped Accrediting Standards" (Minutes, p. 2). Four task forces (see p. 85 above) had developed drafts in the summer and early fall of 1995. The Redevelopment Steering Committee (see p. 82 above) brought together the four task force drafts into *Draft One* that was sent to the membership for comment in October 1995. The Steering Committee developed a second draft later that fall and distributed it in January 1996. Following the January 1996 Commission meeting and its comments, the Steering Committee hosted eight regional meetings in late January and early February 1996 to seek additional input. A final draft was presented to the membership for a vote at the 1996 Biennial Meeting in Denver (see p. 87 below).[227]

The Commission also voted in May 1996 to "authorize staff to appoint a Commission Task Force to examine issues related to external independent study [228]and report to the Commission regarding changes the Commission should propose to the redeveloped standard on extension education," as well as "issues related to international extension programs" (Commission Minutes, May 1996, p. 3).

The January 1996 and May 1996 Commission meetings devoted considerable time to USDE concerns, which the Department had communicated to the Commission as part of its renewal of recognition, which was limited to only three years (Commission Minutes, January 1996, p. 2, and May 1996, p. 2). A key concern was the Department's desire for the Commission to be "separate and independent" from the Association. In response, the Commission voted to recommend to the membership a new policy that would give the Commission the authority to set its own budget (Minutes, May 1996, p. 2), per the change in the ATS Constitution in 1994 (see p. 85 above).

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[227] The entire four-year redevelopment process is summarized in the Spring 1996 issue of *Theological Education*, which was devoted in its entirety to the Quality and Accreditation Project, including an overview by Katarina Schuth, the Steering Committee chair. That issue contains the entire set of Revised Standards and the Proposed Accrediting Policies and Procedures.

[228] In the 1990s "external independent study" was the term ATS used for "distance education" (online learning), where students were geographically separated from instructors and other students and where instruction typically employed some form of technology (Distance Education and The Association of Theological Schools in *Theological Education*, Autumn 1999, p. x).

The 1996 Biennial Meeting in Denver, the Association's 40th, lasted four days and culminated in a vote on the four-year project to redevelop the Standards.[229] The final vote of nearly 200 member schools was overwhelmingly positive, with only two no votes and two abstentions.[230] That vote was preceded by 31 amendments from the floor,[231] the most ever (see pp. 56 and 69 above). Twenty were recommended, after review by the Committee on Reference and Counsel (see Footnote 155). Most of the 20 approved amendments were relatively minor in nature, though a few were more substantive. For example, the membership approved an amendment changing Standard 2.5 on Integrity that required schools to "enhance participation of persons of racial/ethnic minorities in institutional life" to "*Schools shall seek to* enhance participation of persons of racial/ethnic minorities in institutional life" (Bulletin 42, 1996, Part 6, p. 27). Standard 8.3.1.3 on Governance was amended from a requirement that trustees "reflect the desirability of diversity regarding race, ethnicity, and gender" to "*In accordance with the school's purpose and constituencies*, the governing board's membership should reflect diversity of race, ethnicity, and gender" (Part 6, p. 29). The issue of gender diversity would come back as a source of considerable contention at the 2010 Biennial Meeting (see p. 110 below).

The final vote of approval in 1996 was what Aleshire, then Associate Executive Director and the person most involved in the redevelopment project, called "his 'very best day at ATS'—and he had nearly 9,900 days at ATS."[232] The day was so emotional that immediately after the vote ATS President Costen led those assembled in the Grand Ballroom of Adam's Mark Hotel in Denver in a spontaneous singing of the Doxology. That was a memorable day in the history of the ATS Commission on Accrediting. The chair of the Redevelopment Steering Committee, Katarina Schuth, spoke for many when she said it had been "a lengthy process that has had only one goal: the improvement of graduate theological education in the United States and Canada" ("The Quality and Accreditation Project" in *Theological Education*, Spring 1996, p. 1). The Executive Director of ATS echoed that theme in his 1996 report, noting that "generations of leaders of this Association… have been committed from the first to 'the improvement of theological education' [and that] the most comprehensive assessment of standards in the history of ATS accreditation [is] a reaffirmation of that commitment" (Bulletin 42, 1996, Part 6, p. 41).

The newly redeveloped Standards lengthened the existing Standards (last redeveloped in 1972) from 49 to 81 pages.[233] The existing (pre-1996) Standards covered 11 Degree Program Standards, plus the following 14 General Institutional Standards: (1) Institutional Purpose, (2), Students, (3) Faculty, (4)

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[229] At the 1996 Meeting the membership also "voted that the Association condemns the burning of African American churches and the racism that emanates from such violence" (Bulletin 42, 1996, Part 6, p. 33). That appears to be the first time in ATS history that the membership voted on that kind of issue, since ATS Biennial Meetings were not designed as forums for social issues. The 2018 Biennial Meeting—back in Denver—also entertained several resolutions from the floor to condemn certain U.S. immigration policies at the time that were deemed racist. The membership voted not to approve any of those resolutions, since many members felt that such actions were outside the scope of the Association and would entangle ATS in U.S. politics.

[230] The "two schools that formally abstained requested that their names appear in the record: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary" (Bulletin 42, 1996, Part 6, p. 33).

[231] Commission policy at the time required that for an amendment to be considered, it had to be "endorsed" by at least 25 accredited members (Bulletin 42, Part 6, p. 27). The 20 approved amendments are listed in Bulletin 42 (1996, Part 6, pp. 27-32).

[232] The Aleshire quotation is from Tanner's "Accreditation Standards: A Look Back and a Look Around" in *Theological Education* (2018, Volume 52, Number 1, p. 33). The entire issue was A Tribute to Daniel O. Aleshire on the occasion of his retirement from ATS in June 2017, after 27 years, the last 19 as Executive Director (1998-2017).

[233] One part of the pre-1996 Standards that was shortened in 1996 was summarizing the six-page "Criteria for Clusters" (adopted in 1970; see p. 52 above) into a one-page section 9.7 on Clusters under Standard 9 on Institutional Resources (Bulletin 42, 1996, Part 3, pp. 65-66 and 161-166). The five-page "Criteria for Extension and Distance Learning Programs" (adopted in 1992) was incorporated into the new Standard 10 on Extension Education in 1996.

Governance and Administration, (5) Finances, (6) Library, (7) Buildings and Plant, (8) Evaluation, (9) Globalization of Theological Education, (10) Responsiveness to Minority and Women's Concerns, (11) Educational Programs Conducted Off-Campus, (12) Institutional Policies Regarding Placement, (13) Nomenclature, and (14) U.S. Higher Education Act, Title IV Participants [234] (Bulletin 42, 1996, Part 3, pp. 117-129).

The Standards approved in 1996 covered the same 11 Degree Program Standards, plus these 10 General Institutional Standards: (1) Purpose, Planning, and Evaluation; (2) Institutional Integrity; (3) Learning, Teaching, and Research: Theological Scholarship; (4) The Theological Curriculum; (5) Library and Information Resources; (6) Faculty; (7) Student Recruitment, Admissions, Services, and Placement; (8) Authority and Governance; (9) Institutional Resources; and (10) Extension Education. A key change in Standard 10 allowed up to one-third of a degree to be earned by "external independent study," which was the term ATS used at that time for what would later be called "online learning" (see Footnote 228).

The 1996 Standards differed significantly from earlier Standards. The first four 1996 Standards were either entirely new or substantially rewritten. Standard 2 on Integrity incorporated the earlier standard on minority and women's concerns. In tone, the 1996 Standards were quite different, focusing as much on "aspirational" aspects of the Standards as on "assurance" aspects. They were also much more detailed, with sub-points to the second, third, fourth, and sometimes fifth level in many Standards.

The General Institutional Standards continued to be numbered, while the Degree Program Standards used letters for the first time (e.g., A. MDiv). The 11 Degree Program Standards also added a 12th letter, L for Criteria for Admission, Transfer of Credits, Shared Credits in Degree Programs, and Advanced Standing Related to ATS-Approved Degree Programs. That was the longest title for any Standard ever and served as a sort of "catch-all" for several U.S. Department of Education regulations and for issues addressed recently by the Commission on Accrediting.

As noted in the Report of the Steering Committee of the Quality and Accreditation Project (Bulletin 42, 1996, Part 6, p. 95), after four years of intensive labor, four task forces, three drafts, two Biennial Meetings, eight regional meetings involving 221 individuals from 134 ATS schools, and nearly 300 pages of membership comments, the new 1996 Standards were approved and ready to be implemented. It was one of the most collaborative, participatory projects in the history of the ATS Commission.[235] It is worth noting, though, that the four task force essays on "The Good Theological School" in 1994 (see p. 83), which helped launch that major project, had nothing to say about distance education, according to Elizabeth Patterson in The Questions of Distance Education (*Theological Education*, Autumn 1996, p. 5).

Between the 1996 and 1998 Biennial Meetings the Commission wrestled again, as in the previous biennial period, with new U.S. Department of Education regulations, as well as some existing regulations that the Department felt ATS had not yet fully met. At its January 1997 meeting, the Commission approved a number of new policies in the Commission Policy Manual that dealt with such issues as complaints, notifying the Department in a timely manner, and responding to adverse actions taken by another accrediting agency regarding an ATS member that was dually accredited (Commission Minutes,

[234] Standard 14 on the U.S. Higher Education Act proved to be the shortest-lived Standard in ATS Commission history, having been adopted in 1994 as a stop-gap measure until the 1996 Standards could be adopted. The key points of the former Standard 14 were incorporated into Standard 2 on Institutional Integrity, under sub-point 2.6 on responsibility of Title IV participants.

[235] Also approved at the 1996 Biennial Meeting was a major revision of the Procedures Related to Membership and Accreditation (Bulletin 42, 1996, Part 3, pp. 1-27). For the first time, the Commission included a procedure on issuing a "warning," which was not public and could not exceed two years (Part 3, p. 15). The "warning" option was deleted in 2004 (see p. 100 below) but was resurrected in the 2020 redevelopment (see Footnote 113).

January 1997, pp. 2-3). At that meeting, the Commission approved its own budget for the very first time in its history, per USDE regulations (Minutes, p. 5; see also p. 86 above). The Commission also dealt with "an apparent breach of confidentiality on the part of an ATS-appointed visiting committee member" (Minutes, January 1997, p. 6). At the same meeting, the Commission handled several petitions for extension sites in South Korea, to which all petitioners were referred to a special consultation in late spring 1997 at the ATS office on "degree programs in South Korea" (Minutes, January 1997, pp. 27-28).

The January 1997 Commission meeting was also the first where a petition to offer extension courses "by compressed interactive video" was approved as an experiment (Minutes, p. 28).[236] Regarding that approval, the Autumn 1999 issue of *Theological Education* on Educational Technology and Distance Education: Issues and Implications for Theological Education included an article on "Summaries of Two Experimental Distance Education Programs," approved by the Commission in 1997 (pp. 117-124). One was about New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary's experiment to offer courses taught by on-campus faculty via "compressed interactive video" to students at its (then) ten graduate extension centers. The other was about Bethel Theological Seminary's experiment to offer an "In-Ministry MDiv" via a "distributed delivery system… to ministry-active learners in remote ministry settings using friendly technology." Both experiments were approved by the Commission in preparation for a new standard on distance education proposed for the 2000 Biennial Meeting.

Those two experiments were the first "online" programs approved by the Commission, long after other higher education institutions began offering fully online programs (the two ATS experiments still required some residency).[237] The Commission soon realized that there was "a higher number of institutions participating in distance education than had been anticipated," according to Report of the [Fall 1998] Survey of ATS Schools on Educational Technology and Distance Education for the Autumn 1999 issue of *Theological Education* (quote from p. 127 of that article). That survey revealed that almost one-third of ATS schools (63 of 201 respondents) were offering one or more courses through "distance education," though almost half were non-credit courses. The most common technologies used then by ATS schools were emails (45 of 63), audio tapes (39 of 63), and the "World Wide Web" (29 of 63), with most of those technologies supplemented by print-based materials (Amos, p. 129). The issue of online education for theological schools would occupy the Commission for the next two decades, beginning with a new Standard on Distance Education in 2000, revised in 2012, and completely rewritten in 2020.

The June 1997 Commission meeting included approval of a revised Handbook of Accreditation,[238] which was to be "introduced at the self-study workshop September 26-27, 1997" (Commission Minutes, June 1997, p. 2). That is the first reference in the Commission minutes to a self-study workshop, though it may not have been the first one. At their June 1997 meeting, the Commissioners approved new guidelines for petitioning for new extension education sites and for closing a school (Minutes, p. 4). The Commission also discussed concerns from some ATS members regarding recent "actions by the Commission on Theological Education of the University Senate of the United Methodist Church [that led] to some ATS schools [being] deleted from the Senate's list of certified [UMC] schools" (Minutes, June 1997, p. 4).

[236] The January 1997 Commission meeting also approved a special "two-year exception" to another school to admit students without a baccalaureate degree, though any such "exceptions are to be granted on a case-by-case basis" (Minutes, p. 32).

[237] In the Autumn 1999 issue of *Theological Education*, devoted to distance education, one article noted that by 1997 "distance education programs were offered by 850 accredited North American institutions" (p. 126). That same article noted that in 1995 there were an estimated 30 million Internet users (p. 125). Today there are 5.35 billion (!) Internet users, two-thirds of the planet (see Number of Internet and Social Media Users Worldwide as of January 2024).

[238] The first Handbook of Accreditation was approved in 1990 (see p. 78 above), with a revision approved in 1994 (see p. 85 above). The 1997 revision was the first to be published in multiple volumes and included a new section on "Department of Education mandates" (Commission Minutes, June 1997, p. 2).

At its June 1997 meeting, the Commission heard a report from the Task Force on Educational Technology and External Independent Study. This Task Force has been authorized by the Commission at its May 1996 meeting "to examine issues related to external independent study and report to the Commission regarding changes the Commission should propose to the redeveloped standard on extension education, as well as issues related to international extension programs" (see p. 86 above).[239] Not accidentally, at its very next meeting in January 1998, the Commission welcomed Katherine Amos, newly hired Director of Accreditation and *Educational Technology* (emphasis added). Another new ATS staff member, Elizabeth Patterson, was welcomed at the Commission's May 1998 meeting. She served as Director of Accreditation and Educational Evaluation, a concern of the U.S. Department of Education (USDE).

The Commission also hosted at that January 1998 meeting another USDE representative, as it had in 1992 and 1995 (see pp. 80 and 85 above). That was the meeting where the Commission approved several new policies related to USDE regulations and/or concerns, such as designating a certain portion of ATS membership dues for the Commission, part of USDE's concern that the Commission be "separate and independent" from the Association (see pp. 85-86 above), as well as recommending an addition to Standard 5.2 requiring member schools to track graduation and placement rates (Commission Minutes, January 1998, pp. 8-10).

The May 1998 meeting of the Commission included approval of new notations to align with the 1996 Standards (Commission Minutes, May 1998, pp. 3-6). There were now 62 notations,[240] including 18 new or revised ones on Standard 4. Theological Curriculum, which included the various Degree Programs. The new notations were printed in Bulletin 43, 1998, Part 2 Membership List (pp. 154-158). For the first time since 1976, they did not include any separate notations for the DMin degree (see p. 61 above), nor did they include any notations for Associate Members, which had existed since 1968 (see p. 50 above).

The minutes of the May 1998 meeting[241] recorded for the first time the categories of "areas of strength" and "areas for growth" when the Commission reviewed schools for reaffirmation of accreditation. Prior to that (since at least 1986; see p. 71 above), the Commission Minutes recorded in its reaffirmation actions only areas that required focused visits, reports, or notations. The Commission also approved at its May 1998 meeting another experiment (see first two discussed on p. 89 above), approving a petition from a member school to offer the ThM to "one cohort of students [in] a modified delivery" format (Minutes, May 1998, p. 39). The Commission was gearing up to push the bounds regarding extension education and distance delivery through technology, something that would occupy its attention for the next few decades.

The 1998 Biennial Meeting in Baltimore had as its theme "Theological Education in a Technological Age." That was fitting, given the heavy emphasis on technology at that meeting. The theme was addressed through two plenary sessions and eight different workshops. As the outgoing Executive Director stated in his 1998 report: "It is appropriate that the theme of this meeting addresses one of the most critical and

[239] The 1996 Biennial Meeting had also voted to support that Commission action by authorizing that task force to do its work by the 2000 Biennial Meeting (Bulletin 42, 1996, p. 33).

[240] The previous list of Notations (in 1996) totaled 91, including 40 DMin notations, plus another six Notations for Candidate and Associate Members (Bulletin 42, 1996, Part 4, pp. 144-148).

[241] The May 1998 Commission meeting was the last for Michael Gilligan (see Footnote 221) and the last for Dan Aleshire—as Associate Director. At the June 1998 Biennial Meeting, Aleshire was elected as the Association's fifth Executive Director. The six ATS Executive Directors are Charles Taylor (1956-1966), Jesse Ziegler (1966-1980), Leon Pacala (1980-1991), James Waits (1991-1998), Dan Aleshire (1998-2017), and Frank Yamada (2017-).

potentially institution-changing issues this Association has faced in its history" (Bulletin 43, 1998, Part 3, p. 42).[242] While that may be an overstatement, the whole issue of distance education for theological education proved to be quite controversial. A key outcome of the discussions at the 1998 Biennial Meeting and the continued conversations during the next biennium was the approval of a revised Standard on Distance Education at the 2000 Biennial Meeting (see p. 93 below). As the Executive Director noted in his last address in 1998: "Few issues confronting the schools today challenge more fundamentally the means and instrumentalities of our work [with the hope that] as these discussions bring insight and clarity to these matters, they will contribute to the historic purpose of the Association—'the improvement of theological education'" (Bulletin 43, 1998, Part 3, p. 47).[243]

At the 1998 Biennial Meeting, the Commission on Accrediting reported that it had focused its attention during the past biennium on several issues, including extension/distance education, as well as increased oversight from the U.S. Department of Education (USDE). Regarding the former, the Commission had adopted new guidelines for schools seeking to open international sites. It also reported that work on a new standard on distance education was well underway and would be ready for the 2000 Biennial Meeting. Regarding the latter, the Commission proposed several minor changes to the 1996 Standards to comply with USDE regulations, focused on schools measuring graduation and placement rates and on a new annual dues formula that would clarify the "financial independence" of the Commission from the Association. Both were approved. The Commission also proposed, and the membership approved, a new Degree Program Standard for a Doctor of Educational Ministry (Bulletin 43, 1998, Part 3, pp. 31-35). That new standard was in response to several SBC seminaries that had petitioned the Commission earlier to offer the degree, with the Commission concluding that the 1996 Standards did not cover it.

The 1998 Biennial Meeting included an installation service for the new Executive Director, Dan Aleshire, who spoke on "What Song Shall We Sing?" with a slide presentation showing various chapel and worship settings at ATS schools (Bulletin 43, 1998, Part 3, p. 44). The 1998 meeting also heard the first report on "Women in Leadership," appointed in 1996 "to initiate a program of leadership development for women in theological education" (Part 3, p. 108). The report noted that it had hosted the very first conferences for ATS women leaders, one in Pittsburgh in September 1997 and another in Alexandria (VA) in March 1998.[244]

Between the 1998 and 2000 Biennial Meetings the Commission addressed issues from the 1998 Biennial Meeting[245] and those anticipated at the 2000 Meeting, especially issues related to extension/distance

[242] As noted in Footnote 146, the 1998 Bulletin 43 was the first to reduce the number of parts from eight to three, with Part 3 containing the Biennial Meeting program and minutes. Part 2 contained the Membership List and Part 1 had everything else.

[243] The 1998 Biennial Meeting heard a report from the Data Center Advisory Committee, appointed in 1994, that noted two fairly new tools for ATS schools: the Institutional Peer Profile Report and the Strategic Information Report (Bulletin 43, p. 120).

[244] The very first Committee on Women in Theological Education had been appointed in 1974 (see pp. 59-61 above). The first woman Commission chair was elected in 1978 (see p. 63 above); the first woman ATS president was elected in 1986 (see p. 71). The 1978 Standards were the first to address minority and women's concerns, with significant input from the Committee on Women in Theological Education (see p. 63 above; see also Bulletin 33, 1978, Part 6, p. 85). At the 1978 Biennial Meeting, that Committee, along with the Committee on the Black Religious Experience in Theological Education and the Committee on Hispanic/American Theological Education were "discontinued" but replaced by a new "Committee on Underrepresented Constituencies" (Bulletin 34, 1980, Part 6, p 109). In 2000, the Committee on Underrepresented Constituencies was changed to CORE, the Committee on Race and Ethnicity in Theological Education (Bulletin 44, 2000, Part 3, p. 123).

[245] One of those issues was actually from the 1996 Biennial Meeting that lasted until fall 1998: the "Pilot School Project" that involved eight ATS schools as they implemented the new 1996 Standards as part of their decennial evaluations. That project is addressed at length in the Autumn 1998 issue of *Theological Education*, Models of Assessing Institutional and Educational Effectiveness: The Pilot School Project.

education. At its first Commission meeting, the Commissioners heard a report from the Task Force on Extension Education, which included visits to the two schools that had received approval in 1997 to offer programs through online delivery methods (Commission Minutes, January 1999, p. 3; see p. 89 above). At its January 1999 meeting, ATS staff reviewed issues related to quite a few international visits, several of which were in Korea (Minutes, pp. 4 and 31-34). Each Commission meeting of the 1998-2000 biennium devoted a section of the minutes to petitions for four different types of extension education programs (described on p. 83 above), including "proposals related to external independent study," i.e., online programs, which were limited to no more than one-third of a degree (see, e.g., Commission Minutes, January 1999, pp. 43-44).

The January 1999 Commission meeting minutes for the first time included specific strengths and areas of concern for each school reviewed for reaffirmation of accreditation, per the Commission's earlier discussion in May 1998 (p. 90 above). The non-public sanction of "warning," approved in 1996 (see Footnote 235), was issued to several schools at the January 1999 Commission meeting (Minutes, pp. 16, 31, and 45). At their June 1999 meeting, Commissioners welcomed Marsha Foster Boyd as the new Director-Elect for Accreditation and Leadership Education and also noted that Charles Willard would be resigning from the Commission to join the ATS staff as a Director of Accreditation (Commission Minutes, June 1999, pp. 1 and 3).[246] At that meeting, the Commission adopted a revised Handbook of Accreditation that included a whole new section on globalization (Minutes, p. 3).

One of the more difficult issues at the June 1999 Commission meeting dealt with Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, which the Commission had placed on "warning," following a "fact-finding visit to investigate issues surrounding a complaint related to incidents at the School in 1997" (Minutes, June 1999, p. 4). The "incidents" revolved around the Greek Orthodox Archbishop who oversaw the School of Theology (for details see Embattled Greek Orthodox Archbishop Resigns, *Religion News Service* January 1, 1999). The Commission minutes record a lengthy discussion on this "unprecedented" case, which had endangered the "bonds of trust" articulated in Standard 8 on Authority and Governance. In the end, the Commission voted to remove the school from warning status, but reminded the school that the issues of trust and governance would be reviewed again in the school's 2001 comprehensive evaluation visit (Minutes, June 1999, p. 6).

The June 1999 Commission meeting also reviewed "Guidelines for the Use of an MA in Intercultural Studies as Nomenclature" (Minutes, pp. 7-9). The Commission noted that "over the past two years [it] had received several petitions from member schools for permission to offer an MA in Intercultural Studies" but it was not clear how schools were "distinguishing this degree from an MA in Missions" (Minutes, p. 7). At that same meeting, the Commission "voted to authorize the Committee on Distance Learning to prepare an eleventh standard, on distance learning, in line with Standard Ten" on Extension Education that would be ready for review by the Commission at its June 2000 meeting, in preparation for proposing it to the membership at the 2000 Biennial Meeting (Minutes, p. 6). At the June 1999 meeting (Minutes, pp. 58-59), the Commission "extended indefinitely its approval" of the experiment by New Orleans Baptist Seminary to deliver as much as 30% of its extension site programs via "compressed interactive video" (see p. 89 above).

At its January 2000 meeting, the ATS staff raised some concerns about "possible and probable abuses of the DMin program standards, particularly having to do with the admission requirement of three years of

[246] William Myers was welcomed as a new director in accreditation at the January 2000 Commission meeting (Minutes, p. 1). So, as of January 2000, the Commission director-level staff were *Katherine Amos* (Accreditation and Educational Technology), *Marsha Foster Boyd* (Accreditation and Leadership Education), *William Myers* (Leadership Education and Accreditation), *Elizabeth Patterson* (Accreditation and Educational Evaluation), and *Charles Willard* (Accreditation and Institutional Evaluation).

experience following the first professional degree" (Minutes, p. 2). That issue would arise in future meetings. At its June 2000 meeting, the Commission adopted a revised Policy Manual of the Commission on Accrediting (Minutes, p. 2). The Commission also reviewed a copy of the ATS staff report to the U.S. Department of Education, responding to the conditions for granting ATS a "four-year period of recognition" (Minutes, June 2000, p. 2). The Commission also reviewed and recommended to the membership (at the 2000 Biennial Meeting) a significantly revised Standard 10 on Multiple Locations and Distance Education. Instead of proposing an "eleventh standard on distance learning" (see previous paragraph), the Commission decided instead to add a new section to Standard 10 on Extension Education, approved in 1996 (Commission Minutes, June 2000, p. 2).[247] Along with that, the Commission adopted revised "Guidelines for Petitioning the ATS Commission on Accrediting for Approval of Programs at Multiple Locations (Extension Education) and Distance Education Programs," as well as revised "Guidelines for Evaluation of Proposals for Programs of International Theological Education" (Minutes, June 2000, pp. 2-3).

The 2000 Biennial Meeting in Toronto focused on "Continuity and Change" (Bulletin 44, 2000, Part 3, p. 1). One of the most significant changes in ATS history was the adoption at that meeting of a rather radically revised Standard 10 on Multiple Locations and Distance Education (Part 3, pp. 41-52). It replaced the former Standard 10 on Extension Education, approved in 1996, which had referred to distance education as "external independent study" (Bulletin 43, 1998, Part 1, p. 86; see also Footnote 228). Attached to the new Standard 10 in 2000 was a new set of "Procedures for Approval of Programs Involving Multiple Locations (Extension Sites) and Distance Education" (Bulletin 44, 2000, Part 3, pp. 52-55). The new Standard and Procedures were approved, with three amendments from the floor (Bulletin 44, Part 3, pp. 31 and 40).

Both the new Standard and the new Procedures recognized four types of extension sites: complete degree sites, ongoing courses offering sites, occasional course offering sites, and international sites (see p. 83 above). They both also recognized "distance education" as a distinct category, separate from extension education. The Standard defined distance education as "a mode of education in which major components of the program, including course work, occur when students and instructors are not in the same location. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous and usually encompasses a wide range of technologies" (Bulletin 44, 2000, Part 3, p. 46).

All five of these delivery modalities required Commission approval, except occasional course offering sites. Distance education (online) courses taught for more than one year required approval at two levels: (1) the first two courses (up to one-sixth of a degree) and (2) anything more than one-sixth of a degree, which the Commission called "comprehensive distance education." The one-third limit for "external independent study" (i.e., distance education) introduced in 1996 was replaced in 2000 with this statement: "Residency requirements shall conform to those specified in the ATS Standards for the degree programs to which distance education course work is credited" (Bulletin 44, 2000, Part 1, p. 94). The residency requirements for the three-year MDiv and two-year professional MA degrees required "one full year" at the main campus or at an approved extension site (Part 1, pp. 103 and 111) and "at least half of the course work" for the two-year academic MA (Part 6, p. 110).

[247] The first standard on extension education had been approved in 1980 as Standard IX on Educational Programs Conducted Off-Campus. It was only one paragraph but referenced the first "Criteria for Extension/Satellite Credit Offerings and Degree Programs," also approved in 1980 (see p. 65 above). In 1992, the membership retained the one-paragraph Standard IX (renumbered as XI) but expanded greatly the "Criteria for Extension and Distance Learning Programs" and for the first time "recognized what ATS called 'distance learning,' described as 'instruction for individuals outside the classroom setting'" (Aleshire, Distance Education and the Association of Theological Schools in *Theological Education*, Autumn 1999, p. vii).

The net effect was to expand the 1996 one-third online limit to one-half for an MA and two-thirds for an MDiv. Standard 10.4.2 also allowed for exceptions or experiments involving "modified requirements for programs that embody an educational design that ensures high standards of quality, congruence with the educational mission of the schools, and coherence with the educational values and outcomes of theological education" (Bulletin 44, 2000, Part 3, p. 51).

The 2000 Biennial Meeting, Aleshire's first full meeting as the new Executive Director (he was installed at the end of the 1998 Meeting; see p. 91 above[248]), approved a new mission statement: "*The mission of The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada is to promote the improvement and enhancement of theological schools to the benefit of communities of faith and the broader public*" (Bulletin 44, 2000, Part 3, p. 27). It was the result of months of conversations by the Executive Committee with ATS school leaders and was based on the four purposes stated in the ATS Constitution, the last of which was to "promote the improvement of theological education" (Part 3, p. 63).

The new mission statement added two things to the Constitutional purpose statement. First, it expanded "improvement" to include "enhancement," since the sentiment in 2000 was that ATS schools "have improved … but could be better" (Bulletin 44, 2000, Part 3, p. 64). Second, the new mission statement identified the Association's audiences or "the end to which improvement and enhancement [should] be oriented" (Part 3, p. 64), namely "to the benefit of communities of faith and the broader public." That ATS mission statement has not changed since its adoption in 2000 (see ATS website). The Executive Committee also reported that under Aleshire's leadership, and after many conversations with senior leaders of member schools, ATS would focus on "four core functions: accreditation, leadership education, development of theological education, and data and communications" (Part 3, p. 59).

The Commission on Accrediting reported at the 2000 Biennial Meeting on its activities during the past biennium (Bulletin 44, 2000, Part 3, pp. 96-97). Key accomplishments included proposing a new Standard 10 on Multiple Locations and Distance Education (see p. 93 above), conducting annual Self-Study Workshops (attended by 68 schools), offering training events for evaluation committee chairs, and proposing minor changes to various documents to conform to USDE regulations, as well as those from the recently formed Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA; see Footnote 122).[249]

Between the 2000 and 2002 Biennial Meetings the Commission approved numerous petitions for online courses. At its very first meeting in January 2001, the Commission approved eight petitions for online education: six schools for two "distance education courses" and two schools for "distance education programs," including one school for an "experimental project" for a substantially online academic MA program (Commission Minutes, January 2001, pp. 31-33). Later in that meeting, the Minutes recorded that "from time to time the Commission has approved experimental programs as a means of testing the viability of alternative educational practices for theological education [but felt it now needed] to establish guidelines for member schools regarding applications for degree programs that do not conform to all aspects of Standard 10" (Minutes, January 2001, p. 47). It added that "the provision for experimental programs must be used sparingly" (p. 47). At its very next meeting, the Commission denied a school's petition for an experimental online "pilot" program (Minutes, June 2001, p. 46).

[248] The 2000 Biennial Meeting was also the first for Chris Meinzer, hired in 1999 as ATS's chief financial officer. He is currently the longest serving ATS staff member (and within two years of surpassing Aleshire as the longest serving ever).

[249] The 2000 Biennial Meeting also heard the last report from the Task Force on Globalization, "which held its final meeting on October 23, 1999, concluding nearly two decades of work, [reporting that it] is happy to conclude its work with … evidence that globalizing theological education is well established as a goal and practice of ATS schools" (Bulletin 44, 2000, Part 3, p. 143).

The January 2001 Commission meeting included a report on the "Pilot School Project" (see Footnote 245) that "demonstrates, overall, that the Standards are effective and have validity and integrity" (Minutes, p. 46). The Commission also renewed six Associate Members' "requests for renewal of Associate Membership, (Minutes, January 2001, pp. 34-35). That was the first time the Commission implemented a new procedure, approved in 1996, that limited Associate Membership to five years and required a renewal request to the Commission at the end of that period (Bulletin 42, 1996, Part 3, p. 5).

The June 2001 Commission meeting contains the first recorded instance of the Commission postponing a school's reaffirmation visit because "the self-study was inadequate to make feasible the comprehensive visit scheduled" (Commission Minutes, June 2001, p. 32). Ironically, the school receiving that action was a well-known, well-respected charter member of ATS. At that same June 2001 meeting, the Commission deferred approval of a school's petition for two online courses "until the school demonstrates how the delivery of the courses actually meets the requirements of the standard for interaction in the online environment among students" (Minutes, p. 44). That is the first recorded instance of a concern that would occur frequently over the coming years regarding what is now called "regular and substantive interaction" in online learning.[250]

One of the practices clarified at the June 2001 Commission meeting was to ask evaluation committees to reduce the number of "strengths" they included in their reports. First introduced in 1999 (see p. 92 above), the number of strengths that an evaluation committee found at a given school had begun to balloon to ten or more. So, in June 2001 the Commission asked committees to limit their list of school strengths to a few that were "distinctive" (Commission Minutes, June 2001, p. 61). At that meeting, the Commission also clarified when an evaluation committee might require a report vs. a notation and further noted that when an evaluation committee recommended several notations, "it should also include a recommendation that the school be put on warning" (Minutes, p. 61).

At its January 2002 meeting, the Commission actions on schools being reviewed for reaffirmation of accreditation began to include references to specific Standards, when an "area for needed growth" or a report was required. That meeting also recorded the first instance of a "teach-out plan" that the Commission requested for a school that was closing (Commission Minutes, January 2002, p. 41). The same meeting included an action in which the Commission placed a school on probation, something that it rarely did (Minutes, p. 45); the last one had been in 1995 (see p. 86 above). The Commission also voted to revise the list of Notations, removing N4.11-18 (on extension education) and relocating them to N10.1-11, with three new notations: on "insufficient interaction among teachers and learners," on "insufficient technology or technical support services," and on "insufficient … library resources for the extension or distance education program" (Commission Minutes, January 2002, pp. 47-48; see also Bulletin 45, 2002, Part 2A, pp. 148-152).

The January 2002 Commission meeting concluded with a "kitchen sink" of various issues, ranging from helping the Commission better track schools' financial conditions through the ATS Annual Report Forms to training evaluation committee members to evaluate distance education programs. The Commission's workload was another concern, which led them to experiment with a "consent agenda" approach at

[250] An "infamous" example of the concern over "regular and substantive interaction" was the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Inspector General finding in 2017 that Western Governors University (an accredited, nonprofit, online university with more than 130,000 students) did not meet the Department's requirement for "regular and substantive interaction." That Office ruled that WGU had to reimburse $713 million in federal financial aid, which the Department overruled in 2019. Greater clarity on "regular and substantive interaction" was provided by the Department in new regulations in 2020 (Clarity and Confusion on "Regular and Substantive Interaction" in *Inside Higher Education*, November 16, 2022).

their January 2002 meeting and to recommend expanding the number of Commissioners from twelve to fifteen, with three "workgroups of five each" (Minutes, January 2002, p. 61). Commissioners also expressed "concern with the uneven quality in the self-studies" and requested that "self-studies be bound without metal fasteners, which cause delays at airport security checkpoints" (Minutes, p. 61). The Commission adopted a new policy that any evaluation committee recommending fewer than ten years for that school's reaffirmation of accreditation should "include a rationale" in its report (Minutes, p. 61).

At its May 2002 meeting, the Commission welcomed Msgr. Jeremiah McCarthy, the new Director of Accreditation and Institutional Evaluation and former Commissioner (Minutes, May 2002, p. 1). He replaced Katherine Amos (see p. 90 and Footnote 246), who became the new Associate Dean of Academic Affairs at Wake Forest University (Wake Forest News, August 12, 2002). The May 2002 meeting recorded the first approval of a school to offer as much as two-thirds of the MDiv online, Regent University School of Divinity (Commission Minutes, May 2002, p. 28). In light of its January 2002 discussion on schools' financial conditions, the Commission in May 2002 approved a revision to Notation N9.3 by adding the following text in italics: "The school has sustained a cumulative loss in the operating budget over the past three years *without evidence of an approved and implemented plan that will successfully reduce deficit spending*" (Minutes, May 2002, p. 42).

The Commission concluded its May 2002 meeting with actions and discussion on various issues, including plans for a systematic review of the 1996 Standards, partly to meet a concern of the U.S. Department of Education that an accrediting agency's standards be reviewed every five years (Minutes, p. 44). The Commission also voted "to receive the action of the Executive Committee" regarding three different schools (Minutes, pp. 44-45). That is the first recorded instance of the Commission's officers acting "as an executive committee of the Commission when decisions need to be finalized prior to the scheduled meeting" (Commission Minutes, January 1994, p. 32; see p. 84 above).[251]

The 2002 Biennial Meeting in Pittsburgh would prove to be the last when the Association and the Commission were still under one organizational structure (see p. 100 below). The theme of that meeting was "Context and Culture: The Public Character of Theological Schools" (Bulletin 45, 2002, Part 3, p. 1). As Aleshire noted in his 2002 Executive Director report:

> "This past year has not been an ordinary time. The events of September 11[252] brought searching religious questions to theological schools and Easter-Sunday-sized crowds to churches. Professors in ATS schools with expertise in Islam have been answering reporters' calls all year. Students in ATS schools in lower Manhattan have spent a year learning theology in forms of public work that no curriculum committee ever imagined. In Canada, the church has been in the news, as well as in the courts, as the country has tried to sort out the church's and state's culpability for abuse that occurred in residential schools during the first half of the twentieth century"[253] (Part 3, p. 46).

Indeed, it had "not been an ordinary time." Aleshire went on to report that ATS had been engaged since 1998 in a four-year project on "the public character of theological schools" (Part 3, p. 46). The Executive

[251] One of the more interesting items in the May 2002 Commission Minutes is this item: "How does the Commission acknowledge that it has made a mistake, e.g., the approval of a thirty-hour master's degree program?" (Minutes, p. 44). No details or responses to that question are recorded in the May 2002 Minutes.

[252] One of the 2002 plenary sessions was devoted to responses to 9/11 from seminary leaders at schools closest to New York City and Washington DC (Bulletin 45, 2002, Part 3, p. 30).

[253] As part of "the largest class-action settlement in Canadian history," the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was funded in 2007 to "facilitate reconciliation among former students, their families, their communities, and all Canadians" (TRC Commission of Canada). In 2015, TRC issued 94 "calls to action" or recommendations that affected ATS Canadian members.

Committee reported that the Lilly-funded project had been led by Robin Lovin of Perkins School of Theology and Richard Mouw of Fuller Theological Seminary. Mouw had served as Commission chair in 1994-1996 and would become the ATS president in 2010.[254] Two issues of *Theological Education* were devoted to lessons learned from that project: The Public Character of Theological Education (Autumn 2000) and Public Character in Action: Patterns and Possibilities (Spring 2001).[255]

Shifting gears, the Commission proposed two sets of changes to the ATS Constitution, to the Procedures Related to Membership and Accreditation, and to the Degree Program Standards (Bulletin 45, 2002, Part 3, p. 31 and pp. 36-45). The first set of changes dealt with the Appeals Panel process, which had been duplicated in the ATS Constitution and in the Procedures Related to Membership and Accreditation. The approved changes kept them only in the Procedures and also streamlined the appeals process through two levels (vs. the former three): a first appeal to a three-member subcommittee of the Commission and a second appeal to a five-member Appeals Panel elected by the membership (see also p. 83).

The second set of changes dealt with distance education and residency. The 2002 Procedures added a third level of approval for distance education to the two adopted in 2000 (see pp. 93-94 above). The first level of approval for the first two online courses was similar to that approval in 2000. A second level of "preliminary" approval was required when "six courses" were offered online, compared to "one-sixth" of a program approved in 2000. And a new third level of "ongoing" approval was added in 2002 when the first students taking online courses graduated, at which point the school must do an evaluation and petition the Commission for a comprehensive distance education program. The residency requirements for each degree remained the same (Bulletin 45, 2002, Part 3, pp. 41-45). The Commission commented in 2002 on the "short shelf-life" of its Standards and Procedures related to distance education (Part 3, p. 89), which had been revised at every Biennial Meeting since 1992 and would be again at the 2004 Biennial Meeting.[256]

The 2002 Biennial Meeting heard a report on the "four themes that are integrated throughout the [1996] standards: the globalization of theological education, the value of inclusion across racial/ethnic and gender lines, freedom of inquiry necessary for teaching and learning in theological education, and a priority on planning and evaluation throughout the institutional and educational work of the school" (Bulletin 45, Part 3, p. 57). The Commission was concerned that "these aspects of the Standards have been inadequately attended to by the institutions and ATS accreditation committees" (Part 3, p. 57).

The Commission reported in 2002 that it had "an increasingly heavy agenda of reports that it has required of member schools" (Bulletin 45, Part 3, p. 88). In fact, the Commission listed 94 (!) schools that past biennium from which reports had been received (Bulletin 45, 2002, Part 3, pp. 92-95).[257] That was nearly half of the accredited members—in just one two-year period, and often each school had to submit several reports on multiple issues. It is doubtful that any other accrediting agency required so

[254] Ten Commission chairs served as ATS presidents in the 90-year history of the Commission. Luther Weigle was the first (see pp. 9-10 and 30-31 above) and Richard Mouw was the last. All ten are identified in Appendix A.

[255] The Nominating Committee report, which had been given by the Executive Committee until 2000, referenced for the first time an ATS policy called "Criteria for the Constituency of Committees" (Bulletin 45, 2002, Part 3, p. 139). That policy, created in 2001 (Bulletin 48, 2008, Part 3, p. 35) stated that ATS committees (including Officers and Commissioners) should reflect four characteristics: the three ecclesial families, the two countries, both genders, and the various racial/ethnic groups.

[256] From 1950 to 2012, only two Biennial Meetings did not approve any new or revised Standards: 1964 and 1988 (see p. 74 above). No changes to the Standards were made after 2012 until the third redeveloped Standards were approved in 2020.

[257] The Commission had received reports from 70 schools in the previous biennium (Bulletin 44, 2000, Part 3, pp. 101-103) and from 77 schools in the biennium before that (Bulletin 43, 1998, Part 3, pp. 79-80 and 83-84); see also p. 104 above.

many reports. That helps explain the Commission's heavy workload, which it would seek to address in the 2002-2004 biennium by proposing an expansion of Commissioners from 12 to 15 (see p. 96 above).

Between the 2002 and 2004 Biennial Meetings, the Commission reviewed an increasing number of petitions for distance education. For example, at its January 2003 meeting,[258] the Commission approved three petitions for distance education, using the new Standards and Guidelines approved in 2002 (Minutes, January 2003, p. 38). It also deferred three petitions for "non-traditional" PhD programs and instead appointed a task force to review the issues those petition raised (Minutes, January 2003, p. 55). At its January 2004 meeting, the Commission approved one of those three schools to offer a PhD "as an experimental program" (Minutes, January 2004, p. 32).

At its January 2003 meeting, the Commission used the phrase "accreditable entity"[259] for the first time in requiring an embedded school "to create an accreditable entity by the time of [their] initial accreditation visit" (Commission Minutes, January 2003, p. 39). That was becoming an increasing issue as more and more schools joining ATS were embedded (24 between 1990 and 2002). The January 2002 Commission Minutes included the category of "Changes in Nomenclature" for the first time (January 2002, pp. 30-31). In June 2003, the Commission deferred on a petition to offer an "experimental, online" ThM program "until the seminary provides a written evaluation of the program" that conforms to the 2002 Standards and Guidelines for distance education (Commission Minutes, June 2003, p. 33). The Commission also dealt with a student complaint against a member school that alleged the school had not complied with FERPA and ATS Standard 2.2. The Commission responded that "it is not licensed or empowered to make what is, fundamentally, a decision for the courts" (Minutes, June 2003, p. 39).

At that meeting, the Commission also rendered its counsel on Standard 6.1.1 (on faculty doctoral credentials) "to mean that the DMin degree is also an appropriate degree for positions in ATS member schools for faculty whose teaching responsibilities fall in areas of professional practice" (Minutes, June 2003, p. 41). On that note, the Commission received the report of the DMin task force, appointed in January 2000 (see pp. 92-93 above), proposing that the DMin Standard on admissions be amended to allow "as many as 10 percent of the students [to be admitted] without the prerequisite three years of ministry experience, provided that the institution has an objective means for determining that these persons have the capacity" to do DMin work (Commission Minutes, June 2003, p. 41).

The June 2003 Commission meeting also acknowledged that SACS would no longer conduct joint visits with ATS, though they still continued until 2014 (see p. 117 below). The change was in response to USDE regulations that accreditors act as "separate and independent" agencies (Minutes, June 2003, p. 43). Doing joint visits with regional accrediting agencies had been a long-standing ATS practice that dated back to 1952 (see Footnote 87). Joint visits, at one point, accounted for 60% of all ATS accreditation visits (see p. 76 above). Within a decade, all but one of the six regional accrediting agencies would cease doing joint visits for the same reason. The Department's "separate and independent" regulation would have even greater implications for ATS, as the next paragraph explains.

In June 2003, the Commission "voted to support the initiative of the Executive Committee in exploring further the possibilities of Pennsylvania incorporation and of separately incorporating the Commission

[258] The January 2002 Commission meeting was the first without Elizabeth Patterson, who had joined the ATS accrediting staff in 1998 (see p. 90 above). That left four ATS directors with responsibilities in accrediting: Marsha Foster Boyd, Jeremiah McCarthy, William Myers, and Charles Willard. Lisa Kern joined the ATS staff in 2003 as communications coordinator.

[259] The 2020 Policies and Procedures requires that schools "embedded in a college or university must have a defined accreditable entity [e.g. department or unit] that offers post-baccalaureate theological degree programs" (Section I.B).

on Accrediting" (Commission Minutes, June 2003, p. 42). The Minutes of the Executive Committee from April 2003 (included in the Minutes from December 2003, pp. 8-9) had a report from the Executive Director about why moving the Articles of Incorporation from Ohio to Pennsylvania, as well as re-incorporating as two entities (the Association and the Commission), could finally satisfy the increasing concerns from the U.S. Department of Education that the ATS Commission still did not meet the Department's regulation that accrediting agencies be "separate and independent" from any related association.

Aleshire reported at the December 2003 Executive Committee meeting that the law firm hired by ATS had completed its legal review of reorganizing into two legally separate corporations—in Pennsylvania. Included in the December 2003 agenda was the law firm's very detailed and very lengthy "Plan of Reorganization" for the Association and the Commission, complete with separate Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation, and a "plan of merger," including assets (Executive Committee Minutes, December 2003, pp. 138-206). The Executive Committee affirmed those documents and prepared to present them to the ATS membership at the 2004 Biennial Meeting (see next chapter).

At its January 2004 meeting, the Commission voted to remove a school's notation but then place that school on warning. At its next meeting in May 2004, the Commission proposed revised Procedures for the membership (at the upcoming 2004 Biennial Meeting) that would eliminate what it had just done in January. The proposed Procedures (Commission Minutes, May 2004, pp. 54-58) removed the Commission's non-public option of "warning" and instead allowed only two sanctions (both public): notation and probation, both for a maximum of two years. The proposed revisions also mandated, for the first time, that notations and probations could not be imposed sequentially. In other words, if a school did not adequately address the concerns in a notation or probation after two years, then the Commission's next action would be withdrawal of accreditation. All of those proposed revisions were in response to U.S. Department of Education regulations that a school could not be "out of compliance" with an accreditor's standards for more than two years.[260] The only exception allowed was that an accreditor could "extend for good cause" a notation (called a warning by most accreditors at that time) or a probation, for a maximum of one year beyond the original two years.

At its May 2004 meeting, the Commission "voted to authorize a task force [of Commissioners and experienced ATS deans] to review the [MA] duration requirement and to propose interpretive guidelines for review and approval by the Commission on Accrediting" (Minutes, May 2004, p. 40). That began a years' long conversation about the two-year MA, which continued until the 2020 revision of the Standards.[261]

The May 2004 Commission meeting also included a review of the ATS Executive Committee's "Plan of Reorganization" that was first discussed in principle at the June 2003 Commission meeting and would be proposed to the membership at the 2004 Biennial Meeting. To that momentous meeting we now turn in Chapter 8.

[260] At that meeting in May 2004, the Commission approved various changes in its policies (Minutes, pp. 32-34), including conducting a "comprehensive review of its policies, procedures, and practices" once each biennium (Minutes, p. 32). The policy changes were all in response to USDE regulations, as the Commission was preparing to submit another petition for renewal of recognition.

[261] The 2020 Standards replaced "years" in all degree duration requirements with a minimum number of semester credit hours. That change not only was in keeping with what other accrediting agencies had been doing for decades but also finally eliminated the long-standing controversy among ATS schools as to what constituted "a year of study."

Chapter 8. Reorganizing and Revising the Standards (2004-2012)

The period of 2004 to 2012 would echo in key ways two of the major changes that ATS made in the 1950s when it reorganized itself and revised its long-standing Standards (see Chapter 4 above). This chapter covers both a major reorganization (in 2004) and a major revision (in 2010-2012). We begin with the major reorganization.

The 2004 Biennial Meeting would be ATS's last as an organization under one legal structure, something it had enjoyed since its incorporation in 1956 (see pp. 37-38 above) and its first Constitution in 1922 (see p. 7 above). In light of increasing pressure from the U.S. Department of Education to document that the Commission on Accrediting was "separate and independent" from any related association (i.e., ATS), the Executive Committee of the Association and the Commission on Accrediting proposed to the ATS membership in 2004 that it reincorporate from a single Ohio corporation into two Pennsylvania corporations.[262]

To accomplish that reorganization, the 2004 Biennial Meeting program included 105 pages of documents for the membership to affirm.[263] For each of the two corporations (the Association and the Commission) there would be new Articles of Incorporation, new Bylaws (replacing the Constitution), and new Procedures, along with a Plan of Reorganization and a Plan of Merger (Bulletin 46, 2004, Part 3, pp. 66-170). These changes also meant that ATS's Executive Committee would be replaced by a Board of Directors, similar in composition and authority, elected by ATS Members. These changes meant, as well, that the Commission on Accrediting would be redefined as the Accredited Members of ATS, along with Candidates for Accreditation. Those Members would delegate all responsibility for accrediting decisions to a new Board of Commissioners, elected by the Commission members and similar in composition and authority to the previous Commission on Accrediting. To fund the new Commission corporation, the ATS Executive Committee proposed a new dues formula for member schools that allocated 25% of the revenue to the Association and 75% to the Commission (Part 3, p. 29).[264] That was an increase for the Commission over the 40/60 dues revenue ratio approved in 1998 (Bulletin 43, 1998, Part 3, p. 37).

The 2004 Biennial Meeting approved all of those documents, including revised Procedures Related to Membership for the Association to be distinct from new Procedures Related to Accreditation for the Commission (Bulletin 46, 2004, Part 3, pp. 43-44). The new Commission Procedures eliminated the category of Warning, resulting in only two sanctions: Notation and Probation, which could not be imposed sequentially (Part 3, pp. 35-37). The non-public sanction of Warning had been approved in 1996 (see Footnote 235) and was often applied before a Notation, which could be followed by Probation. The

[262] ATS had relocated its office from Vandalia (OH) to Pittsburgh (PA) in 1991 (see p. 82 above), but it had kept its Articles of Incorporation in the State of Ohio.

[263] The 105 pages of proposed documents made the 2004 Biennial Meeting program book the longest in ATS history at 263 pages, with most previous program books rarely exceeding 150 pages. For a summary rationale for all these changes, see Bulletin 46, 2004, Part 3, pp. 68-69.

[264] The Plan of Merger also transferred $250,000 from the Association to the Commission "as initial capitalization for the new corporation" (Bulletin 46, 2004, Part 3, p. 29). The "Effective Time" of the merger (transfer) was no sooner than "12 a.m. on February 1, 2005" (Part 3, p. 135). The ATS treasurer reported at the 2004 Biennial Meeting that ATS had an "Unrestricted Net Asset balance of $9,749,260" (Part 3, p. 171). Most of ATS's funds stayed with the Association since the Commission's expenses were less (the Commission did not carry out the numerous grant-funded programs that the Association did). The Commission in its accrediting role was also more susceptible to lawsuits (targeting any large funds) than was the Association.

Department of Education was concerned that the Commission could allow a school to be "out of compliance" with its Standards for six years (two years of Warning, two years of Notation, and two years of Probation), instead of the maximum of two allowed by USDE regulations. The new Procedures in 2004 eliminated that possibility, though a school could request an "extension for good cause" of up to one year for either a Notation or Probation.

The 2004 Procedures also provided an official definition of "reports" for the first time, clarifying that they were not instances of "non-compliance" but matters requiring "additional information" or "areas of needed improvement" (Bulletin 46, 2004, Part 3, pp. 34-35). In addition, the new Procedures eliminated the category of "provisional accreditation" for new schools since that category was "not within the scope of recognition of ATS" by USDE (Part 3, p. 32).[265]

In its report at the 2004 Biennial Meeting, the Commission proposed revisions to two Standards. The first was to revise the DMin admissions standard that required three years of ministry experience after the first professional degree (approved in 1990; see p. 78) to allow up to 10% to be admitted without the requisite ministry experience (see p. 98 above). The second, based on a motion made from the floor, was to allow the same 10% exception for DEdMin students (Bulletin 46, 2004, Part 3, pp. 45-46). Both were approved. It had been a busy biennium for the Commission with 57 comprehensive visits and reports from 90 schools (Part 3, pp. 200-206). That two-year period had been so busy, in fact, that ATS hired, for the first time, "two retired, experienced accrediting visitors and chairs to provide adjunct staff support on selected visits" (Part 3, p. 197). ATS revived that practice briefly in 2018-2020 to support the work of the senior director of accrediting who was also involved in the redevelopment of the Standards during that biennium.

At the 2004 Biennial Meeting, the Executive Committee noted that there had been 33 leadership education events in the preceding biennium, with 1,514 participants[266] (Bulletin 46, 2004, Part 3, p. 49). ATS now had at least five regular groups meeting yearly: presidents, deans,[267] development officers, student personnel, and "most recently" chief financial officers (Part 3, pp. 215-216). A new online version of the Annual Data Tables, formerly the ATS Fact Book, was also announced at the 2004 meeting (Part 3, pp. 49-50), as were digital versions of the Strategic Information Report and the Institutional Peer Profile Report (Part 6, p. 63).

The Executive Committee announced at the 2004 meeting the formation of an "ecology group [comprising] six agencies with direct involvement in theological education," ATS, FTE, In Trust, Auburn Center, Wabash Center, and the Louisville Institute (Part 6, pp. 49-50). The 2004 Biennial Meeting also welcomed eight new Associate Members, bringing the total membership to 251 schools, with a combined enrollment of 80,773 in the fall of 2004. That was the peak enrollment in ATS history, declining every year after that until 2017, except for a slight increase in 2010 (see Appendix D).[268]

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[265] The ATS Commission began using "provisional accreditation" in 1966 (see Footnote 166). The category of "preliminary approval" of new degree programs, begun in 1972 (see p. 61 above) continued until 2010 (see p.110 below).

[266] ATS also hosted its first workshop for administrators and faculty at Historically Black Theological Schools in October of 2003, with 70 in attendance (Bulletin 46, 2004, Part 3, p. 225).

[267] Regular meetings of deans began in March 2001 when ATS hosted the first Society of Chief Academic Officers (SCAO). One of the initial participants suggested that if they "move the 'S' to the other side… you would have CAOS" (Kathleen Billman and Bruce Birch, eds., *C(H)AOS Theory: Reflections of Chief Academic Officers in Theological Education* (Eerdmans, 2011, p. 5).

[268] ATS enrollment declined from 80,773 in 2004 to 75,444 in 2009, a 7% decrease (ATS Annual Data Tables). However, 87% of that decline was from non-degree enrollments like certificates. Enrollment ticked up slightly in 2010 (from 75,444 to 76,011), due primarily to lingering effects from the Great Recession of 2008-2009 (Why Student Enrollment Rises as the Economy Falls).

Between the 2004 and 2006 Biennial Meetings, the Commission[269] dealt with many routine reports and visits, but otherwise had a relatively minor load in such areas as new Standards or new Policies. At its January 2005 meeting, the Commission did hear reports from two task forces that had been appointed in the previous biennium: one on the PhD and one on the DMin. As a result, the Commission proposed two minor changes in those degree program standards for the 2006 Biennial Meeting. The first minor change was a proposal to insert the word "normally" before the residency requirement for the PhD that it be "completed on the main campus" (Commission Minutes, January 2005, p. 31). The second minor change was to propose altering the duration requirements for professional MA degrees to permit "advanced standing" to allow for a "one-year" MA for those with "some advanced theological study or with prior extensive undergraduate studies in religion or some other appropriate foundational, professional areas" (Minutes, January 2005, p. 32)—much like what was allowed for the academic MA.

At its January 2006 meeting, the Commission revised slightly its Policy Manual, substituting "Officers Committee" for the former Commission Executive Committee, first appointed in 1994 (see p.84). That change aligned the Policy Manual with the new Commission Bylaws approved by the membership at the 2004 Biennial Meeting. Those Bylaws also expanded the number of Commission Officers to include a chair, vice chair, secretary, and "representative to the ATS Board of Directors" (Commission Minutes, January 2006, pp. 52-53). At that meeting, the Executive Director announced that Tisa Lewis would be moving from Director of Student Information Services (hired in 2005) to Director of Accreditation and Institutional Evaluation, replacing Charles Willard who would retire in July 2006 (Minutes, January 2006, p. 53).

The January 2006 meeting also included an extended discussion of MA duration requirements, with a few suggesting that the two-year MA require for the first time a minimum of 48 semester credits, even though ATS schools had been offering "a proliferation of master's programs in the 30-36 semester hour range" (Minutes, January 2006, p. 54). The Commission decided to defer the matter to the 2006 Biennial Meeting "for a broader conversation" (Minutes, p. 54). At that same meeting, the Commission reviewed the issue of Canadian schools offering the BTh, even though the Commission's scope was limited to graduate degrees in theology. The Commission decided to appoint a task force to study the matter, especially since the whole issue of ATS accrediting only graduate schools of theology had been a central part of its history since 1918 (Minutes, January 2006, pp. 56-57).

At its June 2006 meeting, the Commissioners asked the staff "to pursue a joint visit protocol with SACS," even though SACS had announced in 2003 that it would no longer do joint visits (Minutes, June 2006, p. 43; see also p. 98 above). In a fairly rare action, the Board placed a school on probation, something it had not done since 2002 (see p. 95 above). It approved two new sections in its Handbook of Accreditation: one on theological libraries and one on assessment of theological learning (Minutes, June 2006, p. 43). The latter was written by John Harris of Samford University, a well-known expert in assessing student learning. He was then hired at that meeting to "assist the Board in its thinking about outcomes-based assessment" (Minutes, June 2006, p. 42).

The Handbook of Accreditation approved in 2006 had nine sections: (1) Introduction to Accreditation, (2) Guidelines for Conducting a Self-Study, (3) Guidelines for Institutions Receiving Accreditation Evaluation Committees, (4) Guidelines for Members of Accreditation Committees, (5) Using the Commission

[269] This history sometimes uses the term "Commission" after 2004 to refer to what is technically the "Board of Commissioners." The 2004 Commission Bylaws expanded the Board of Commissioners from 12 to up to 16 (Bulletin 46, 2004, Part 3, p. 113). In June 2004, the membership elected seven new Commissioners (four institutional and three public), bringing the total to 15 (Part 3, pp. 253-354) who served during the 2004-2006 biennium (see p. 96 above).

Standards of Accreditation in Institutional Evaluation, (6) Guidelines Adopted by the Board of Commissioners, (7) Guidelines for Evaluating Globalization, (8) A Guide for Evaluating Theological Learning, and (9) Guidelines for Evaluating Library and Information Resources. That Handbook, first approved in 1990, remained fairly intact until the 2010-2012 revision of the Standards. It exists today as a significantly revised and reduced Self-Study Handbook (see p. 78 above).[270]

The theme of the 2006 Biennial Meeting in Chicago was "Aspiration and Accountability: Accreditation in Theological Education" (Bulletin 47, 2006, Part 3, p. 5).[271] It was the first Biennial Meeting since 1996 that focused on accreditation, only this time the focus was not on adopting new Standards but on the challenges and future of accreditation in general. In his report, the Executive Director described how the three plenary addresses at the meeting "will seek to provide a broad perspective about accreditation" (Bulletin 47, 2006, Part 3, p. 18).

The first plenary by Michael Gilligan took a historical look at accreditation, focusing on the 1992-1996 project to redevelop the ATS Standards, in which Gilligan had played an important role as Assistant Director of Accrediting (see p. 83 above). The second plenary was by Judith Eaton, president of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (see p. 2 above).[272] Eaton spoke on nine challenges facing higher education accreditation, three fundamentals for the work of accrediting, and four pathways for changes in accreditation, including more accountability and more emphasis on student learning (Biennial Meeting Minutes, 2006, p. 8).[273] The third plenary by Aleshire focused on the future of accreditation, especially for theological education. It was a future that foresaw growing government influence, increasing diversity in delivery modalities, and added pressure for theological schools to demonstrate student learning outcomes (Biennial Meeting Minutes, 2006, p. 11). One of the most unusual features of the 2006 Biennial Meeting was a panel of key leaders from five of the six regional accrediting agencies in the U.S. (only Northwest was not represented) and from the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies.[274] The panel addressed the topic of assessing student learning, the subject of a new section of the ATS Handbook of Accreditation (see p. 102 above) and one of the future challenges in accreditation.

The Commission reported in 2006 that it had conducted 40 comprehensive visits and had "responded to an increasingly expanding number of reports it had required of member schools" (Bulletin 47, 2006, Part 3, p. 21). In giving a rationale for a dues increase, Aleshire "reported that the increasingly complex work of accreditation can no longer be accomplished by the equivalent of three full-time accrediting staff.[275]

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[270] Section 8 of the 2006 Handbook of Accreditation was replaced in 2014 by *A Reflective Guide to Effective Assessment of Student Learning*, which was revised in 2021 as A Reflective Guide to Effective Evaluation for Theological Schools.

[271] The Biennial Meeting "Program and Reports," Part 3 of Bulletin 45 (2006) and Bulletin 46 (2008), were not included in the bound volumes in the ATS office, but unbound copies were found in the office.

[272] CHEA is also referenced on pp. 45 and 94 above, as well as in Footnotes 10 and 122. In its 2006 report, the Commission wrote that it had received initial recognition from CHEA in 2001 and had just submitted its five-year interim renewal report (Bulletin 45, 2006, Part 3, p. 20).

[273] Starting in 2006, the Bulletins no longer published the minutes for the Biennial Meeting. Since 2006, the Biennial Meeting Minutes have been stored digitally at the ATS office, to which the author was provided access for this history.

[274] The author attended the 2006 Biennial Meeting and recalls a favorite line about assessment from the executive director of the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies. In responding to the problem of doing "too much assessment" of students, he said he was reminded of the expression he had often heard as a child in rural Canada, "You can't fatten a pig by weighing it."

[275] In June 2006, ATS had four director-level accrediting staff: Marsha Foster Boyd, Jeremiah McCarthy, William Myers, and Charles Willard (see Footnote 258), but Boyd and Myers were part-time in accrediting. In July 2006, Boyd left and Willard retired. In July 2006, Tisa Lewis and William Miller were added as full-time accrediting directors. In September 2006, Carol Lytch was hired as Assistant Executive Director (ATS Board of Directors Minutes, April 2006). She served until 2011.

To illustrate the growing workload… Aleshire noted that in 1994-1996 the Commission rendered approximately 250 decisions. During 2004-2006, it made more than 500 decisions" (Biennial Meeting Minutes, 2006, p. 3).

A key part of the Commission's growing workload was the explosion of reports it had begun requiring from schools in recent years. For example, in the previous two biennia (2000-2002 and 2002-2004), the Commission had required reports from 98 and 90 schools, respectively, compared to only 70 and 77 schools, respectively, in the preceding two biennia (1996-1998 and 1998-2000). That was an average increase of 29%. However, in 2004-2006 the Commission required reports from 128 (!) schools, a 36% increase over 2000-2004 and a 73% (!) increase over 1996-2000 (see Footnote 257). By 2008, the number of schools with required reports increased again to 134.[276]

One likely reason for the rapid rise in reports required by the Commission was its increasing reluctance to impose Notations and its elimination of Warnings. Prior to 2004, the Commission issued non-public Warnings and after that could impose public Notations with no mandatory time limit, which, if not addressed, could be followed by Probation. Due to USDE new regulations, in 2004 the Commission eliminated Warnings and limited Notations to two years, which, if not addressed, would be followed by withdrawal of accreditation. So, it is not surprising that the number of notations imposed by the Commission dropped from 44 in 1998-2000 to only seven (!) in 2004-2006.[277]

At the 2006 Biennial Meeting the Commission recommended a change in the PhD Degree Program Standard, adding the word "normally" to the on-campus residency requirement for the PhD (Bulletin 47, 2006, Part 3, p. 32). The Commission Treasurer also reported that the Commission had entered into a service agreement with the Association to supply the Commission's personnel and related costs (Part 3, p. 34). That was part of the 2004 reorganization, but the first time to report that it had been enacted.

The new ATS Board of Directors (replacing the Executive Committee) reported in 2006 that ATS had hosted 42 leadership events with 2,000 participants (Part 3, p. 41 and pp. 67-69), both of which were up by about a third over the previous biennium (see p. 101 above). The largest attended events were those for DIAP at 165 (see p. 70 above), for CAOS at 150 (see Footnote 267), and for CFOs at 100 (see p. 101 above). The Board also reported that ATS had redesigned its website and now averaged 72,000 page views per month (Part 3, p. 42). In addition, ATS began using in 2006 a web conferencing tool called Macromedia Breeze (a forerunner to Adobe Connect) to offer some workshops online (Part 3, p. 43). That was related to the Technology and Educational Practices Project that ATS launched in 2002, which involved 100 ATS schools receiving technology grants, funded mostly by Lilly Endowment Inc.[278]

The Advisory Committee for Student Resources reported in 2006 that the Entering Student Questionnaire had been used by 7,283 students at 131 schools and that the Graduating Student Questionnaire had been used by 5,777 students at 137 schools (Part 3, p. 87). Both would be available online by 2007 (Part 3, p. 42). The Task Force for the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation Project, funded by Lilly Endowment Inc., gave its final report after four years (Part 3, pp. 93-95). Many of the 39 schools involved in the project led assessment workshops at the 2006 Biennial Meeting.

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[276] The numbers above from 2004-2008 include those listed in the June Commission Minutes because Commission Reports at Biennial Meetings printed in Bulletins from 2006 forward did not include actions from its last meeting of that biennium.

[277] The number of notations in this comparison begins with 1998-2000 because in 1996-1998 the Commission "refrained from imposing notations due to new Standards" adopted in 1996 (Bulletin 43, 1998, Part 3, p. 81).

[278] In 2004, ATS hired its first full-time director of technology, Chris Olsztyn, who still serves as Director of Information Technology.

Between the 2006 and 2008 Biennial Meetings, the Board of Commissioners focused increasingly on assessment of student learning at member schools. At its January 2007 meeting, for example, the Board began to require reports on "a comprehensive assessment plan" as part of most comprehensive evaluation visits, partly in response to Department of Education concerns and partly in light of the new section in the Handbook on Accreditation on assessment of student learning (see p. 102 above). That section had been written by John Harris of Samford University, who led a workshop for the Commissioners at their January 2007 meeting (Commission Minutes, January 2007, p. 45).

The Board also discussed the recent "Spellings Report" at its January 2007 meeting (Minutes, p. 45). Margaret Spellings, U.S. Secretary of Education (2005-2009), formed the Commission on the Future of Higher Education in 2005, which issued its report in 2006, A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education. The report was critical of accrediting agencies for focusing too much on "counting books in the library" and not enough on "measuring student success in the marketplace." In his 2006 report, Aleshire cited this telling comment from the Spellings Commission: "*Accreditation of higher education in the United States is a crazy quilt of activities, processes, and structures that is fragmented, arcane, more historical than logical, and has outlived its usefulness*" (Bulletin 47, 2006, Part 3, p. 18). Accreditation would come under increasing pressure from the political arena and from major news media in the coming years—due in large part to this opening salvo from the Spellings Report, which focused on three themes: accessibility, affordability, and accountability.[279]

In Canada there was a new emphasis then on what the provinces and territories called quality assurance. For example, Ontario adopted a "statement of Graduate University Degree Level Expectations in January 2005," which led to "establishing a new quality assurance body" in 2007 (History of Quality Assurance in Ontario). In 2007 the Council of Ministers of Education across Canada issued a joint Ministerial Statement on Quality Assurance of Degree Education in Canada. The Statement's stated goal was "to provide assurance to the public, students, employers, and postsecondary institutions at home and abroad that new programs and new institutions of higher learning meet appropriate standards and that [student] performance against the standards will be assessed by appropriate means."

At its January 2007 meeting, the Board of Commissioners appointed a task force to develop a mission statement for the work of the Commission in light of the reorganization in 2004 (Minutes, January 2007, p. 48). The Commissioners also discussed at length the duration requirement for the professional MA, defeating a motion that would have required at least 48 semester hours for the professional MA but not for the academic MA. At its January 2008 meeting, the Board of Commissioners decided to insert the word "normally" before the MA guidelines it had published on the ATS website. That insertion meant the duration for the MA would "*normally* consist of at least 48 semester hours" (Minutes, June 2008, p. 43). The Board was reminded that "accreditation is not accounting" (Minutes, January 2007, p. 47).

At its January 2007 meeting, the Board of Commissioners authorized the accrediting staff to "develop a plan for the comprehensive review of the accrediting standards… with particular emphasis upon the degree program standards, multiple locations, distance education, educational technology, and assessment of student learning outcomes" (Minutes, January 2007, p. 48). The Executive Director noted, at a later meeting, "the need to move away from an 'essentialist model' of theological education to a more differentiated set of standards that can address quality indicators for multiple patterns of theological education" (Minutes, January 2008, p. 44).

[279] The author, then academic dean at a Christian college and seminary, wrote an article in 2009 entitled Accessibility, Affordability, and Accountability: A "Spellings Report" for Our Schools (*Christian Standard*, March 15, 2009, pp. 8-9, 14).

At its June 2007 meeting, the Commission appointed a task force to review concerns over its workload (Minutes, June 2007, p. 44). Commissioners also had a lengthy discussion on new "hybrid" online courses and what those meant for residency requirements. The Board of Commissioners noted how residency was really "undefined" in the current Standards, with "the value of residency increasingly yielding to greater emphasis on accessibility" (Minutes, June 2007, pp. 44-46). The Board decided to appoint a task force to study that issue (Minutes, June 2007, p. 48).

The Executive Director reported that he was "particularly concerned" about proposed USDE regulations whereby the federal government would require accreditors, rather than the schools they accredit, to establish student learning outcomes for all students in a sort of "one size fits all" approach. If enacted, such regulations would have been unprecedented in the history of accrediting (Commission Minutes, June 2007, pp. 45-46). Regardless, the Department of Education was clearly expecting every accrediting agency to take a much tougher stance on evaluating student learning outcomes. The perception was that ATS "lags behind the regional agencies in outcomes-based assessment" and that "the Board of Commissioners is going to have to be much more aggressive in its expectations and enforcement of assessment-related actions" (Minutes, June 2007, p. 46).

That renewed emphasis on assessment appeared frequently in the January 2008 Commission Minutes, with announcement of a new assessment training workshop for ATS schools and a letter to all ATS presidents concerning "heightened expectations for assessment of student learning" (Minutes, January 2008, pp. 41 and 43). At that same meeting, the Commissioners discussed again the BTh degree in Canada but decided not to pursue an expansion of its scope of recognition with the U.S. Department of Education that would include undergraduate degrees (Minutes, January 2008, p. 42). The Commissioners did recommend a revision to the membership at the 2008 Biennial Meeting on Degree Program Standard M that would allow schools to admit students without a bachelor's degree to graduate courses, provided the courses had different learning outcomes for each group of students. That had been a concern for many years among Canadian members that often intermingled the two groups in their university settings (Commission Minutes, January 2008, pp. 43-44).

At its June 2008 meeting,[280] the Board of Commissioners appointed a 15-member "Task Force for the Revision of the Standards" (Commission Minutes, June 2008, p. 45). Compared to the 13-person revision task force appointed in 1992 that had three Evangelical Protestants and one Roman Catholic (see p. 82 above), the 2008 task force had five Evangelical Protestants and three Roman Catholics; seven were Mainline Protestants (but see Footnote 295). The Commissioners were also informed that "web-based modules of the self-study workshop" were now available, as well as "electronic access of pertinent self-study materials and laptop computers" for Commissioners during their meetings (Minutes, June 2008, pp. 48-49). The Board discussed again the use of "reader panels," first raised at the January 2008 meeting (Minutes, June 2008, p. 49). The Board heard another staff report on "the status of the joint visit protocols… with SACS and WASC" (Minutes, June 2008, p. 49; see p. 102 above).

The 2008 Biennial Meeting in Atlanta marked the 90th anniversary of the founding of ATS.[281] The theme was "We Have This Treasure: The Promise of Learning for Religious Vocation." That theme reflected the

[280] In June 2008, the Board also approved a revised version of its Policy Manual, which then had 12 sections covering 23 pages. That Policy Manual would be revised and expanded significantly in 2011 to meet new USDE regulations (see p. 112 below).

[281] To mark this milestone, Glenn Miller wrote, *A Community of Conversation: A Retrospective of The Association of Theological Schools and Ninety Years of North American Theological Education* (ATS, 2008); see Footnote 6. The 2008 Biennial Meeting also featured a video "The Promise Fulfilled: Five Pastors Talk about Theological Education" (Biennial Minutes, 2008, p. 2).

title of a book Aleshire had just published, *Earthen Vessels: Hopeful Reflections on the Work and Future of Theological Schools* (Eerdmans, 2008). Aleshire's address was on "Making Haste Slowly: Celebrating the Future of Theological Schools" (Biennial Minutes, 2008, p. 19). He reminded the membership: "If the last century had its share of slow steps, we now seem to be in the quick-quick part of the dance, and seminaries need to learn new steps." That was an introduction to the four-year process to revise the Standards, beginning in 2008.

All of the workshops at the 2008 meeting focused on accreditation, which were introduced with an opening plenary by Barbara Brittingham, then president of the New England Association. Three of the seven workshops addressed joint visits with four different regional accreditors (WASC, SACS, Middle States, and North Central).[282] The Executive Director and the chair of the Board of Commissioners led a workshop on "Discussion of Potential Changes to the Standards of Accreditation" (Bulletin 48, 2006, Part 3, p. 8). Aleshire described in his workshop a four-year "two-staged review of the Standards," with recommended revisions on the General Institutional Standards at the 2010 Biennial Meeting and recommended revisions on the Degree Program Standards at the 2012 Biennial Meeting (Part 3, p. 8). One of the lunch sessions at the 2008 Biennial Meeting was devoted to "small group discussions… to identify top issues to be addressed" in the revision process (Biennial Meeting Minutes, 2008, pp. 14-15). To lead that process, the Board of Commissioners had appointed a 15-member "Task Force for the Revision of the Standards" at its June 2008 meeting (see p. 106 above and Footnote 295).

The Board of Commissioners reported to the membership in 2008 that it had developed a new mission statement, in light of the corporate reorganization in 2004. The Commission's new mission, borrowed heavily from the Commission's purpose statement in the 2004 Commission Bylaws: "*The Commission on Accrediting of The Association of Theological Schools contributes to the enhancement of theological education by the accreditation of member schools and by collecting institutional data for the purpose of informing the accreditation process in service to these schools*" (Bulletin 48, 2008, Part 3, p. 19).[283]

Regarding the "collecting institutional data" part of the new mission, the Board also reported that it had received "an $800,000 grant from the Lilly Endowment for conversion of the ATS database to an industry standard platform" (Part 3, p. 19). That would be more than $1.1 million today and an important reminder of the value of data for ATS and its member schools. As noted in Footnote 66, since the creation of the Commission in 1934, ATS has continued to maintain "the largest body of information about theological education in [North] America" (Bulletin 10, 1935, p. 6).

The membership also approved at the 2008 meeting a recommendation to revise Degree Program Standard M.1 on enrolling non-baccalaureate students in a graduate-level course. The revision removed the "20% limit" and replaced it with a requirement that "the course has content, requirements, and student learning outcomes appropriate to post-baccalaureate education," as well as differentiated course requirements for any undergraduates in that course (Bulletin 48, 2008, Part 3, p. 30). The membership

[282] Two of the 2008 workshops were led by new ATS staff: Helen Blier, hired in 2007 as Director of Student Information, and Janice Edwards-Armstrong, hired in 2007 as Director of Leadership Education. Other recent staff hires were Eliza Smith Brown, Director of Communications (hired in 2008); Stephen Graham, Director of Faculty Development (hired in 2008); and Lester Ruiz, Director of Accreditation (hired in 2008). Graham and Ruiz still work at ATS, though with different roles and titles (ATS website).

[283] The 2004 Commission Bylaws, Section 1.2, lists two purposes: "(i) contribute to the enhancement and improvement of theological education through the accreditation of schools that are members of The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada ("ATS") and (ii) collect data from all members of ATS for use in accrediting and to provide the data resources supporting applied research undertaken by ATS" (Bulletin 46, 2004, Part 3, p. 106). That section in the current Commission Bylaws reads the same twenty years later.

approved a change in the Commission Procedures in Article XI on Complaints, removing a statement that the Board would not investigate a complaint that was under litigation, per new USDE regulations.

One of the major items at the 2008 Biennial Meeting was the adoption of a new ATS Policy Statement on Disability and Theological Education (Bulletin 48, 2008, Part 3, pp. 46-52). At the same time, the membership voted to "retire" five existing Policy Statements, which dated from the 1960s and 1970s (Part 3, pp. 43-44) and to "revise or replace" six other Policy Statements, which also dated from the 1960s and 1970s (Part 3, pp. 44-45). The 2008 meeting was the first to list the Association's "four core values," diversity, quality and improvement, collegiality, and leadership (Part 3, p. 53). Those four are still the core values for ATS in 2024, though slightly redefined (see ATS website).

One of the more unusual aspects of the 2008 Biennial Meeting was the membership's vote to deny Affiliate status to Unification Theological Seminary. That was the first denial of an applicant school that had been recommended by the ATS Board of Directors (Biennial Minutes, 2008, p. 6). Unification had applied for Associate Membership in 1978 and again in 1988 but were not recommended either time (see pp. 74 and 79 above, as well as Footnote 176). The school would apply a second time for Affiliate status at the 2010 Biennial Meeting (see p. 111 below).

Between the 2008 and 2010 Biennial Meetings, the Board of Commissioners addressed everything from the Great Recession to MA duration (again). For the first time in a long time, the Board imposed several notations for library concerns[284] (Minutes, January 2009, pp. 9 and 30). They also voted for the first time on a notation to "extend for good cause," an option approved in 2004 (see p. 99 above). Continuing its emphasis on assessment, the Board required many reports on a "comprehensive assessment plan." In fact, at its January 2009 meeting, the Board required 25 reports on assessment, compared to only 14 on finances, despite ATS "schools being currently under significant financial stress… during this financial crisis" created by the Great Recession (Minutes, January 2009, p. 58). Even more surprisingly, the Board discussed once again the issue of MA duration, though noting "the need to refrain from mathematical benchmarks for determining compliance with duration" (Minutes, January 2009, p. 58).

The January 2009 Board meeting heard from the first "Reader Panel," first proposed a year earlier (see p. 106 above). A "Reader Panel" was composed of a small group of Commissioners (3-5) who met by teleconference between meetings to read and act on various school reports and petitions that were considered routine and did not affect membership status. The Reader Panel experiment in the fall of 2008 proved so successful that they were extended in June 2009 to three per year (Minutes, June 2009, p. 39)—and are still used today.

The Board also wrestled with a growing number of petitions for exceptions, typically regarding distance education, to the extent that the Board "requested a spreadsheet of exceptions" granted to date (Commission Minutes, January 2009, p. 59).[285] At its June 2009 meeting, the Board removed probation from a member school that it had imposed in 2006 (see p. 102 above), with a one-year "extension for good cause" granted in 2008. The June 2009 meeting also welcomed Judith Eaton and Jan Friis of the

[284] At its January 2009 meeting, the Board of Commissioners approved a policy that it would "not impose a notation on a member school *at a meeting of the Board* until the school had been given an opportunity to show cause why a notation should not be imposed" (Minutes, January 2009, p. 60). The italicized phrase meant an evaluation committee could still recommend a notation, because the school had a chance to respond to that recommendation before the Board met to act on it. But the Board would generally not impose a notation without a prior visit or notice to the school.

[285] At its June 2010 meeting, the Board of Commissioners approved new Guidelines for Considering Petitions for Exceptions and Experiments (Minutes, June 2010, p. 50).

Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). They discussed CHEA's "multi-year initiative to establish a new balance, recalibrating the respective roles and the relationship between the government and the private sector" in accreditation (Minutes, June 2009, pp. 34-35). That initiative met with mixed results, as the U.S. Department of Education began to take an increasingly adversarial stance toward private accrediting agencies that, to some extent, still exists.[286]

The June 2009 meeting included two lengthy discussions. One discussion focused on the benefits and challenges of continuing to conduct joint visits with regional accrediting agencies (Minutes, June 2009, pp. 36-37). The issue of joint visits, a focus at the 2008 Biennial Meeting workshops (see p. 107 above), had been discussed at almost every Commission meeting since 2003 (see p. 98 above). The second discussion was with several representatives of an ATS school regarding the Board's "long-standing concern with the issue of gender diversity" at that school (Minutes, June 2009, pp. 37-38). That was an issue that would surface in a major way at the 2010 Biennial Meeting (see p. 110 below). The June 2009 meeting was also the last for McCarthy, who was leaving ATS but was appointed to the Task Force on the Revision of the Standards as an institutional member (Minutes, June 2009, p. 35). His replacement was Lester Ruiz, hired in 2008 as the newest Director of Accreditation (see Footnote 282). He joined Tisa Lewis and William Miller as Directors of Accreditation, both hired in 2006 (see Footnote 275).

At the February 2010 meeting of the Board of Commissioners, the Executive Director noted the "possible mergers, affiliations, or integrations of member schools" due to the financial fallout from the Great Recession (Minutes February 2010, p. 48). In fact, between 2010 and 2023, 55 ATS schools would end up merging (34), closing (13), or withdrawing (8).[287] At that same meeting, the Board approved a "Proposed Revised Header Page" (called "Staff Comment and Counsel" since 2015) that included the use of the words "accept" and "receive" for reports, with the former meaning no follow-up action was needed (Minutes, February 2010, p. 50). That consolidated a practice the Commission had begun in the 1980s (see p. 70 above) but had not followed very carefully. At its June 2010 meeting, the Board of Commissioners reviewed its work during the past biennium, noting that it had "struggled with what it means to enforce standards in the time of crisis when things are changing" so rapidly, "including the tension between enforcing standards and providing flexibility and creativity" (Minutes, June 2010, p. 49).[288] That tension would surface again during the 2020 revision of the Standards, during a different kind of crisis (see p. 127 below).

The 2010 Biennial Meeting in Montreal has been referred to by some (with tongue in cheek) as "the brawl in Montreal" because of a somewhat contentious debate on the floor regarding a proposed change in the Standards on the role of women in leadership. More on that in a moment. The theme of the 2010 meeting was "The Future Has Arrived: Changing Theological Education in a Changed World." Aleshire noted in his message that this would be "a working meeting" with all of the plenary sessions "working sessions to consider proposals for policy guidelines, accrediting procedures, and institutional standards" (Bulletin 49, 2010, Part 3, p. 11). The 2010 meeting began with a two-hour Open Forum on those proposals.

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[286] That adversarial relationship seemed to reach a new height in 2015 when the U.S. Secretary of Education referred to accreditors as "watch dogs that don't bite" (Education Department Beefs Up Accreditation). That phrase reflected a June 17, 2015 *Wall Street Journal* article on accrediting agencies entitled The Watchdogs of College Education Rarely Bite.

[287] See Debbie Gin's Predicting School Closures and Mergers Among the ATS Membership (*Colloquy*, May 2020). Her list of 45 mergers, closures, and withdrawals in 2020 has been updated with 2023 data (see also p. 131 below).

[288] In June 2010, the Board reaffirmed one school's accreditation for ten years that had never received a full ten years, despite having been accredited for more than forty years. The password the school used for the evaluation committee to access school materials during its visit was a not-so-subtle "10 in 2010." At the exit interview, the chair, just before reading the committee recommendation, quoted from 2 Chronicles 14:1 "The country was at peace for ten years." The school cheered.

Most of the proposed changes in 2010 were fairly routine. For example, the membership easily approved changes in the Commission Procedures that were primarily intended "to ease the number of accrediting interactions between schools and the Board of Commissioners" (Bulletin 49, 2010, Part 3, p. 13).[289] One of those changes was to eliminate the need for "preliminary" approval of every new degree, something the Commission had required since 1972 (see Footnotes 170 and 265). Another change was not to require a petition for distance education until the school began offering "as many as six of the courses in any approved degree program through distance education" (Part 3, p. 28). That approval of six or more courses offered online would now constitute "comprehensive distance education approval," the only level of approval needed, compared to the three levels required since 2002 (see p. 97 above).[290]

Regarding proposed changes in 2010 to the General Institutional Standards, the Board of Commissioners felt that the 1996 Standards "have been functioning effectively" but needed some changes to "enhance editorial clarity, update the standards as appropriate, and introduce substantive changes only where they were deemed necessary" (Bulletin 49, 2010, Part 3, p. 13). One of the changes for "editorial clarity" involved "suppressing" Standard 4 on the Curriculum, with its various sections relocated to Standard 3 and to a new Standard DS in the Degree Program Standards (Bulletin 49, 2010, Part 1, p. 83). Those sections would be revisited in the 2012 revisions. Standard 3.3 also redefined "Globalization" as "Global Awareness and Engagement" (Part 3, p. 51). Many of the "updates" dealt with technology, including a new section 9.8 on Instructional Technology Resources (Part 3, pp. 81-82).

By far the most controversial change dealt with part of Standard 2 on Integrity. Since its adoption in 1996, Standard 2.5 required that each member school "*shall seek to enhance participation of persons of racial/ethnic minorities in institutional life. According to its stated purpose, the school shall [also] seek to address the concerns of women and to increase their participation in theological education*" (Bulletin 48, 2008, Part 1, p. 144). The change proposed in 2010 split Standard 2.5 into two: Standard 2.5 essentially required that each school "*shall seek to enhance participation and leadership of persons of color in institutional life*" and Standard 2.6 essentially required that each school "*shall seek to increase the participation and leadership of women in theological education*" (Bulletin 49, 2010, Part 3, p. 45). What the proposed change on women in leadership effectively deleted was "*according to its stated purpose*."

That proposed change to the original Standard 2.5 elicited seven different motions from the floor of the 2010 Biennial Meeting over the course of two business sessions, beginning with the first motion to add "*within the framework of the school's stated purposes and theological commitments*" to Standard 2.6 on the participation and leadership of women (Minutes, pp. 8-10). Other motions sought instead to strengthen the role of women, regardless of a school's theological stance. Some motions were defeated on the floor; others were referred to the Committee on Reference and Counsel (see Footnote 155). In the end, the membership voted to adopt the first motion (Biennial Meeting Minutes, 2010, pp. 9-10).

At the opening session the next morning, one woman "filed a formal protest, inviting others to stand in support and sign a copy of the protest [over] the nature and tone of the debate [and] an outcome which many of us see as a regression in our commitment to supporting gender equity" (Biennial Meeting Minutes, 2010, p. 10). It was one of the most troublesome votes in ATS history. It was also the first time

[289] Other changes were to meet new U.S. Department (USDE) regulations, such as having teach-out plans for schools about to close, requiring schools to advertise an upcoming accreditation visit to its publics, monitoring substantive changes, and defining which actions of the Board could be appealed (Bulletin 49, 2010, Part 3, pp. 13 and 21-42).

[290] The 2010 Commission Procedures also required schools to have some process for "verifying student identity and protecting student privacy" (Bulletin 49, 2010, Part 3, p. 29), something required by USDE because of concerns over non-students completing online work for students who were actually enrolled.

in ATS history that more theologically conservative schools constituted a majority on such an important vote, as most Evangelical Protestant and Roman Catholic schools tended to vote in favor of the first motion, while Mainline Protestant schools tended to favor the original proposal. In important ways that vote reflected the 2010 Biennial Meeting theme: "The Future Has Arrived: Changing Theological Education in a Changed World," albeit in ways not anticipated.

One other controversial vote at the 2010 Biennial Meeting involved the application of Unification Theological Seminary for Affiliate status. As noted earlier (see p. 108 above), that school had applied for Affiliate status in 2008 but was not approved by the membership, despite being recommended by the ATS Board of Directors. At the 2010 meeting, the initial vote was negative but a motion to reconsider the vote on Unification, after a review by the Committee on Reference and Counsel, was made and carried. At a later business session, the Committee moved to grant Unification status as an Affiliate, reminding the membership that Affiliate status was not a membership category and Affiliates had no vote in ATS matters. This time the membership voted to grant Unification status as an Affiliate (Biennial Meeting Minutes, 2010, pp. 4 and 7). The key concern here was what former Executive Director Leon Pacala had called the "threshold issue" for ATS membership as a Judeo-Christian organization (see p. 79 above).

At the 2010 Biennial Meeting, the ATS Board of Directors proposed four revised ATS Policy Statements (renamed ATS Policy Guidelines), which the membership had requested at the 2008 Biennial Meeting (see p. 108 above). The revised Policy Guidelines on Striving for Culturally Competent Schools replaced two previous statements on Ethical Guidelines for Seminaries and Guidelines for Women in Theological Schools that had been adopted in 1976 (see p. 60 above). The former statements on Faculty Reductions During Financial Crisis (1976); Faculty Resignations, Leaves, and Retirements (1960); and Student Financial Aid (1976) had all been updated to reflect current issues. One remaining policy on Professional Ethics for Teachers from 1972 was "retired" (Biennial Meeting Minutes, 2010, p. 6).

Another unusual aspect of the 2010 Biennial Meeting was that it was held in the immediate aftermath of the Great Recession of 2007-2009, whose effects were still deeply felt by most ATS schools.[291] In that regard, the ATS treasurer "highlighted the Association's careful fiscal management during a time of deep financial stress and noted budget reductions that included salary freezes and elimination of matches for staff pension contributions" (Biennial Meeting Minutes, 2010, p. 2). She went on to report that ATS investment funds had dropped 18% in the previous fiscal year, a loss of more than $2 million, mirroring the experience of many ATS schools during those difficult financial days (see Footnote 291). Several workshops at the 2010 meeting focused on "financial exigency" and on "the choices we made to stay alive." The membership also heard a Report on Institutional Viability and Financially Stressed Schools Program (Bulletin 49, 2010, Part 3, p. 147).[292]

Between the 2010 and 2012 Biennial Meetings, the Board of Commissioners tended to a wide range of issues, in addition to its normal workload of making accrediting decisions on behalf of the 237 accredited

[291] The Great Recession in the U.S. lasted from December 2007 to June 2009, the longest economic downturn since World War II (Federal Reserve History, The Great Recession). In Canada, it lasted from 2008 to 2009 (Recession in Canada). In one biennium (2008-2010), ATS schools lost more than $1 billion (15%) in investment funds (see Table 1.2 in Annual Data Tables). While the financial markets eventually recovered, enrollments in U.S. higher education never have, dropping by more than 2 million students since 2010's peak of 21 million (College Enrollment in the United States from 1965 to 2022, Statista). That decade-long decline is unprecedented in U.S. history, though graduate enrollments have increased by about 300,000 (Postbaccalaureate Enrollment, NCES). See also Chris Meinzer's Economics of the Past Teach Us about the Present (*Colloquy*, May 2020).

[292] The Board of Commissioners reported at the 2010 Biennial Meeting that it had requested the ATS Executive Director to issue a letter to all member schools in February 2009 to let them know that the Board would "interpret [the Standards] in the context of the financial stress that all schools are experiencing" (Bulletin 49, 2010, Part 3, p. 14).

members.[293] Much of the 2010-2012 biennium was devoted to writing a petition to the U.S. Department of Education for renewal of recognition, as well as another petition to CHEA for renewal of recognition. Those two petitions required numerous changes to Commission policies and procedures, especially in the Board's Policy Manual, which occupied significant time at that biennium's four Board meetings. At its February 2011 meeting, the Board approved a revised Handbook of Accreditation that included two new documents: Guidelines for Petitions for Exceptions and Educational Experimentation and Guidelines for Duration Requirements for Two-Year Master's Programs (Commission Minutes, February 2011, p. 3). At that meeting, the Board also removed the category of "Areas of Needed Growth" from visiting committee reports, since that area "lacked clarity" (Minutes, p. 5).

The June 2011 Board meeting approved many additional changes to the Board Policy Manual in order to meet new USDE regulations. Those changes included new requirements to monitor key areas of member schools related to enrollment, distance education, degree completions, placement rates, and financial health (Commission Minutes, June 2011, pp. 2-5). Additional requirements for evaluator training and extension site visits were also incorporated into the Board Policy Manual (Minutes, pp. 2-5).

At its February 2012 meeting, the Board of Commissioners discussed "the tension between quality improvement and quality assurance" (Minutes, p. 2). They also discussed distinctions between notations and probation and wondered whether the Board should either "eliminate notations as a category" or "if they should cover a broader range of issues" (Minutes, p. 2). At that February 2012 meeting, the Board discussed the progress on the revision of the Degree Program Standards, which would be presented for comments at several "interpretation conferences" across North America for additional feedback, prior to presenting a final draft to the membership at the 2012 Biennial Meeting (Minutes, p. 4). In one of the Board's least popular decisions it instructed the Executive Director to inform the member schools that each school would now be required to "publish the school's statement of educational effectiveness on its website… in compliance with CHEA" regulations (Minutes, p. 6). The Board was also informed in February 2012 of a member school's "intention to voluntarily withdraw its membership in the Commission" (Minutes, February 2012, p. 7). That was in response to a decision the Board had made in June 2011 to "withdraw [its] institutional accreditation by June 25, 2012" (Minutes, June 2011, p. 24).

At a specially-called "WebEx conference call" in April 2012—the Commission's first virtual meeting, the Board reviewed the final draft of the proposed revisions to the Degree Program Standards (Commission Minutes, February 2012, p. 4). At its June 2012 meeting, the Board approved an implementation plan for the new Standards. It also decided to wait until its February 2013 meeting to develop a "protocol for considering exceptions" to residency via online delivery methods, presuming the membership approved proposed revisions to the Standards on residency in 2012 (Minutes, June 2012, p. 2). The June 2012 Board meeting also considered "the contributions of Ministry Practitioners on evaluation committees," something USDE had begun requiring in 2010 (Minutes, June 2012, p. 4).

During the 2010-2012 biennium, the Board of Commissioners probably dealt with more actions related to notations than it had in many years. At its February 2011 meeting, the Board considered more than two dozen actions on notations, most of which were "show cause why a notation should not be imposed" (Minutes, February 2011, passim). Half of those dealt with financial concerns. At its June 2011 meeting, the Board again considered more than two dozen actions on notations, most of which were also "show cause why a notation should not be imposed" (Minutes, February 2011, passim). Unlike in February 2011, the notations considered at the June 2011 meeting were nearly half for financial

[293] The ATS accrediting staff also welcomed two new support staff in 2010: Susan Beckerdite and Caitlan Rohrer. The latter was replaced by Lea Ann Fairall in 2012.

concerns and half for evaluation/assessment concerns. At its February 2012 meeting, the Board discussed nearly 40 notations, mostly "show cause" in nature. And in this its third meeting of the biennium, the pendulum had swung fully from concerns over finances to concerns over assessment, with a three to one ratio favoring assessment. In its fourth and final meeting of the biennium, the Board considered nearly three dozen actions on notations, most in the form of either "show cause" or "threats" to impose. This time the balance was back to even, with about half dealing with finances and about half dealing with assessment.

The 2012 Biennial Meeting in Minneapolis had the largest attendance of any Biennial Meeting since 1998, with 414 registrants, including 347 from 197 member schools (Biennial Meeting Minutes, 2012, p. 1).[294] The 13 new Associate Members approved at that meeting constituted the highest number since 15 were admitted in 1972 (see Appendix D). One of those new Associates was Wesley Seminary at Indiana Wesleyan University, the first new Associate Member in ATS history that delivered most of its degree programs online, including 42 of 75 hours for its MDiv (Bulletin 50, 2012, Part 3, p. 116). That seemed appropriate since the 2012 meeting would revise Degree Program Standards to allow reduced residency requirements for every degree, with greater use of on online education.

The 2012 meeting was the second Biennial Meeting in a row to consider revised Standards, which had mostly been in place since 1996. The 2010 meeting adopted revised General Institutional Standards, except Standard 10 on Multiple Locations and Distance Education, which was saved for 2012. The 2012 meeting focused on the Degree Program Standards, including a new Educational Standard that would incorporate the former Standard 10 and add new emphases on assessment of degree programs. The Board of Commissioners reported in 2012 that the proposed revisions "have been designed to strike a balance among competing educational visions of schools that live in different ecclesial worlds" (Bulletin 50, 2012, Part 3, p. 14). Those "ecclesial worlds" were highlighted in the Executive Director's report, noting that Evangelical Protestant schools (113) now outnumbered Mainline Protestant schools (105) for the first time, as well as Roman Catholic/Orthodox schools (55).[295] Each of those three ecclesial families had very different views of seminary education, particularly on issues of residency.

The 2012 revisions, for the first time, allowed distance (online) education to be a significant component of every degree, for schools with "comprehensive distance education approval" (six or more courses, per the 2010 revision), including granting "exceptions" to allow most degrees to be offered completely online. Up to two-thirds of the MDiv, professional MA degrees, and the DMin could be offered online—and 100% online if granted an "exception."[296] The academic MA could be delivered all online without any exceptions needed. The ThM had to be done all on campus, as did the PhD, though schools could also petition for exceptions for those two degrees, though those were granted less frequently. Another

[294] The 1998 Biennial Meeting in Baltimore, focused on technology, had 447 registrants, the most until 2022 when 490 attended, many because of the Lilly-funded Pathways for Tomorrow project. The Biennial Meetings from 2014 to 2022 averaged 435 (the author is indebted to Alissa Horton of ATS for those figures; she joined ATS in 2010 and still serves there). The average in the 2000s was 354. The 1990s averaged 340. The 1980s Minutes record only school, not individual, figures (see Endnote 2).

[295] The three numbers in parentheses are from the author's analysis of Table 1.2 in the 2012-2013 ATS Annual Data Tables, which include the 13 Associate Members inducted in 2012. Ten were Evangelical Protestant and three were Roman Catholic. Interestingly, the original 15-member revisions task force appointed in 2008 (see p. 106 above) had been expanded to 19, with the majority (10) now from Mainline Protestant schools, five from Evangelical Protestant schools, and four from Roman Catholic schools (Bulletin 50, 2012, Part 3, p. 15).

[296] All degrees in music required two-thirds of the coursework to be done on campus, though exceptions could be granted. For some reason, the EdD degree required all work to be done on campus with no exceptions. The 2012 Standards also included a new degree category "Doctor of [specialization]," which incorporated the previous DEdMin and DMiss degrees, as well as allowed for other specialized professional doctorates. That degree's residency requirements mirrored the DMin.

important revision to the 2012 Degree Program Standards was to strengthen the "goals" section of each degree to include new sections on "learning outcomes" and "educational assessment" (Bulletin 50, 2012, Part 1, pp. G39-75). The inclusion of "learning outcomes" with "program goals" became a bit problematic for many schools in subsequent years as they tried to differentiate the two.

The new Educational Standard incorporated much of the former Standard 4 on the Theological Curriculum, but added a new section on exceptions and experiments, which were allowed for almost all degree residency requirements for the first time. The new Educational Standard also defined four delivery modes: campus-based education, extension education, distance education, and faculty-directed individual instruction (Bulletin 50, 2012, Part 3, pp. 31-38). For the first time, the Standards included requirements for "Nondegree Instructional Programs" (e.g., certificates), even though such programs were not within the Commission's scope of accreditation.[297] For the first time also, the Standards specifically forbade correspondence education because it "lacks regular and substantive interaction between faculty and students" (Part 3, p. 31; see also pp. 24 and 79 above). The new Standard on Distance Education had 19 (!) sub-sections, with so many details it was felt by some to be overly prescriptive and problematic in terms of being able to keep up with the rapid changes in technology.

The new DMin Degree Program Standard defined for the first time "MDiv equivalency" as "72 graduate semester hours" (Bulletin 50, 2012, Part 3, p. 66), though ATS had allowed MDiv degrees with that few hours since the 1990s. The new minimum of 72 hours was chosen partly in response to U.S. military chaplaincy regulations, which required at least 72 hours.[298] The proposed new DMin Standard still required "at least three years of experience subsequent to the first graduate theological degree," but did allow "as many as 15 percent" without that experience (Bulletin 50, 2012, Part 3, p. 67). However, that proposal was changed by an amendment from the floor.

In fact, the Degree Program Standards proposed at the 2012 Biennial Meeting met with 17 amendments from the floor (Minutes, 2012, p. 5). Those amendments dealt with everything from the definition of a hybrid course to the maximum transfer credits allowed. After review by the Committee on Reference and Counsel,[299] the membership ended up approving seven of the 17 amendments proposed on the floor, including a change in DMin admission requirements that allowed "as many as 20 percent" without three years of ministry experience after the first graduate theological degree (Minutes, 2012, p. 13).

Interestingly, the new Standards in 2012 proposed for four of the ten categories that all credits for those degrees "should be earned within ten years of the awarding of the degree" (Bulletin 50, 2012, Part 3, pp. 47, 53, 58, and 85). Those four degree categories were the MDiv, the professional MA, the MA in church music, and the PhD. The membership adopted a motion from the floor to delete the "ten-year" rule for the PhD, but not the others (Minutes, 2012, p. 12). The "ten-year" rule proved particularly problematic for many schools in subsequent years and was deleted in the 2020 revision. It seemed to be a counter example of the counsel given the Board of Commissioners in 2007 that "accreditation is not accounting" (see p. 105 above). With the approval of the seven amendments, the membership voted to adopt the 2012 Degree Program Standards—after two years, three drafts, one online input meeting, nine regional

[297] Certificate programs became an issue for many accreditors when USDE introduced the "gainful employment" rule in 2011. It was aimed at for-profit vocational programs but involved all schools with certificate programs, requiring extensive paperwork to comply. The rule was rescinded in 2019 but reintroduced in 2023 (The Tortured Path of the Gainful Employment Rule). The rule is one reason why the ATS Commission never sought to include certificate programs within its scope of USDE recognition.

[298] See Tanner's Reports of the MDiv's Death Are Greatly Exaggerated (*Colloquy*, January 2019), p. 2.

[299] The Committee on Reference and Counsel was first used in 1972 (see Footnote 155) and played a key role in revisions of Standards in 1972 (p. 56 above), 1984 (p. 69), 1996 (p. 87), and 2010 (pp. 110-111).

"interpretation conferences," and seventeen amendments (Bulletin 50, 2010, Part 3, pp. 13-14). The result was a three-part set of Standards totaling nearly 30,000 words. That was a 50% increase over the 1996 Standards, which had about 20,000 words, and triple the length of the Standards in the 1980s, which had about 10,000 words.[300]

Other revisions adopted at the 2012 Biennial Meeting concerned the Commission Procedures. Those were fairly modest and mostly in response to new U.S. Department of Education regulations, particularly since ATS was involved at that time in renewing its recognition with the Department. Key changes included adding a "Ministry Practitioner" to the Board and the Appeals Panel (see pp. 67 and 112 above) and expanding the definition of "substantive changes," i.e., initiatives from member schools that required prior Commission approval (Bulletin 50, 2012, Part 3, pp. 232-25).

The Board of Commissioners reported in 2012 that it had "processed a record number of actions during this biennium," including 85 comprehensive visits and reports from 140 some schools—both records (Bulletin 50, 2012, Part 3, p. 14).[301] And all of those actions were taken with only three full-time accrediting staff members—in the midst of a major revision of the Standards and petitions for renewal to both USDE and CHEA. It was what some at ATS called the "perfect storm" of accrediting activities happening all at once. It is not surprising then that the Board reported in 2012 that ATS had hired two new Directors of Accreditation: Raúl Gómez Ruiz and Tom Tanner, both of whom would begin that summer (Part 3, p. 14).[302] Even with those two hires, the Commission treasurer reported a balanced budget, with net assets of nearly $800,000 (Part 3, pp. 89-90).

The ATS Board of Directors reported at the 2012 meeting that it had launched a new project, Economic Equilibrium and Theological Schools (Bulletin 50, 2012, Part 3, pp. 122-123). That new project, funded by the Lilly Endowment, would "identify underlying issues that result in chronic financial stress [for] a significant number of ATS member schools experiencing substantive and enduring financial stress that threatens their ability to attain their respective missions" (Part 3, p. 122). The effects of the 2008-2009 Great Recession were still lingering (see pp. 108-109 and 111 above). The 2012 meeting also heard another report on the Institutional Viability and Financially Stressed Schools Program, begun in 2009, and would continue into a second phase, the Economic Equilibrium project (Part 3, p. 150).

One of the more exciting projects to be announced at the 2012 Biennial Meeting was called, at that point, simply "Educational Models," later to be renamed "Educational Models and Practices in Theological Education" (Part 3, p. 123). It would be a "comprehensive research project [on] emerging practices and new educational models for accredited theological education, particularly as they respond to identified needs within the church" (Part 3, p. 123). That project would end up being funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. with a nearly $7 million grant, would last four years (2014-2018), and would involve more than 90% of the membership. It laid the foundation for the third major redevelopment of the Standards in 2018-2020. To that period we now turn.

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[300] The 1936 ATS Standards had 612 words. The 2012 ATS Standards with nearly 30,000 words were the longest of any accrediting agency: twice as long as the second longest by the American Bar Association, and four to five times longer than most regional accrediting agencies. The 2020 Standards have roughly 7,500 words, one-fourth the size of the 2012 Standards.

[301] The numbers for the 2012 Board report include numbers added by the author from the Board's June 2012 meeting, which occurred too late to include in the Biennial Meeting program.

[302] Ruiz left in 2013 because his religious order called him to Rome. Tanner, the author of this history, stayed for ten years, retiring in 2022. Those two joined Tisa Lewis (who retired in 2015), William Miller (who retired in 2014), and Lester Ruiz (who is still at ATS), giving ATS five accrediting directors in 2012 for the first time since 2000 (see Footnote 246).

Chapter 9. Re-envisioning the Standards (2013-2024)

The last chapter in this 90-year history of the ATS Commission on Accrediting covers just over a decade, but those dozen years may have witnessed more changes in theological education than in any previous period in ATS history. It was a decade that began with a flurry of exceptions and experiments, including the Commission's first fully online MDiv and first competency-based MDiv. It was a decade whose first half focused on the Educational Models and Practices project, with 18 ATS "peer groups" looking at everything from online education to programs in prisons, from MDiv duration to DMin admissions. It was a decade whose second half focused on redeveloping a set of Standards that would reflect not "best practices" as in the past, but "best principles" for the future of theological education. The 2020 Standards were unlike any before and, for the first time, shorter than the ones they replaced. It was a decade when theological education and the Standards that defined it were re-envisioned.

At its first meeting of the 2012-2014 biennium in February 2013, the Board authorized a revision of the Guidelines for Petitioning for Exceptions and Experiments (see p. 112 above). That revision proved to be one of the most used Guidelines in ATS history until the 2020 revision of the Standards (see later on this page). At the February 2013 meeting, the Board heard that ATS's petition for renewal of recognition with CHEA had been "given a 'clean report' for five years" (Minutes, p. 2). The USDE recognition process, however, was not complete, because USDE's initial review had found fifty-some items of "non-compliance," which led to multiple changes in the Board Policy Manual.[303] In that context, the Board "expressed concerns from Canadian member schools regarding… creeping implementation of USDE-driven requirements" (Commission Minutes, February 2013, p. 2).

At the February 2013 Commissioners' meeting, the "senior director of accrediting"[304] reported on "the increasing volume of work both for the Board and the accreditation staff" (Minutes, p. 2). The Board appointed a task force to address the workload issue. The February 2013 meeting also appears to be the first time the Board denied initial accreditation to a school (Minutes, pp. 52-53). That same meeting also reported the closure of Bangor Theological Seminary, just one year shy of its 200th anniversary. It was the first of nearly a dozen closures that decade (see p. 109 above). In its August 2013 meeting,[305] the Board approved a dozen exceptions to residency requirements—the most in its history but only the opening of the floodgate. Between 2013 and 2020, the Board would end up approving 242 (!) exceptions and experiments, 227 of which were exceptions and 15 of which were experiments, involving nearly 100 ATS schools (Board of Commissioners, Agenda Volume IV, June 2020, p. 33). All but twenty were for exceptions to residency, including two dozen fully online MDiv programs, the first of which were granted in August 2013. For each of the 242 petitions granted during those seven years, the Board required a series of reports documenting the effectiveness of the change, with nearly 200 reports from nearly 100 schools received by June of 2020. Those reports, along with results from the Educational Models project, provided a wealth of information to guide the 2018-2020 redevelopment.

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[303] The 50+ findings of "non-compliance" were the most ever for ATS, but many accreditors in the early 2010s experienced similar results from USDE. One result of ATS's USDE review was the development of what ATS called the "Targeted Issues Checklist" that focused on Title IV regulations. That Checklist disappeared with the 2020 revision (see Endnote 12).

[304] The title of "senior director" was established in January 2013 by the Executive Director to keep the number of his direct reports to a reasonable level. Prior to that all ATS directors reported directly to him, which at that time was about a dozen.

[305] The August 2013 meeting was scheduled later than usual to accommodate late spring visits. August proved to be so busy a time for Commissioners that in 2014 the Board went back to having their spring meeting in June.

The August 2013 Board meeting welcomed one new Director of Accreditation, Debbie Creamer (from Iliff), to replace Raúl Gómez Ruiz, who left earlier that year (see Footnote 302). The Board also welcomed Barbara Brittingham, then president of the New England Association. She was invited to observe and then comment on the Board's work (part of the workload issue raised at its February 2013 meeting).[306] Brittingham asked a key question: "What is theological about theological accreditation?" Her question reflected a similar one asked in the subtitle to David Kelsey's 1992 book, *To Understand God Truly: What Is Theological about a Theological School?* (see p. 72 above).

Brittingham suggested several ways for the Board to focus on its core work of theological accreditation and minimize some of its more routine work. Those suggestions included expanding the Board membership, increasing the number of "arrows in the Board's quiver" (such as Letter of Concern), being more open to changing educational models (such as competency-based education), requiring a single mid-term report to replace numerous other reports, and moving towards "risk-based accreditation," in which the Board spends more time on schools "at risk" and less time on those that are not (Commission Minutes, August 2013, pp. 6-7). Several of those items would be proposed as changes in the Commission Procedures at the 2014 Biennial Meeting (see p. 119 below).

The February 2014 meeting of the Board of Commissioners introduced Lori Neff as the newly hired Director of Accreditation Services, replacing the retiring Susan Beckerdite (see Footnote 293). At that meeting, the Board approved multiple changes to expedite the work of the Board (Commission Minutes, February 2014, pp. 2-4). Those changes included new petition templates, new guidelines, revised notations, and new options for evaluation committee reports (e.g., adding "Areas of Continued Improvement to Be Addressed During the Next Period of Accreditation"). The Board also approved a new fee for petitions and new guidelines for submitting reports. The Executive Director asked the Board to allow accrediting directors to assist in the new Educational Models and Practices project and to authorize the accrediting staff "to begin a planning process… for redeveloping the accrediting standards" (Minutes, February 2014, p. 2). The Board approved those requests along with a policy to move to digital formats for all Board materials and for all self-study materials from schools, though paper copies continued for most of those items until 2020. The Board approved, too, a change in how it communicated its decisions to member schools, requiring for the first time a "rationale" for each decision it made (Minutes, p. 6).

At its June 2014 meeting, the Board of Commissioners heard a report from Stephen Graham as director of the Educational Models and Practices project, "underscoring the collaborative nature of the project" among member schools (more than 90% participated) and "reiterating the role that the project results will play in the revision of the Standards" (Commission Minutes, June 2014, p. 2). The Board approved a new evaluation form that it would use after each meeting to self-evaluate its own work. In addition, the Board "voted to withdraw from the current joint visit protocol with SACS," one of the last regionals to cease joint visits (Minutes, June 2014, p. 4).

At the same June 2014 meeting, the Board heard a report on staff actions since the last meeting in February 2014, at which it had authorized staff to begin handling more routine matters. Prior to 2014, almost all accrediting decisions, no matter how routine, had been made by the Board. Beginning in 2014, nearly 30% of all accrediting decisions were made by staff, giving the Commissioners more time to discuss more substantive matters. By 2020, nearly half were made by staff (Board of Commissioners, Agenda Volume IV, June 2020, p. 32). One other major shift that began in 2014 was the absence of

[306] Two examples of the Board's increasingly unmanageable workload were (1) its late adjournments, often not dismissing until evening after a full day of decisions and (2) the sheer volume of materials sent to Commissioners before each meeting, often exceeding 3,500 (!) pages. With the move to digital materials in February 2014, along with other changes discussed above, the number of Board materials went from over 3,500 pages to around 350 pages for meetings during the 2010s.

notations on assessment of student learning. As recently as February 2012, the Board discussed nearly 40 notations with three-fourths of them (nearly 30) focused on assessment, though most were "show cause" actions (see p. 113 above). At its June 2014 meeting, the Board imposed only two notations on assessment, compared to eight on finances (Minutes, p. 6). The June 2014 meeting was also the first time the Board approved a competency-based MDiv degree, as a five-year experiment, for Northwest Baptist Seminary in British Columbia (Minutes, pp. 36-37).[307] In addition, the Board granted initial accreditation to Wesley Seminary at Indiana Wesleyan University, the first ATS-accredited school to offer most of its degrees online, and one of the few schools to achieve initial accreditation in only two years (see p. 113 above). Theological education was being re-envisioned.[308]

The 2014 Biennial Meeting was back in Pittsburgh, for the sixth time (see Appendix A). It began with an Open Forum on proposed changes in the Bylaws and in Commission Procedures. One of the workshops introduced a new *Reflective Guide to Effective Assessment for Theological Schools.* It replaced Chapter Eight of the Handbook of Accreditation that had been written in 2006 (see p. 102 above). Many schools had continued to struggle with assessment since that 2006 publication, with the number of reports on assessment tripling since then. So, the Board designed a simpler approach with the new *Reflective Guide*. The issue of assessment/evaluation had received renewed emphasis in the 2012 Standards, mentioned more than 300 times (Bulletin 51, 2014, Part 3, p. 6).

The Report of the Board of Commissioners at the 2014 Biennial Meeting was the first to summarize all of the Board's accreditation actions in the form of a table and to compare the actions of that biennium with the two previous ones (Bulletin 51, 2014, Part 3, p. 16). While total actions had jumped from an average of 520 in the two previous biennia to 711 in 2012-2014, nearly a third of those were now handled by ATS accrediting staff. The biggest jump had been in petitions, increasing 37%, from an average of 223 to 306. Many of those petitions dealt with exceptions (see p. 116 above). The Board of Commissioners also reported on seven new Associate Members and four withdrawals of membership (Bulletin 51, 2014, Part 3, p. 44). In addition, the Board noted that "the ATS headquarters received a much-needed facelift this past year, funded by a generous gift from a Pittsburgh foundation" (Bulletin 51, 2014, Part 3, p. 44).

One of the biggest agenda items at the 2014 meeting was the approval of revised Bylaws and Commission Procedures. The Commission Bylaws were changed to require officers of the Board of Commissioners to be elected by the membership (Bulletin 51, 2014, Part 3, pp. 71-76), rather than be chosen by the Board itself, as had been the case since the 1956 Constitution (see p. 38 above). The membership also approved changes in both the Association and the Commission Bylaws to replace the Personnel Committee with a Coordinating Committee that had representatives from both corporations. The new Coordinating Committee had two primary responsibilities: "oversee the personnel policies of the Association" and "provide a venue for interpreting the work of the ATS Board of Directors and the work of the Board of Commissioners to one another" (Part 3, p. 72). The Commission Bylaws were also revised to expand the Board of Commissioners from a maximum of 16 to a maximum of 20 (Part 3, p. 73). That had been a suggestion of Brittingham when she reviewed the work of the Board of Commissioners at its August 2013 meeting (see p. 117 above).

[307] The June 2014 Commission Minutes described that competency-based MDiv as "like none the Board has ever considered before" (Minutes, p. 5). Five years later, the Board removed the "experimental" status of that pioneering program, giving it "ongoing approval," and reaffirmed Northwest Seminary (its name then) for a full ten years (Commission Minutes, June 2019, pp. 24-25).

[308] For more on Northwest's story, along with other pioneers in competency-based education like Kairos University (formerly Sioux Falls Seminary), see *Theological Education: Principles and Practices of a Competency-Based Approach* (Kregel Academic, 2024). It was written by Kenton Anderson and Gregory Henson, the presidents of Northwest (now at Providence) and Kairos.

The Commission Procedures were revised at the 2014 Biennial Meeting to include a definition of "accreditable entity," first raised in 2003 (see p. 98 above), a new "Letter of Concern" option that was private and could be used before a public Notation, a clarification on when a Focused Visit could be authorized, and changes in the substantive change procedures that streamlined and simplified many of them (Bulletin 51, 2014, Part 3, pp. 26-37). By far the most controversial revision to the Commission Procedures was a new requirement for a "midterm quality improvement report" (Bulletin 51, Part 3, p. 35) for schools after a comprehensive evaluation visit. That new report was suggested by Brittingham (see p. 117 above) as a way to replace the numerous other reports the Board required after such visits. The membership, however, saw it as yet another report, rather than as a reduction in reports; it was voted down (Biennial Meeting Minutes, 2014, p. 9). All the other proposed revisions were adopted without any changes. The membership also approved an increase in annual dues of about 10%, the first since 2008 and only the second since 1996 (Biennial Meeting Minutes, 2014, pp. 3 and 5).[309]

One of the central emphases of the 2014 Biennial Meeting was the launch of the Educational Models and Practices in Theological Education project. Funded by the Lilly Endowment for $7 million over four years (2014-2018), this was the biggest project ATS had undertaken, even larger than the Readiness for Ministry project of the 1970s (see p. 62 above), the Basic Issues in Theological Education program of the 1980s (see p. 72 above), and the "What Is the Good Theological School?" project of the 1990s (see p. 82 above). As noted earlier (see pp. 115-117 above), the Educational Models and Practices project would involve more than 90% of the membership and lay the groundwork for the third redevelopment of the Standards in the Commission's 90-year history.

Between the 2014 and 2016 Biennial Meetings, the Board of Commissioners welcomed two new staff in accrediting: Barbara Mutch and Joshua Reinders, both in the fall of 2015. Mutch replaced Tisa Lewis, who retired in 2015 after ten years at ATS (see Footnote 275). Reinders replaced Lea Ann Fairall, who left in 2015 (see Footnote 293). Mutch, the first Canadian hire at ATS, is currently Senior Director of Accreditation, and Reinders is currently Accrediting Visits Coordinator (see ATS website).

The February 2015 meeting of the Board heard another report on the Educational Models and Practices project, including "its implications for the next revision of the Standards" (Minutes, p. 2). The Board also wrestled with its "orienting compass," which the Executive Director described as "serving the standards, the schools, and their constituencies" (Minutes, p. 2). Regarding the issue of balance between quality improvement and quality assurance, it was suggested that "accreditation is not unlike the difference between the juvenile and adult justice systems… the former rests on improvement and the latter on compliance," an arguable metaphor (Minutes, p. 2).

At the same February 2015 meeting, the Board approved a new policy to require member schools to appoint an "Accreditation Liaison Officer" who would be a key point of contact, in addition to the dean and president, between the Board of Commissioners and the school (Commission Minutes, February 2015, p. 3). The Board also authorized new Guidelines for State Authorization for Distance Education.[310]

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[309] The 2014 Biennial Meeting included a workshop on a major revision of the Strategic Information Report (SIR), led by Chris Meinzer at ATS, who had done that revision. The SIR was first introduced in the 1990s (see Footnote 243), and this revision made it much more user friendly, with benchmarks that were helpful to member schools, especially in preparing self-studies.

[310] The issue of "state authorization" for online programs initially arose in 2010 when USDE issued new regulations that required every accredited school to be "authorized" in every state in which it had students enrolled, even if only enrolled online. The 2010 regulations caused considerable turmoil, as schools scrambled to negotiate with every single state in which they had online students. The ensuing chaos led to the 2013 creation of the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA), which allowed participating schools to be "authorized" in every state except California, the only state not to join NC-SARA (see The Evolution of Compliance for State Authorization of Distance Education). See also Endnote 12.

In addition, the Board reviewed several issues that Brittingham had raised in 2013 (see p. 117 above). Those issues included greater attention to risk-based accreditation, more research on alternative educational models, and increased focus on the "big picture," especially on her question: "What's theological about theological accreditation?" (Commission Minutes, February 2016, p. 4). At the end of its meeting, the Board reviewed all of its decisions for "consistency and fairness," noting that "consistency does not mean uniformity" (Minutes, p. 6).

One of the more challenging actions before the Board at its February 2015 meeting was a report on a focused visit to General Theological Seminary. That school had made national news in the fall of 2014 after eight of its ten faculty went on strike at the beginning of the fall term (see Faculty Strike at General Theological Seminary, *Inside Higher Ed*, September 30, 2014). The eight asked General's board to dismiss the new president or they would resign. The trustees interpreted that as their resignations, and all eight were let go immediately. The Board of Commissioners authorized a focused visit soon after, which found a very divided campus with most of the dismissed faculty having been rehired but without resolution of the strained relationships. Some reconciliation did occur before a second focused visit that spring, but by the end of that academic year seven of the eight were no longer employed. The seminary eventually recovered, but it was an example of the difficult challenges facing theological education in this period.

At its June 2015 meeting, the Board of Commissioners requested "white papers" from staff on some of the issues discussed at its February 2015 meeting, including a "philosophy behind the next revision of the Standards" (Commission Minutes, June 2015, p. 3). The Board also adopted a new "Policy on Consistency and Fairness," observing that they enjoyed "fruitful discussions, including disagreements and consensus, …. as well as collaboration between Board and staff" (Minutes, pp. 4-5). At its February 2016 meeting, the Board heard a report from the Executive Director on Thinking Theologically About Accreditation that focused on the theological end that accreditation serves, serving the purposes of God (Minutes, p. 3). The Board heard further reports on the Educational Models and Practices project, which had convened 18 peer groups to discuss a variety of educational models and practices (see Educational Models and Practices Peer Group Reports Reveal Insights and Innovations, *Colloquy*, December 2017).[311]

At its June 2016 meeting, the Board heard a report from Dan Aleshire as Executive Director noting that this was his "53rd Board of Commissioners meeting" and would be almost his last as he prepared to retire in June 2017 after 19 years as the Director and 27 years at ATS. The Board affirmed his contributions and affirmed the need to "preserve 'ATS-style' accreditation" (Commission Minutes, June 2016, p. 4). The Board also noted that "the assessment focus of the last decade is shifting to a finance focus" (Minutes, p. 4). In its report at the 2016 Biennial Meeting later that month, the Board of Commissioners reported that finances now accounted for half of all notations, though the total number of notations had declined by almost a fourth from the previous biennium (Bulletin 52, 2016, Part 3, p. 16). The Board's 2016 report also noted that financial challenges were the most frequent reason for the Board to require reports, followed by assessment and planning (Part 3, p. 16).

At its final meeting of the 2014-2016 biennium, the Board heard an update on the Commission's 2015 petition for renewal of recognition with the U.S. Department of Education (Commission Minutes, June 2016, p. 2). For the first time in decades, the Department gave the Commission the maximum years of renewed recognition with no required follow-up reports (see Footnote 303). In light of the Department's concerns with student debt across the U.S. higher education landscape, ATS was pleased to report that among ATS graduates, student debt dropped for the first time in 2016 (Current Data on Educational Debt

[311] The ATS newsletter, *Colloquy*, published more than twenty articles on the Educational Models and Practices project. For a list, see *Colloquy Online* Articles Regarding the Educational Models and Practices Project.

Among ATS Graduates). Among ATS schools participating in the Economic Challenges Facing Future Ministers (ECFFM) project, more than three-fourths had lowered both the number of borrowers and the average amount of their debt (ECFFM Biennial Workshop; see also ATS website Research on Educational Debt and Institutional Finances).[312]

The 2016 Biennial Meeting in St. Louis was that city's first as ATS host site and Dan Aleshire's last as ATS Executive Director. The theme had two foci: racial reconciliation and changing educational models. The first focus arose out of the national news surrounding the killing of a young Black man by police in the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson in 2014. The 2016 meeting featured a plenary by Willie James Jennings on "The Core [ATS] Value of Diversity and the Committee on Race and Ethnicity" and a panel moderated by Michael Martin of National Public Radio on "Theological Education after Ferguson" (Bulletin 52, 2016, Part 3, p. 3).

The second focus of the 2016 Biennial Meeting was on the Educational Models and Practices project, which was featured in several workshops and in a plenary session. That focus mirrored the formal theme of the meeting: "Missions and Models: The Changing Forms of Theological Education."[313] Project director Stephen Graham outlined for the membership the six areas of the Educational Models project, which would conclude with a "redevelopment of the Standards" (Bulletin 52, 2016, Part 3, p. 68). The project's first task was a "mapping survey of the activities of theological schools in North America" that drew responses from 83% of the member schools (Part 3, pp. 68-69). One of the more surprising findings of that survey was that only about a fourth of ATS students lived on or near campus. The vast majority (73%) were commuters (Educational Models Biennial Presentation), with nearly a third of all ATS students also taking at least one class online and 10% at extension sites (see Endnote 11). The "great age of the residential seminary," which flourished from the 1950s to the 1980s, was past or passing (see p. 46 above and Endnote 11). It is no wonder that the Board of Commissioners granted more than 200 petitions for exceptions to residency requirements between 2012 and 2020 (see p. 116 above). The "there" in Being There was changing.[314]

The Board of Commissioners reported at the 2016 Biennial Meeting that they had taken 679 accrediting actions during that biennium, down 5% from the previous biennium (Bulletin 52, 2016, Part 3, p. 16). The biggest decline was in the number of comprehensive visits, down from 69 to 38. The second most frequent actions taken (second only to reports) were for petitions, especially for new extension sites and for exceptions to residency. Petitions for exceptions were up 110% from the previous biennium, reinforcing the changing nature of theological education (Part 3, p. 16).[315]

Part of the changing nature of theological education was the transition to a new ATS Executive Director as Aleshire prepared to retire in 2017. In the third and final volume of his masterful trilogy on theological education in North America, Glenn Miller wrote this: "Daniel Aleshire was the new [21st] century's most

[312] The ECFFM project was directed by Jo Ann Deasy, who joined the ATS staff in 2014. Also joining the ATS staff that year was Deborah Gin, who was involved in the Educational Models and Practices project. Both still serve at ATS (see ATS website).

[313] In his final Executive Director message, Aleshire reported that when they were considering the theme, someone half-jokingly proposed "Mission, Models, and Muddling Through: The Constant Task and Changing Forms of Theological Education" to emphasize how challenging those changing times were (Bulletin 52, 2016, Part 3, p. 14).

[314] Recall the 1997 book, Being There: Culture and Formation in Two Theological Schools (see Footnote 187). See also Tanner's Being Where? The Shift from On-Campus to Offsite to Online Education (*Colloquy,* Summer 2018).

[315] One other change at the 2016 Biennial Meeting was the granting of Associate Membership to ATS's first (and only) for-profit seminary, Grand Canyon Theological Seminary, whose application raised several questions from the floor (Biennial Meeting Minutes, 2016, p. 2).

influential interpreter of theological education… a naturally irenic figure who was able to work effectively across the wide spectrum of ATS schools" (*Piety and Plurality*, p. 340).[316] After his retirement in June 2017, ATS devoted an entire issue of *Theological Education* to him: A Tribute to Daniel O. Aleshire (Spring 2018), with nine articles from ATS staff who had worked with him (see Footnote 232).

Between the 2016 and 2018 Biennial Meetings, the Board of Commissioners focused on preparation for the redevelopment of the Standards, the third in the 90-year history of the Commission (see p. 3 above). In February 2017, the Board authorized a Preparatory Committee for the redevelopment project, whose primary task was to design a plan for redeveloping both the Standards and the Procedures (Commission Minutes, February 2017, p. 5). That plan, after review by the Board, would be brought to the 2018 Biennial Meeting for a formal vote by the membership on authorizing the redevelopment.[317] After the February 2017 Board meeting, the Executive Director published the first article on the proposed plan, Board of Commissioners Launches Planning Effort for Next Redevelopment of Standards and Procedures, *Colloquy*, February 2017).

The June 2017 meeting of the Board of Commissioners was Aleshire's last. He reported on the New Century Fund, begun in 2016 with a $10 million grant from the Lilly Endowment. The formal purpose of the grant was "to establish an endowment and support ATS programmatic initiatives designed to help seminaries prepare leaders who will meet the changing needs of Christian churches" (Lilly Endowment Awards $10 Million Grant to ATS, *Colloquy*, Summer 2016). It was also a way to honor Aleshire's many years of service to theological education as ATS's Executive Director. The goal was to grow the ATS endowment to $30 million by 2021, which was met. It was an extraordinary gift.

The June 2017 Board meeting also heard an announcement on a new School for Peer Reviewers, planned for January 2018. It would be the first time in decades that the ATS Commission offered in-person training for evaluation committee members (ATS Announces First School for Peer Reviewers, *Colloquy*, September 2017; see also p. 57 above). Graham gave another report on the Educational Models and Practices project, focused on the 18 "peer groups" that had met in Pittsburgh in April 2017 (Commission Minutes, June 2017, p. 3). That group of nearly 200 participants from ATS schools discussed concerns they had with the 2012 Standards, ranging from their overly prescriptive nature to the need for some kind of "educational center" that holds the Standards (and members) together. Mutch reported on two "Canadian Consultations" that she had held with ATS member schools in Canada, hearing their concerns about theological education from a Canadian perspective. The Preparatory Committee gave an update, with some discussion on whether the redevelopment process could be accomplished in two years or whether four years would be needed (Minutes, June 2017, pp. 5-6).[318]

The February 2018 meeting of the Board of Commissioners reviewed several reports on the plan for redeveloping the Standards and Procedures, including a history of ATS Standards since the first ones were published in 1938 (Commission Minutes, February 2018, pp. 2-3). The Preparatory Committee noted the need for new Standards that were focused more on general educational principles than

[316] When Aleshire retired in June 2017, one ATS staff member described his broad appeal to such a diverse membership this way: "When FDR died, thousands of mourners came to pay tribute to the man who meant so much to so many. One mourner grieved so deeply that a stranger asked him if he knew FDR. With tears he replied, 'No, but he knew me.'" That was Dan.

[317] Also at its February 2017 meeting, the Board welcomed Christopher The as the new Director of Commission Information Services, replacing Lori Neff (see p. 117 above). He still serves at ATS but in a different role (ATS website).

[318] The June 2017 meeting of the Board of Commissioners was Mary Young's last as a Commissioner as she was joining the ATS staff to serve as Director of Leadership Education after 23 years at Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology (Minutes, p. 3). She retired from ATS in 2023.

detailed prescriptions about educational practices. A framing question for the redevelopment process that surfaced in that discussion was "What is good theological education?"—an intentional variation from the framing question of the 1992-1996 redevelopment: "What is the good theological school?" The Board approved five motions on redevelopment, beginning with a formal motion for the membership at the 2018 Biennial Meeting to authorize "a comprehensive redevelopment of the Standards of Accreditation and the Commission Policies and Procedures expeditiously and with a substantial participation process" (Commission Minutes, February 2018, p. 3). The Board also approved using $250,000 from the New Century Fund to underwrite the two-year redevelopment process that would include broad participation of the membership.

At the June 2018 meeting, the Board of Commissioners recommended changes to the Bylaws that would allow for electronic meetings of the Board, which the membership voted to approve at the Biennial Meeting later that month. Those changes proved fortuitous in light of the 2020 pandemic that moved all ATS meetings online for more than a year. Graham gave one more report on the Educational Models and Practices project, focusing on key themes that had emerged from the 18 Peer Groups that would help inform the redevelopment process (see also Tanner's Reflections on Key Themes and Principles from ATS Peer Groups for the Redevelopment Process). At the June 2018 meeting, the Board heard more about the 19-member Redevelopment Task Force, with five Evangelicals, five Mainline, three Roman Catholics, and six ATS staff. Sarah Drummond was chair, Oliver McMahan was vice chair, and Tom Tanner served as ATS staff liaison (ATS Board of Commissioners Names Redevelopment Task Force, *Colloquy*, May 2018).

The 2018 Biennial Meeting in Denver was ATS's 100th anniversary. A then-record 440 persons registered for this special celebration, representing 203 ATS members (Biennial Meeting Minutes, 2018, p. 1). The theme was "Legacy and Innovation: 1918-2018." The meeting featured 44 displays from member schools at an "Innovation Expo" that highlighted key initiatives undertaken as part of the Educational Models and Practices project, which gave an update on its work at that meeting (Biennial Meeting Program, 2018, pp. 98-101).[319] In his message to the membership, the new Executive Director Frank Yamada highlighted how different the ATS membership was since the last redevelopment of the Standards in 1996.[320] Key changes he noted over the last twenty years were those related to ATS ecclesial families (Evangelical Protestant members were now a plurality), student demographics (more students of color), educational delivery modalities (from no online students in 1998 to more than 30,000), and from 30 petitions for substantive changes in 1998 to nearly 250 (Biennial Meeting Program, 2018, p. 16).

The ATS membership was also changing, even at the 2018 Biennial Meeting, with ten new Associate Member schools approved that represented numerous firsts. Among those ten were ATS's first Jewish member since 1978 (Academy for Jewish Religion; see Footnote 140), first fully online school (Catholic Distance University, now Catholic International University), first specialized seminary (Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies), first Indigenous seminary (NAIITS), and ATS's first school with over 4,000 students (Liberty University Rawlings School of Divinity, with 4,800 students). All ten were approved with almost no questions or concerns (Biennial Meeting Minutes, 2018, pp. 3-4).

The Board of Commissioners' Report at the 2018 Biennial Meeting noted the Board's 769 accrediting actions during the past biennium. That included 242 petitions (over 60 for exceptions and experiments), 67 comprehensive visits (nearly double the preceding biennium), and 373 reports received (Biennial

[319] Since 2018, the Biennial Meeting program book no longer appeared as Part 3 of the ATS Bulletin.

[320] Yamada was hired in July 2017 after serving as president of McCormick Theological Seminary. He was the first person of color to serve as ATS's Executive Director and the first to serve in 20 years, after Aleshire's record-breaking time in that role.

Meeting Program, 2018, p. 24). The main motion at the 2018 Biennial Meeting was to authorize the redevelopment of the Commission's Standards and Procedures "expeditiously," a motion that passed unanimously (Biennial Meeting Minutes, 2018, p. 8).[321]

The formal motion on redevelopment at the 2018 meeting was accompanied in the Biennial Meeting Program with nine pages of supporting documentation, ranging from a rationale[322] for the redevelopment project to a projected two-year timeline, with an initial year of researching and listening and a second year of writing and revising (Biennial Meeting Program, 2018, pp. 32-40).[323] The metaphor used for this third redevelopment in Commission history was not "tearing down and rebuilding from scratch" but rather the goal was to use the existing foundation to "build a strong structure with a few furnishings" to give schools the freedom to "decorate their own rooms" (Biennial Meeting Program, 2018, p. 34). The very next day, the 19-member Redevelopment Task Force met for the first time to begin the work of "listening" to the membership.[324]

Between the 2018 and 2020 Biennial Meetings, the Board of Commissioners met a record number of times: seven! Three of those were joint meetings with the Redevelopment Task Force, including the first meeting of the biennium in February of 2019. At that February 2019 meeting, the Board met for its first two hours with the Task Force to hear its first progress report. That report focused on "Ten Principles for Good Theological Education," which arose from the first six months of its initial "year of listening" to the membership.

Starting with principles reinforced the Task Force's intention to focus the new Standards on best principles, rather than best practices. That approach seemed the best way to address two competing values: (1) the growing diversity of the membership that involved increasingly diverse practices and (2) the membership's desire for simpler Standards that would be briefer and more flexible for each school's context. The "Ten Principles" were well received as a foundational document and underscored the principle-focused nature of this redevelopment process. After several iterations, the final set of ten was eventually published in the 2020 Self-Study Handbook (p. 6).

The rest of the February 2019 meeting of the Board of Commissioners focused on normal accrediting actions, including a welcome to the newest Director of Accreditation, Elsie Miranda, who joined the ATS staff in 2018 (she currently serves ATS as Director of Diversities). That meeting was also Debbie Creamer's first as Senior Director of Accreditation, with Lester Ruiz taking on a new role as Director of Accreditation and Global Engagement. At that meeting, the Commissioners approved a project to restructure the database to provide a more robust and up-to-date technology infrastructure for all the information collected by the Commission (Commission Minutes, February 2019, p. 4). A pilot project was also approved by the Board that would involve using a popular Learning Management System called *Canvas* to help support accreditation visits, as well as the work of the Board. Testing that system in 2019

[321] Several other motions were made unexpectedly from the floor at the 2018 Biennial Meeting, all related to protests about recent U.S. immigration policies, though none were approved (see Footnote 229).

[322] See Five Reasons for a Comprehensive Development of the Standards (*Colloquy*, April 2018).

[323] One of the mantras of the 2018-2020 Redevelopment Task Force was "many think, few write." Unlike earlier redevelopment efforts, the writing of the 2020 Standards and Procedures was left to a very small group, but with widespread input not only from the entire Task Force but from almost all of the membership through multiple public drafts.

[324] The Redevelopment Task Force had met once briefly that spring—by videoconference, but this was their first in-person, full meeting. The Task Force met many times during the two-year process, roughly half by Zoom and half in person. A summary of the two-year schedule for the redevelopment process is provided in Envisioning 2020…Proposed Work Plan and Timeline for Redevelopment (*Colloquy*, May 2018, pp. 1-2).

proved fortuitous as the COVID-19 pandemic struck in the spring of 2020, eliminating all face-to-face meetings at ATS for more than a year.

The June 2019 meeting of the Board of Commissioners included the second progress report from the Redevelopment Task Force. Four themes had emerged to date in the redevelopment process: (1) the desire for fewer/simpler degree categories; (2) the need to recognize multiple diversities; (3) the request for Standards that demonstrated quality, flexibility, and simplicity; and (4) the appeal for Standards that were "modality neutral." During that first year of "researching and listening," the Task Force "engaged more than 600 ATS participants from nearly 200 member schools through fifty focus groups,[325] two surveys, countless emails, and all ATS leadership events" (Biennial Meeting Program, 2020, p. 29). By the end of that first year, the Task Force has received more than a thousand member comments, which were analyzed and coded by two external consultants. Three themes emerged: educational quality accreditation clarity/simplicity, and contextualized flexibility.

The June 2019 Board meeting also reviewed an initial draft of a new set of Policies and Procedures. That document combined for the first time the Commission Procedures and the Board Policy Manual (Minutes, June 2019, p. 3), but reversed the nomenclature by referring to the more general statements from the Commission as Policies and the more specific statements from the Board as Procedures.

The Board met one more time in 2019 at a special meeting via videoconference in November. The primary purpose of that online meeting was to authorize the first public draft of the Standards. At that meeting, the Board also discussed the need for "self-study prompts" (later called "self-study ideas"), i.e., a longer version of the briefer Standards that would include a paragraph or two on each Standard describing how a school might address that Standard in its self-study report. The goal was to ensure that "elegant simplicity" did not become "ambiguous brevity" (Commission Minutes, November 2019, p. 1). The Board also discussed the need—based on membership input—to reframe diversity, redefine duration, and rethink residency. The Board voted to authorize a release of the first draft to the ATS membership in early December 2019, which ended up gathering some 120 comments (Biennial Meeting Program, 2020, p. 29).

The January 2020 Board meeting[326] was again a joint meeting with the Redevelopment Task Force, during which a summary of the 120 comments from the first public draft was reviewed. By the end of that two-hour meeting, the Board authorized the release of the second public draft of the Standards and the first public draft of the Policies and Procedures in February 2020. The second public draft was an annotated version that showed the nature of the revisions from the first public draft, as well as commentary on numerous sections of the Standards showing why the Task Force had proposed the changes it had. An early version of the Standards of Accreditation with Self-Study Ideas was also released for comment.

After the joint meeting with the Task Force, the Board resumed its normal meeting with a review of school visits, petitions, and reports. The Board authorized the expanded use of *Canvas*, through a grant from the New Century Fund (Commission Minutes, January 2020, p. 3; see also p. 124 above). It also

[325] The fifty focus groups involved everyone from presidents and deans to leaders of color and librarians, as well as key denominational leaders. For the first time in Commission history, the process also involved about a dozen trustees and more than a hundred students. In addition, the Redevelopment Task Force appointed a dozen "working groups" to research and write reports on everything from duration to diversity, and from governance to global engagement.

[326] In January 2020, ATS also announced a new interactive Data Visualization tool that the Board had discussed the prior year (*Colloquy*, January 2020), part of its new Data Sharing Policy that it had approved. It became Chapter X in the 2020 Policies and Procedures.

decided to eliminate petition fees, first introduced in 2014 (see p. 117 above). The Board heard a report on another petition for renewal of recognition with the U.S. Department of Education, something that was a due a year earlier than was planned due to new USDE regulations. In addition, the Board approved a change to the online ATS membership directory that included a specific "Statement of Accreditation Status" for each accredited school, something required by new CHEA regulations.

The Board had an "emergency" meeting *online* in March 2020 to approve new COVID-19 Accreditation Guidelines, required by USDE to accommodate schools during the health crisis from the pandemic that shut down most organizations in the U.S. and Canada. The Guidelines allowed schools either to postpone accreditation visits or to host them online; they also allowed schools to offer courses online without approval from their accreditor—during the length of the health emergency. The Board ended up revising those guidelines several times, with the last COVID-19 Guidelines issued in the Fall of 2021. That March 2020 meeting of the Board presaged an entirely new way for the Commission (and ATS) to conduct its activities. For the next year or two almost all visits were done online, as were all Board meetings. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic was reminiscent of the influenza epidemic of 1918 that killed 50 million people worldwide, during ATS's founding in August 1918.[327]

The Board had another special meeting in April 2020 with the Redevelopment Task Force. Its purpose was to review and authorize the release of the third public drafts of the Standards and the Policies and Procedures. The second public drafts, released in February 2020, were accompanied by six regional meetings and two online webinars in February and March of 2020 that were attended by 350 people from more than 200 ATS schools—all done just before the pandemic shut down travel. Another 150 people offered comments through emails, surveys, online posts, and sessions at major ATS events. At its special meeting in April 2020, the Board reviewed summaries of the more than 400 comments on those public drafts, which were incorporated into the third public drafts to be released at least 45 days before the June 2020 Biennial Meeting, per Commission policy.

At its June 2020 meeting, the Board of Commissioners thanked the Redevelopment Task Force for its unprecedented work that reduced three sets of 2012 Standards of 98 pages to one set of 2020 Standards of only 18 pages (see Footnote 300) and reduced two sets of 2012 Procedures and Policies of nearly 90 pages to one set of 2020 Policies and Procedures of only 39 pages. It was what the Board chair called a "culture shift" in Commission history.[328] The Board handled 60 actions at that June meeting, the fewest ever—as member schools anticipated the approval of new Standards and new Policies and Procedures that would significantly streamline the accreditation process. Compared to 2018 when the Board received 41 petitions for exceptions and experiments, in 2020 the Board received only 12 (Board of Commissioners, Agenda Volume IV, June 2020, p. 32). The new Standards would nearly eliminate the need for exceptions by their "modality neutrality."

The Board also finalized "Grandfathering Procedures" at its June 2020 meeting (Commission Minutes, June 2020, p. 2). Those Procedures outlined a two-year implementation process but allowed schools to follow the new Standards and the new Policies and Procedures almost immediately (i.e., as of July 1, 2020). Schools with visits already scheduled for 2021 could choose whether to follow the 2012 or 2020 Standards, but almost all chose the 2020 Standards. The Board also decided to switch from *ShareFile* to *Canvas* for receiving materials for all future Board meetings (see pp. 124-125 above). The June 2020

[327] The source of the "50 million deaths worldwide" figure is The Deadly Virus: The Influenza Epidemic of 1918, from the U.S. National Archives. The number of deaths estimated from COVID-19 by 2024 is around 7 million worldwide (COVID-19 Pandemic Deaths, Wikipedia).

[328] See Frank Yamada's Culture Shift Present in Redeveloped Standards (*Colloquy*, Holiday 2019).

Board meeting also reflected the Board's growing tendency to place more items on the "consent" agenda, with nearly half now handled that way, a practice first begun in 2002 (see p. 95 above).

The 2020 Biennial Meeting was unprecedented in ATS history—for several reasons. It was the first one (and only one) ever conducted entirely online. The meeting was to be held in Vancouver that year, but the pandemic made travel nearly impossible. So, ATS quickly pivoted to an all online meeting via Zoom. It was also unprecedented in the adoption of new Standards and new Policies and Procedures, which, for the first time in Commission history, were approved with no amendments from the floor and with only one negative vote (198-1, Biennial Meeting Minutes, 2020, p. 10).[329] The 1972 redevelopment vote had nearly 20 amendments from the floor (see p. 56 above). The 1996 redevelopment had 31 amendments from the floor (see p. 87 above). Even the more modest revisions in 1984 and 2012 had 27 and 17 amendments respectively (see pp. 69 and 114 above). It was truly unprecedented (and quite a shock to the Board) to have 0 amendments. And of the 200 member schools registered for the 2020 Biennial Meeting, only one (!) voted no.[330]

The theme of the 2020 Biennial Meeting was "Quality, Clarity, Flexibility: Re-envisioning Theological Education for a New Generation," which is reflected in the title of this chapter (see p. 116 above). It was, as the Executive Director said, "a once-in-a-generation vote on the proposed Standards" (Biennial Meeting Program, 2020, p. 9). It was a generation "living in uncertain times" with a global pandemic. Yet, in the midst of that uncertainty came an overwhelmingly positive vote to "re-envision theological education." The vote recalled a comment made during the last of the six regional feedback sessions on redeveloped Standards—in March 2020 just as the pandemic was hitting so many so hard. The comment came from an ATS member in Seattle—one of the first cities in North America to be hit with COVID. He offered this reflection: "*The new standards are focused not on a fearful future but on a preferred future. They speak to what is best about theological education*."[331] A future of quality, clarity, and flexibility. It was a good day in theological accreditation.

One other aspect of the 2020 Biennial Meeting also pointed to "living in uncertain times." Four ATS schools reported their withdrawal from membership during the previous biennium (Biennial Meeting Program, 2020, p. 107). Two of those schools were closing their doors permanently, early victims, in some ways, of the drastic effect that the pandemic would have on higher education.[332] Another school, an ATS charter member founded in 1807, the oldest Protestant seminary in North America, merged with another ATS charter member. It was also the end of an era for the Profiles of Ministry program, which had been revised in 1988 from the original Readiness for Ministry project of the 1970s (see p. 62 above). That had been one of ATS's most ambitious projects, but the times were changing.

The 2020 Biennial Meeting heard a report on ATS's New Century Fund, established in 2016 by a $10 million gift from the Lilly Endowment (see p. 122 above). That fund had taken more than a $2 million hit

[329] The motion that passed 198-1 included membership approval of the new Standards, new Policies and Procedures, and revised ATS and Commission Bylaws (see Biennial Meeting Program, 2020, pp. 32-94 and 121-125). The revised Bylaws eliminated Candidacy because that status no longer meant what it meant to other accreditors and to USDE.

[330] Registrations for the 2020 online Biennial Meeting were limited to one per school, though each registrant could "share their screen" with other colleagues. Per typical practice, only one vote per school was allowed, though, unlike previous practice, all voting was done electronically (Biennial Meeting Program, 2020, p. 15). The 200 schools registered for the 2020 meeting were almost as many as the 203 schools represented at the 100th anniversary meeting in Denver in 2018 (see p. 123 above).

[331] The quotation is in A Premise, a Promise, and a Prayer: Update on the Redeveloped Standards (*Colloquy*, March 2020, p. 1).

[332] See More than 1 Million Fewer Students Are in College (NPR, January 13, 2022) and The Incredible Shrinking Future of College (Vox.com, November 21, 2022); see also Footnote 291.

at the height of the pandemic (Biennial Meeting Program, 2020, p. 139), but it has since recovered to exceed its original goal of $30 million. Another encouraging sign during those "uncertain times" was the report on Economic Challenges Facing Future Ministers, first reported at the 2016 Biennial Meeting (see p. 121 above). Since 2015, the average debt incurred in seminary had dropped by almost $3,000 (8%) to $34,000, and the percentage of borrowers had decreased 9% to 45%, amounting to more than $50 million (!) not borrowed over the previous three years (Biennial Meeting Program, 2020, p. 145). When almost every other graduate profession experienced increased student debt, that was very good news.

The 2020 Biennial Meeting also heard the last report on the Educational Models and Practices project, without which the redevelopment of the Standards in the preceding biennium simply could not have happened. That project, announced at the 2012 Biennial Meeting (see p. 115 above) had been featured at the 2014, 2016, and 2018 Biennial Meetings (see pp. 119, 121, and 123 above). It had done its work well and had laid the strongest of foundations for the redevelopment. One of the more intriguing features of that four-year project had been consultations with other graduate professions, including law, medicine, teaching, and social work. Those consultations raised the reality that theology and these other professions had many "shared values and experiences, with signature pedagogies, as they each sought 'the common good'" (see Seeking the Common Good: What We Can Learn from Other Professional Disciplines, *Colloquy*, February 2019).

The Board of Commissioners gave its usual report at the 2020 Biennial Meeting (Biennial Meeting Program, 2020, pp. 19-21). That biennium 819 accrediting actions were taken, the most ever, but more than a third of those (37%) had been handled by accrediting staff, giving the Board more time to discuss more substantive matters. The Board reported that ATS had submitted two interim reports to CHEA in 2019, both of which were accepted without any additional requirements. In early 2020 ATS had also submitted petitions to both USDE and CHEA for renewal of recognition, with decisions expected in the summer of 2021. All in all, it had been one of the busiest biennia ever for the Commission, especially with the redevelopment of new Standards and new Policies and Procedures.

Near the end of the 2020 Biennial Meeting, the chair of the Redevelopment Task Force, Sarah Drummond, introduced the historic motion and vote this way: The Redevelopment Task Force Has Done Its Work—Yours Is Just Beginning (*Colloquy*, June 2020). She noted two leadership lessons learned from the redevelopment process: (1) sometimes the most radical change leaders can make is to think differently, and that's what the new Standards represent, thinking differently, and (2) the Task Force chose to think differently by stressing principles over practice, which was hard but cathartic work. The new Standards represented "elegant simplicity," a reflection of what Einstein once reportedly said, "Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler."[333] Drummond added that the ongoing work of thinking differently about theological education and about stressing principles over practice now rested with the 275 ATS member schools. To assist the membership in understanding and implementing the Standards, the Board published on the ATS website a series of *Canvas* modules called Understanding the Standards. The module on Understanding and Using the Standards has several components that described what was new, how the new Standards were structured, and key changes regarding residency, eligibility (admissions), and duration.[334]

Between the 2020 and 2022 Biennial Meetings, the Board of Commissioners welcomed several changes in the ATS accrediting staff. In fall 2020, Debbie Creamer transitioned from being Senior Director of

[333] Quotations from The Complexity of Simplicity (*Colloquy*, Summer 2019) and Seeking Elegant Simplicity (*Colloquy*, May 2019).

[334] Those three issues created as much conversation as any in the two-year redevelopment process, especially on the DMin (see, e.g., New Data to Consider on Duration of Doctor of Ministry Degree, *Colloquy*, February 2020).

Accreditation to a new role as Senior Director of Design and Organizational Learning to help with ATS's transition to more online events.[335] Replacing her as Senior Director of Accreditation in early 2021 was Barbara Mutch. Stephen Graham also began serving part-time as a Director of Accreditation, in addition to his continuing role as Strategic Director of Context and Continuity at ATS.

At its February 2021 meeting online, the Board addressed a variety of issues, including new Guidelines for Degree-Approval Exemptions, an increase in comprehensive visit fees from $2,300 to $3,000 along with a decrease in other fees, slight revisions to some Board procedures, and the challenges of doing virtual visits during the pandemic (Commission Minutes, February 2021, pp. 2-6). The February 2021 Board meeting had the fewest actions of any meeting in recent history, testimony to the "accreditation simplicity" sought in the redevelopment process. It was also the first time since 2012 that the Board received no petitions for exceptions or experiments; the 2020 Standards made the need for those relatively rare.

The June 2021 online meeting of the Board of Commissioners updated some of its procedures to align with new USDE regulations, though the changes were relatively minor. The Board approved a revision to its procedure on accreditation decisions delegated to staff, allowing more routine matters to be handled by them (Commission Minutes, June 2021, pp. 2-4). The Board approved, as well, a revised Reflective Guide to Effective Evaluation for Theological Schools that aligned with the 2020 Standards. In addition, the Board heard a report on a comprehensive revision of the Annual Report Forms, led by Debbie Gin of ATS. A key goal was to align those forms with the 2020 Standards, a three-phase process that was to be completed by the fall of 2023. As part of its petition for renewal of recognition with CHEA, the Board welcomed an external observer. The Board made 68 accreditation decisions at its June 2021 meeting, well below the number made by the Board in its meetings before the 2020 redevelopment. Among those decisions was the approval of four new experiments, indicative of the openness to innovation in the 2020 Standards. The Board also approved the highest number ever of petitions for distance education, part of ATS member schools' responses to the continuing pandemic, along with an unusually high number of actions on financial issues, again due to the pandemic (Commission Minutes, June 2021).

Between the June 2021 and February 2022 Board meetings, ATS received word that its petition to USDE for renewal of recognition had been approved for the maximum number of years, with no follow-up reports required. That was the second such renewal in a row, after the 2016 USDE petition (see p. 120 above). CHEA had also renewed the ATS Commission's recognition for the maximum period with no follow-ups required. In July of 2021, ATS added two new staff as Directors of Accreditation: James Moore (formerly Associate Dean at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) and Valerie Rempel (formerly Vice President and Dean at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary). Both had been on the Board of Commissioners until their transition to ATS staff roles. Both would serve remotely, the first Directors of Accreditation to do so at ATS, due partly to the pandemic but mostly to a new philosophy at ATS about distributed work.

The February 2022 online meeting of the Board of Commissioners reviewed an unusually high number of comprehensive visits (55), mainly because of 19 follow-up visits that were required for schools that had virtual visits, per USDE regulations (Commission Minutes, February 2022, p. 2). There were also a record number of petitions (77) that included notifications to staff, "reflecting numerous changes among schools, as well as more efficient ways that the new Policies and Procedures allow schools to make changes (Minutes, p. 3).[336] The Board also approved changes to its Procedures on teach-out plans and

[335] See also Debbie Creamer Takes Early Retirement from ATS (*Colloquy*, October 2023).

[336] The 2020 Policies and Procedures streamlined many substantive change petitions by converting them to notifications to ATS.

site closures, required by new USDE regulations. One of those new regulations required member schools to petition for distance education approval, even if offering only one course online. As a result, the Board revised Procedure IV.F.1 to have two levels of approval for distance education: limited approval (one course to less than half a degree) and comprehensive approval (half or more of a degree).

One of the more significant reports at the February 2022 meeting of the Board of Commissioners concerned the Pathways for Tomorrow grants from Lilly Endowment Inc. (Commission Minutes, February 2022, p. 6). In 2020, the Endowment announced three phases of grants "to help theological schools strengthen and sustain their capacities to prepare and support pastoral leaders in Christian churches" (Pathways for Tomorrow, ATS website). The first phase awarded $50,000 in January 2021 to each of 217 ATS schools in the U.S. for "nine-month planning grants," supplemented with a grant to ATS to give $50,000 to each of 17 Canadian schools. The first phase totaled nearly $12 million. The second phase in January 2022 awarded $82 million to 84 ATS schools for five-year grants to "prioritize and respond to their most pressing challenges as they work to prepare pastoral leaders" (ATS website).[337] In June of 2022, the Endowment approved an additional 21 grants for Phase Two, adding another $20 million. The third phase awarded five-year, multi-million dollar grants to 16 ATS member schools in June and September of 2022, totaling some $83 million. In addition, ATS Receive[d] a $5.57 Million Grant to Coordinate Pathways Initiative in 2021 (*Colloquy*, Holiday 2021) and another $4.75 million in 2022 . All of these Pathways for Tomorrow grants totaled more than $200 million for ATS schools to improve theological education, the largest grants in ATS history.

The June 2022 meeting of the Board of Commissioners was the first in-person meeting since the pandemic in the spring of 2020, though at a local hotel rather than the ATS office. The June 2022 meeting saw a record number of petitions for distance education approval (Commission Minutes, June 2022, p. 2). Part of that was due to the pandemic, with the "emergency approval" for distance education without accreditor action now expired (see p. 126 above). Another part was due to the new USDE regulations that required approval for even one online course (see top of this page). All but a dozen ATS schools now had some form of distance education approval, with online enrollments at ATS schools reaching nearly 48,000 by the fall of 2023—the most in ATS history and 45% higher than the 33,000 enrolled online in 2019, just before the pandemic (see Endnote 11). At its June 2022 meeting, the Board approved the Commission's first competency-based DMin program (Minutes, p. 8). The Board also heard a report on the comprehensive revision project for the ATS Annual Report Forms, which was then in its second phase (Commission Minutes, June 2022, p. 3; see also p. 129 above). In addition, the Board approved a revised set of Guidelines for Global Awareness and Engagement that aligned with the 2020 Standards (Minutes, pp. 3-4). The Senior Director of Accreditation presented a Professional Development Session on Canadian Theological Education (Minutes, p. 4).

The June 2022 Biennial Meeting had as its theme, "A Better Future Together" (Biennial Meeting Program, 2022, p. 4). It was a hybrid meeting, with the business sessions done online and the other sessions done in person in Pittsburgh. Only 116 member schools attended the virtual business sessions, leading ATS to go back to an all in-person meeting for the 2024 Biennial Meeting. Nearly 500 participants attended the in-person meeting in Pittsburgh—the highest ever for an ATS Biennial Meeting (see Footnote 294). One of the keynote sessions featured an interview by Charla Long (a public member of the Board of Commissioners) with Paul LeBlanc, president of Southern New Hampshire University on competency-based education. Long is also the executive director of C-BEN, the Competency-Based Education Network. Another keynote session at the 2022 Biennial Meeting was a panel discussion on Theological Education Between the Times, a project sponsored by Candler School of Theology on the "ends of

[337] Lilly Endowment Awards $82 Million to Theological Schools, *Philanthropy News Digest*, December 1, 2021.

theological education" and the need to do theological education "in diverse communities that respect differences." The panel discussion was moderated by Dan Aleshire, former ATS Executive Director, and the 2022 recipient of the ATS Distinguished Service Award (see Endnote 9). The 2020 Biennial Meeting welcomed eleven new Associate Members (Biennial Meeting Program, 2022, p. 14), the most since 2012.

Unlike previous Biennial Meetings, the printed program for the 2022 meeting did not include any reports (it was only 18 pages long). The Minutes for the 2022 meeting summarized the Board of Commissioners Report in this way: "810 accrediting actions [taken in the previous biennium], including 135 visits, 315 requests for changes, and 141 petitions" (Biennial Meeting Minutes, 2022, p. 8). The 810 accrediting actions were the second most ever (819 were reported at the 2020 Biennial Meeting; see p. 128 above), but nearly half of those had been handled by the accrediting staff (Board of Commissioners, Agenda Volume IV, June 2022, p. 69).

Between the 2022 and 2024 Biennial Meetings, the Board of Commissioners dealt with several issues related to transitions and challenges stemming from the pandemic. In February 2023, the Board finally met at the ATS office, after a three-year hiatus due to the health crisis (Commission Minutes, February 2023, p. 1). The Board's actions on comprehensive visits included the highest percentage ever in which schools' accreditations were reaffirmed for less than ten years, with challenges related to finances and enrollment still lingering from the pandemic (Minutes, p. 3). The Board's actions on petitions were the fewest in decades, with only two for distance education since so many schools had sought that approval during the height of the pandemic (see p. 130 above). The Board heard another report on the revision of the ATS Annual Report Forms (ARF), the third in this three-phase project (see pp. 129-130 above). A public draft of the revised ARF had been released recently, with the revised ARF to be implemented in the fall of 2023 (Commission, Minutes, p. 3).[338] The revised ARF "went from 75 pages of forms and instructions to 45 pages—a 40% reduction," and they aligned with the 2020 Standards (see Gin's ATS Seeks Feedback on Public Draft of Revised Annual Report Form, *Colloquy*, January 2023, p. 1).

The June 2023 meeting of the Board of Commissioners heard a report from the Executive Director highlighting the record number of leadership transitions at ATS schools—more than 500 for presidents and deans since 2017, with transitions since the pandemic occurring at twice the rate as before the pandemic (Commission Minutes, June 2013, p. 2).[339] He also noted 55 mergers, closure, or withdrawals since 2010 (up from 45 reported in 2020; see Footnote 287). Graham led a Professional Development Session on Observations from Research on Mergers and Affiliations (Minutes, p. 4). In addition, the Board approved new Guidelines for Competency-Based Theological Education. Also at the June Board meeting, the Commissioners received a staff report that 44% of all new DMin admissions did not have an MDiv degree, something allowed by the 2020 Standards and monitored on the Annual Report Forms since 2021 (Minutes, p. 3). In the summer of 2023, ATS added two new Directors of Accreditation: Heather Campain Hartung (formerly Vacek) and Emanuel Naydenov. Hartung had been vice president and dean at Moravian and Lancaster Theological Seminaries. Naydenov had been director of masters' programs at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and had helped launch Bulgaria's first accredited seminary after the fall of Communism (ATS Welcomes Two New Directors of Accreditation to Its Staff, *Colloquy*, Summer 2023).

In February 2024, the Board of Commissioners reviewed a record number of reports that affected member schools' accreditation status, with nine notifications from other accreditors about non-compliance, four reports responding to warnings, four teach-out plans for schools that were closing or

[338] See Gin's Five Significant Changes to Expect for Revised Annual Report Form (*Colloquy*, November 2022).

[339] See Yamada's Unprecedented Number of Changes Occurring Among ATS School Leaders (*Colloquy*, February 2023).

merging, and two schools announcing their withdrawal from the ATS Commission (Commission Minutes, February 2024, p. 5). The Board appointed a committee in February 2024 to oversee a three-step review of the 2020 Standards and the 2020 Commission Policies during the next two years (Minutes, p. 5). The first step in the review was to send a survey in the spring of 2024 to everyone who had served on an ATS evaluation committee since 2020. The second step was to issue a public call for comments in May of 2024. The third step was to host an input session at the 2024 Biennial Meeting in Atlanta, inviting all those at that meeting to participate. All comments received from those three steps will be processed by the review committee and the Board of Commissioners in the spring of 2025. Any proposed revisions will be sent to the membership in the fall of 2025 and spring of 2026. A formal vote on any revisions will be held at the 2026 Biennial Meeting (for details on this review, see Mutch, ATS Standards of Accreditation to Undergo Formal Review Process, *Colloquy*, April 2024).

In February 2024, Senior Director of Accreditation, Barbara Mutch, led a Professional Development Session on Diversity for the Board of Commissioners, focused on how member schools had been addressing Standard 1.5 on that issue. She noted that more than half (57%) of the schools with comprehensive visits in the preceding two years had been required by the Board to submit reports on diversity. Another Professional Development Session at that same meeting was led by Moore on the Renewal of Recognition Process with the U.S. Department of Education (USDE). The Commission's petition to USDE was due July 2024, with a hearing on that petition scheduled for the summer of 2026. The 2024 petition had to address 110 different USDE regulations, compared to fewer than 40 in the previous two renewals of recognition in 2016 and 2021. One of the newest USDE regulations required the ATS Commission to expand its scope of recognition to include direct assessment of competency-based education (Minutes, February 2024, p. 7).

The June 2024 meeting of the Board of Commissioners and the 2024 Biennial Meeting in Atlanta had not yet occurred by the completion of this history of the ATS Commission. The theme chosen for the 2024 Biennial Meeting was "Rooted in Hope, Thriving in Change." Given all the leadership transitions at ATS schools in recent years (see p. 131 above), the Executive Director wrote an article in the January 2024 issue of *Colloquy* to help orient new ATS leaders to the ins and outs of this important meeting: 2024 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting— The Who, What, Where, When, and Why (*Colloquy*, January 2024). Yamada concluded his article with these words about attending his first Biennial Meeting as a participant from a member school: "*I experienced what it meant to be part of a community of practice in which schools from diverse theological perspectives came together to improve in this time of significant change in theological education*." After 106 years for the Association and 90 years for the Commission, ATS is still seeking to improve theological education—in the midst of significant changes. The conclusion to this 90-year history of the Commission talks about key changes and challenges that it has faced for 90 years. To those we now turn.

Conclusion: "Taking the Longer View"

Fourscore and four years ago, in his 1940 presidential address, Lewis Sherrill noted that "this Association was born out of the throes of the first World War. And in this meeting, which is but our twelfth, the same shadow is on the world again" (Bulletin 14, 1940, p. 18). Sherrill was hired in 1935 as ATS's first Executive Secretary and in that position played a key role in helping write the first Standards, published in 1936. In 1940, Sherrill as ATS president encouraged the 75 members gathered in Lexington for the ATS Biennial Meeting to "*take the longer view… so that what we do now may, if possible, become a worthy foundation for a long series of tomorrows*." In its grand goal of improving theological education, the Commission on Accrediting has consistently focused on "*taking the longer view,*" whatever challenges it has encountered and whatever changes it has made in response (see Appendix E for Commission Milestones).

Taking the Longer View: 90 Years of Challenges in Theological Accreditation

Over its 90-year history, the ATS Commission on Accrediting has faced a multitude of challenges. And it has always responded in new ways to improve theological education amidst those challenges—whether a world war or a global pandemic, a Great Depression or a Great Recession. One should not forget that the Commission was born in the 1930s, in the midst of the Great Depression. In the 1940s, it wrestled with whether to adopt a second set of Standards for schools struggling in the middle of the Second World War. In the 1950s, the Commission reorganized itself as the Cold War became a hot war in Korea. In that same decade, ATS began requiring periodic visits from peer evaluators and self-study reports that required schools to look deeply at how they could better achieve their missions.

In the 1960s, the Commission issued its first probation in a fight for civil rights and welcomed its first Roman Catholic members in the wake of Vatican II. In the 1970s, the Commission redeveloped its Standards (the first of three times), as inflation and student protests over Vietnam threatened the life of theological education. In the 1980s, the Commission rethought the Standards and theological education itself, amidst controversies over governance and globalization and over growing concerns from women and persons of color. In the 1990s, the Commission undertook the second redevelopment of the Standards, as it faced increasing regulatory oversight from the U.S. government. It also wrestled with residency and with what that meant as distance education grew ever closer to theological education.

In the 2000s, the Commission reorganized itself again as it formed its own legal corporation, in response to regulatory concerns, while dealing with the fallout from 9/11 and an increasingly unstable world. It responded to the Great Recession of 2007-2009 and the hit that theological schools took and are still taking in the wake of that financial crisis, a crisis that morphed into an unprecedented decline in U.S. higher education enrollment. In the early 2010s, the Commission revised its Standards to address growing concerns over student outcomes and online education, even as the public questioned the "value proposition" of higher education amidst rising student debt. It was also a period when Canada faced a national reckoning with the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

In the mid to latter 2010s, the Commission benefited from the Educational Models and Practices Project, the largest study of theological education of its kind in the Commission's 90-year history. With results from that project, the Commission undertook its third redevelopment of the Standards in 2018-2020. The resulting 2020 Standards were unlike any that preceded, with a focus on principles over practices and a re-envisioning of theological education. And all that in the midst of the first global pandemic since the 1918 influenza epidemic during the first ATS conference in Cambridge.

Taking the Longer View: Four Changes in Theological Accreditation

Throughout their 90-year history, the ATS Standards of Accreditation have always reflected their cultures and their contexts. They have changed in subtle ways and in substantial ways, but they have always changed. Four major changes or "movements" have been described in the history of theological accreditation.[340] A first movement in the early to mid-20th century focused on resources (how many faculty and how large an endowment). A second movement in the mid to late 20th century focused on mission (what is the school's purpose and how does that purpose inform its programs). A third movement, which gained momentum in the 1990s and is still running strong, focused on accountability and student outcomes (what are students learning and how well are they learning it).

A fourth movement has been emerging for some time now, in both theological accreditation and theological education. It is what Daniel Aleshire, former ATS Executive Director, calls "*formational* theological education" in his 2021 book, *Beyond Profession: The Next Future of Theological Education*. While a focus on formation has long been part of the Roman Catholic educational tradition, only in recent years have other ecclesial families in ATS found a renewed emphasis on formation. This focus on formational education replaces, in many ways, the 20th century's focus on theological education as professional education.

This fourth movement in theological accreditation is both a subtle and a seismic shift in the history of the ATS Commission. Formation is what William Sullivan called a "signature pedagogy" for theological education in his introduction to the 2006 classic, *Educating Clergy*.[341] It is also central to the 2020 Standards of Accreditation. To be sure, previous ATS Standards used the word "formation," but they did not make it a central focus for theological education or theological accreditation. The 2020 Standards treat formation as foundational to both, with that term occurring several dozen times and in almost every Standard. The opening paragraph to Standard 3 on Student Learning and Formation makes this "fourth focus" crystal clear:

> *Theological schools are communities of faith and learning centered on student learning and formation. Consistent with their missions and religious identities, theological schools give appropriate attention to the intellectual, human, spiritual, and vocational dimensions of student learning and formation. Schools pursue those dimensions with attention to academic rigor, intercultural competency, global awareness and engagement, and lifelong learning. Schools support student learning and formation through appropriate educational modalities and policies.*

Regardless of whatever movement or era in which it has found itself over the last 90 years, the ATS Commission on Accrediting has always sought to improve theological education. Through nearly a century of changing cultures and differing contexts, the "*communities of faith and learning*" that constitute the Commission and live by its Standards have striven to keep faith and learning central by taking the longer view.

Taking the Longer View: Looking Backward or Forward in Theological Accreditation

Throughout the Commission's 90-year history, accrediting standards—inside and outside of theological education—have been viewed by some as *retrospective* in orientation; they look back to what has been

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[340] See Aleshire's Fifty Years of Accrediting Theological Schools (*Theological Education*, Spring 2014, pp. 63-80). He described the fourth movement in 2014 as "regulatory accreditation" (p. 71 of his article), which is combined here with the third movement.

[341] Charles Foster, Lisa Dahill, Lawrence Golemon, and Barbara Wang Tolentino, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (Jossey-Bass, 2006). Their book identifies four "signature pedagogies" of theological education: pedagogies of interpretation, formation, contextualization, and performance. Sullivan (p. 10) puts "the idea of formation" at the center.

done. That perspective describes the accrediting process this way: look for where the best schools have walked and pave those paths. The paved paths become standards. They tell everyone where to walk. At their best, however, accrediting standards are *prospective* in orientation; they look forward to what could be done, what should be done, not backwards to what has been done. That perspective describes the accrediting process this way: look for markers of quality in theological education and point schools toward those markers, regardless of the paths they are on. The markers of quality become standards. They are a compass, pointing everyone in the same direction, not a detailed map for everyone to follow the same paths.

The 2020 Standards are meant to be a compass. They seek to give schools the freedom and the flexibility to choose the paths that fit best their missions and their contexts. But always they point to quality in theological education. They are a guiding North Star, not a road map. That makes following them more challenging, but theological schools have always responded well to challenges.

Taking the Longer View: Three Values in Theological Accreditation

Among the 90 U.S. accrediting agencies and the nearly 40 professional accreditors in Canada, the ATS Commission on Accrediting is unique. It is the only accreditor in North America focused exclusively on graduate theological education. Within that focus, the Commission reflects three important values: community, accountability, and flexibility.[342]

Community is an important value because the Commission is the only group of peers who serve graduate schools of theology. It is a denominationally diverse community, but one where the member schools share common goals and interests. *Accountability* is a second important value because accreditation is an ongoing relationship between member schools and the Commission. The Commission and the Standards are there to serve, not to be served, to help schools achieve their respective missions, not to hinder them. Peer evaluation is a crucial part of that, with more than 500 ATS school administrators, faculty, and staff who serve as ATS evaluators. *Flexibility* is the third important value because in times like these, adaptability is vital for theological education. The 2020 Standards are principle-based in order to give schools the freedom they need to innovate and experiment with a variety of best practices that fit each school's unique situation and mission.

Taking the Longer View: The Next 90 Years in Theological Accreditation

For 90 years the Commission on Accrediting has had one overriding purpose: improving theological education. May the next 90 years see theological schools focused on that same North Star. ATS schools have consistently followed the counsel of those who have come before them: to "*take the longer view … so that what we do now may, if possible, become a worthy foundation for a long series of tomorrows*." Ninety years from now—after a long series of tomorrows—may those who come after look back and say: "Look what God hath wrought."

This history began with a prayer—from the first ATS conference in 1918 in Cambridge (see p. 1 above). This history ends with a prayer—from a priest who graduated from and taught at an ATS seminary (see p. 136 below). The opening line of his prayer encourages us all to "take the longer view."

[342] From Tanner's Director Shares Six Things to Know about ATS Accreditation (*Colloquy*, October 2020).

Taking the Longer View*

It helps, now and then, to step back and *take the long view*.
The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts; it is even beyond our vision.
We accomplish in our lifetime only a fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.
No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We water the seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.
We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

This enables us to do something and to do it well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
An opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.
We may never see the end results.
But that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders. We are ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own.

* More commonly known as "The Romero Prayer," this poetic reflection was actually "composed by the late Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw, drafted for a homily by Cardinal John Dearden [of Detroit] in November 1979 for a celebration of departed priests. As a reflection on the anniversary of the martyrdom of Bishop Romero [of El Salvador, assassinated on March 24, 1980], Bishop Untener included in a reflection book a passage titled 'The mystery of the Romero Prayer.' The mystery is that the words of the prayer are commonly attributed to Romero, but they were never spoken by him. Pope Francis used the 'magnificent prayer' in December 2015 in his Christmas address to the Roman Curia. The confusion seems to have arisen from a major paper on Catholic education given by Westminster's Cardinal Basil Hume on 6 January 1997 where he quoted the prayer but, for reasons it is now impossible to fathom, misattributed it to Archbishop Romero… Thereafter, the beautiful prayer went around the global Church and, not surprisingly, it became known as 'The Romero Prayer.'" [from The Archbishop Romero Trust]

ENDNOTES

Endnote 1: The 53 schools at the inaugural ATS Conference in 1918 had a combined enrollment of around 4,000 students. That represented about 40% of all theology students then—a significant percentage. These estimates are based on 1922 enrollment data provided in Robert Kelly's 1924 *Theological Education in America: A Study of One Hundred and Sixty-One Theological Schools in the United States and Canada* (Appendix II, Tables A-B, pp. 406-416). Kelly lists a combined enrollment of 10,421 theological students in 1922 for the 161 schools in his study. Forty-five of those schools, plus eight others, attended the 1918 Conference. Kelly records that the combined enrollment of those 45 schools in 1922 was 4,451. The lower estimate of 4,000 in 1918 reflects lower enrollments during WW I, which was still being waged in August 1918 (the Hundred Days Offensive, the last major Allied offensive, began on August 8, 1918—the week before the Conference). The U.S. Selective Service Act of 1917, the year the U.S. entered the war, led to significant drops in many college enrollments (NCES, 120 Years of American Education, 1993, p. 65). Though clergy and theology students in the U.S. were exempt (World War I: Conscription Laws), many volunteered to serve. Canada had entered the war in 1914, but due to dwindling volunteers enacted the Military Service Act of 1917 to conscript men aged 20-45; clergy were exempt but not theology students (Canada and the First World War). The two largest schools at the 1918 Conference were the University of Chicago Divinity School with 491 students and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary with 425 (using Kelly's 1922 data).

Endnote 2: The program for the first ATS Conference in 1918 included a list of 101 "delegates" (plus 23 "guests") from 49 schools. However, the program later states that "fifty-three schools" attended. Subsequent reports in ATS Bulletins that refer to the 1918 Conference list 53 schools as the number that participated, so that is the number used here. The professional titles listed for the delegates named in the 1918 program indicate that the vast majority were teaching faculty of theological schools (hence the broad use of the term "theologians" in the narrative on p. 1 above). Of the 101 listed, 63 had the title of "Professor" (plus another 6 with "Dr."), with only 17 presidents and 12 deans listed. Thirty-two of the 101 were from six schools in the Boston area, including 12 from Harvard, and almost all were from the northeast. That is not surprising in an era when long-distance travel was difficult and mostly by train, though one attendee came from California and another from Winnipeg. Still, the 101 delegates from 53 theological schools at the first ATS Conference in 1918 was a record that would not be broken until the 1944 meeting in Pittsburgh, when 106 members from 77 schools attended. The following table provides a record of attendance and membership for the first 30 years of ATS Conferences (1918-1948), gleaned from ATS Bulletins for those Conferences (see also Appendix A):

ATS Conference~ Attendance and ATS Member Schools: 1918-1948						
Year	**# Attending**	**# Schools Represented**	**(# Canadians Attending)***	**# Member Schools^**	**(# Canadian Members)***	**Conference Location: School (City)**
1918	101	53	(9)	NA	(NA)	Harvard (Cambridge, MA)
1920	56	35	NA	NA	(NA)	Princeton (Princeton, NJ)
1922	54	48	(15)	NA	(NA)	Knox (Toronto, Ontario)
1924	44	28	(0)	45	(6)	Garrett (Evanston, IL)
1926	61	38	(3)	49	(6)	Yale (New Haven, CT)
1928	65	39	(2)	56	(8)	Union (New York City, NY)
1930	78	39	(2)	59	(8)	CTS/U of Chicago (Chicago, IL)
1932	57	33	(1)	64	(8)	Lutheran (Gettysburg, PA)
1934	59	35	(2)	65	(9)	Colgate-Rochester (Roch., NY)
1936	70	44	(3)	64	(9)	Crozer (Chester, PA)
1938	77	55	(6)	80	(10)	Emmanuel (Toronto, Ontario)
1940	75	54	(0)	85	(10)	College of the Bible (Lex., KY)
1942	57	54	(0)	95	(10)	Colgate-Rochester (Roch., NY)
1944	106	77	(2)	104	(9)	Xenia (Pittsburgh, PA)
1946	93	71	(5)	104	(10)	McCormick (Chicago, IL)
1948	100	83	(3)	105	(9)	Bonebrake (Dayton, OH)

~ATS meetings were called "Conferences" until 1936 when they began to be called "Biennial Meetings" (see Footnote 42).
*Canadian figures listed separately to emphasize ATS's bi-nationality. WWII affected Canadian schools from 1940 to 1944.
^School membership figures were not recorded until 1924, after the adoption of the first ATS Constitution in 1922.

Endnote 3: The 1930 Conference was hosted jointly by Chicago Theological Seminary and the University of Chicago Divinity School but held at the Windermere Hotel in Chicago, where Rockefeller sometimes stayed. [Side note: the Windermere Hotel also hosted a North Central conference in 1930 that met to revise their standards (Newman, *Agency of Change*, p. 131).] ATS's president that year was Shailer Mathews, dean of the Chicago Divinity School (CDS) from 1908 to 1933. Mathews was a leading liberal theologian, prolific author, and early leader at ATS, serving on its Continuation Committee since the 1918 Conference. CDS was also the largest member of ATS in those early years. Mathews was hired in 1908 by William Rainey Harper (whom Rockefeller hired in 1891 as founding president of the University of Chicago) as "part of his plan to place religious studies on equal footing with other academic inquiries" at the University. That quotation is from an article on the University of Chicago Library website, Shailer Mathews (1863-1941): Theology. That same article relates an intriguing anecdote about Mathews reportedly preaching the shortest sermon ever in Bond Chapel on campus. Asked to speak on the afterlife, Mathews' entire sermon consisted of only two sentences: "*What worries me is not if I shall have immortality, but if I have it, what I'll do with it. Shall we pray?*"

Endnote 4: Luther Weigle (1880-1976) was a very bright light in the ATS constellation in the 20th century. He was also one of the longest serving ATS deans, holding that office at Yale Divinity School for more than two decades (1928-1949). Prior to becoming dean, Weigle held the prestigious Sterling chair in religious education at Yale, the first. During his deanship, Yale admitted women for the first time and many outstanding faculty were hired (e.g., Richard Niebuhr and Roland Bainton) . As noted above (p. 9), Weigle held many important positions at ATS. He was elected ATS president in 1928 and chaired its Executive Committee from 1930 to 1948, the longest tenure of any chair. He also chaired the ATS Commission on Accrediting in 1934. He was an outstanding Christian educator and was featured in Biola University's Database: Christian Educators of the 20th Century (as was Lewis Sherrill, who was a doctoral student of Weigle's, see pp. 9 and 15 above). The article on Luther Allan Weigle in the Biola database includes this amusing anecdote from an interview of him later in his life in the *New Haven Register*:

> "This is Mr. Weigle speaking." This has been the way Yale Divinity School Dean Emeritus Luther A. Weigle has been answering his telephone over the years, and his manner, as much as the man, has since become legend. Dean Weigle has verified an anecdote related to his phone answering habit. One day, the Weigle family sat down for dinner and the dean was summoned to the telephone. After a short conversation, he returned to the table and found his family waiting for him to say a prayer before the meal. He folded his hands, bowed his head and reverently said: "This is Mr. Weigle speaking."

Endnote 5: The outgoing Executive Secretary, Oren Baker of Colgate-Rochester, reported in 1954 that in moving ATS files to his campus in New York, he had to fill out an application for tax-exempt status for the Association, which required reporting all ATS "properties." All he could list were "two filing cabinets of [ATS] files, back bulletins, school catalogs, 47 reference books, and one second-hand typewriter," plus a cash balance of $5,038.30 (Bulletin 21, 1954, pp. 44 and 69). Baker said the IRS clerk in Rochester looked at those meager assets, "knitted his brows and said despairingly, 'Just sign it and send it in'" (p. 43). The IRS sent it back for more information, but with no new assets to list, the ATS application for tax-exempt status was finally accepted "by some kind of providence" (p. 44). Baker summed up his 1954 report by quoting Matthew 8:20, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head" as a financial mantra that "lies at the heart of our endeavor" (pp. 54-55). The Association's meager finances would change drastically with two major grants between 1956 and 1958 (see p. 37 above).

Endnote 6: The first policy on visiting teams was adopted at the 1958 Biennial Meeting (Bulletin 23, pp. 129-130). It is worth repeating here as a model of the spirit of accreditation:

> The proposed visits are not part of a "policing" operation to see whether a school deserves accreditation ... They are not designed to make all schools alike. Least of all, the teams will not speak as representatives of rich powerful schools to inform "have nots" how to operate on a scale still many years in the offing.
>
> They will presuppose, on the part of visitors and visited, humility of minds in search of truth and gentleness of hearts dedicated to a high common purpose. The spirit, then, will be not an eagerness to overtake a brother in a fault, or to conceal weaknesses, but to explore candidly the true condition of the school. There will be no condescension nor stubbornness, but a will to find ways of increased

effectiveness. There will be a realization on the part of the visitors that in each school they are likely to discover contributions to our common life that no other is making, and awareness on the part of the school that it has much to learn from the experience of others.

Our cooperation may be likened to the Protestant doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Just as the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is grossly misunderstood when it results in selfish individualism, so the proper independence of each theological school is abused unless each member of this body contributes to the life and health of every other part.

Because we belong to this Association, we belong to each other. As a group of schools, we are responsible to our Lord, to His Church, to human society, and to each other for the kind and quality of theological education our schools are promoting. In our pilgrimage together we have "reached the point of no return." We must move forward together in the advancement of theological education.

Endnote 7: The Sealantic Fund from the Rockefeller fortune not only benefited ATS directly but also many ATS libraries through their funding of the ATLA Library Development Program. That program involved "ninety North American theological libraries between 1961 and 1966" (Yale Divinity Library Archives). By 1964 the program had "raised not less than two million dollars for books and periodical for theological libraries," worth nearly $20 million today (Bulletin 26, 1964, p. 111). In his 1964 report to ATS, the program's director, Raymond Morris (Librarian of the Yale Divinity School Library) reported that by 1966 "the five-year program will add one million volumes to the theological libraries" (Bulletin 26, 1964, p. 112).

Endnote 8: One of the more intriguing articles in the Spring 1968 issue of ATS's *Theological Education* on Curriculum for the Seventies was by Jerald Brauer, dean of the University of Chicago Divinity School. His article on the future of theological education was shockingly subtitled: "Why Keep the [ATS]?" On its 50th anniversary, a well-respected seminary leader proposed that it was time for ATS to "consider the possibility of losing its life in order to gain a fuller life for all of theological education" (*Theological Education*, Spring 1968, p. 729). The "fuller life" Brauer imagined was an organization not tied to Mainline Protestantism, but composed equally of Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Jewish members—a truly ecumenical association that "would stand as a clear symbol of the new age in which we find ourselves" (p. 730). He felt any counter arguments (e.g., the chaos created by members losing their accreditation) were "strangely like those employed by member institutions that are resisting proposals for seminaries to merge, move, cluster, or develop new forms of cooperation" (p. 729). Brauer's perspective was that only ecumenically oriented, university related clusters could ensure the viability of theological education. Since one of his key arguments for replacing ATS was that Roman Catholic schools felt at "the periphery" of ATS, Jesse Ziegler invited Edward Malone, dean of Maryknoll Seminary (the first Roman Catholic seminary to be accredited by ATS) to give "A Response" (*Theological Education*, Spring 1968, pp. 732-734). His counter to Bauer was three-fold: (1) ATS in its present structure is a "significant educational instrument for Roman Catholic seminaries," (2) Roman Catholic seminaries "do not feel in the least disadvantaged," and (3) "in the present moment in ecumenical history" ATS represents for Roman Catholic seminaries "a more suitable instrument than that envisioned by Dean Brauer's proposals" (p. 732).

Endnote 9: Since 1988, ATS has given a Distinguished Service Award at each Biennial Meeting (see Footnote 205). Here is a list of all past recipients (a list of recipients through 2018 is included in the 2020 Biennial Meeting program book, p. 10). Note that six of the 20 recipients were Commission chairs.

1988 ***Krister Stendahl***, dean of Harvard Divinity School
1990 ***Robert Wood Lynn***, senior vice president for religion at Lilly Endowment Inc.
1992 ***Charles Rooks***, president of Chicago Theological Seminary, first African American Commission chair
1994 ***Sara Little***, professor of Christian Education at Union (VA), first woman Commission chair
1996~ ***David Hubbard***, president of Fuller Seminary, first evangelical ATS president
1998 ***Martin Marty***, distinguished professor of history at the University of Chicago Divinity School
2000 ***Vincent Cushing***, president of Washington Theological Union and first Roman Catholic ATS president
2002 ***Robert Cooley***, president of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and ATS president
2004 ***Barbara Brown Zikmund***, president of Hartford Seminary and first woman ATS president
2006 ***Diane Kennedy***, dean of the Aquinas Institute and ATS president

2008 ***Joseph Hough***, president of Union Theological Seminary
2010 ***David Tiede***, president of Luther Seminary and ATS president
2012 ***Barbara Wheeler***, director of the Center for the Study of Theological Education at Auburn Seminary
2014 ***Justo González***, Cuban American historical theologian
2016 ***Katarina Schuth***, professor of religion at Saint Paul Seminary and Commission chair
2018* ***Anne Anderson***, president of St. Michaels College Faculty of Theology and Commission chair
2018* ***John Kinney***, president of Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology, ATS president and Commission chair
2018* ***Richard Mouw***, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, ATS president and Commission chair
2020 ***Tite Tiénou***, former dean and current chair of Global Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
2022 ***Daniel Aleshire***, retired ATS Executive Director
2024 ***Marsha Foster***, president emerita of Ecumenical Theological Seminary, former ATS director of accreditation
2024^ ***Oliver McMahan***, vice president of Pentecostal Seminary, vice chair for 2020 Standards Redevelopment

~ In 1996, David Hubbard died suddenly just a few weeks before the Biennial Meeting, making him the only one to receive the Distinguished Service Award posthumously (until 2024; see ^ note below).
* In 2018, to celebrate ATS's 100th anniversary, the Association gave three Distinguished Service Awards.
^ In 2024, two awards were given, with Oliver McMahan's award given posthumously (he died March 26, 2024)

Endnote 10: The U.S. Higher Education Act (HEA) was first authorized in 1965 (see Footnote 128). The Act provided significant federal dollars in student aid to U.S. schools and regulated significant portions of higher education, including accrediting agencies. The 1965 Act was to be reauthorized every five years or so, which it was until 2008, but has not been reauthorized since then due to political differences (AACRO website). Congress came close in 2020, but the pandemic prevented that (Higher Education Act Reauthorization: What Colleges and Universities Need to Know). The 1992 HEA Reauthorization (see p. 82 above) created "State Postsecondary Review Entities" (SPREs) that would have competed with accreditors. In 1995, a new Congress defunded the SPRE legislation, effectively killing that potential threat. However, the Department of Education continued to issue new regulations that created significant challenges for many accrediting agencies—something that occupied much of the Commission's time in the 1990s and 2000s.

Endnote 11: As noted on p. 83 above, the Commission spent a considerable amount of time on extension education in the 1990s. First authorized in 1980 (see Footnote 247), by 1990 extension education enrollment totaled 14,698 students—25% (!) of all ATS students—at 76 different ATS schools, one-third of the membership. Perhaps due to tighter controls and more rigorous guidelines adopted in the 1990s by the Commission, by 1999 extension education had declined to 13,363, after peaking at 15,383 in 1992. Then the year 2000 introduced a "whole new ballgame," when the Commission began approving distance (online) education. That year 27 ATS schools enrolled 2,278 students in at least one online course. By the end of the decade (2010), 90 ATS schools enrolled 16,120 students in at least one online course—an eight-fold increase! By 2008, there were more ATS students online than offsite (15,887 vs. 14,203) for the first time, and the difference has only grown greater since then. The most recent data (2023-2024) show 47,956 online students (at 216 ATS schools), compared to 4,796 offsite students (at 52 ATS schools). That's a 10 to 1 differential. Since the 2020 pandemic, the majority of ATS students have taken at least some of their courses online. That is not surprising during the pandemic when 47,492 students (61%) of all ATS students were enrolled online. But every year since 2020 online students have continued to constitute a majority of all ATS students, with 47,956 (63%) enrolled online this past year.

[NOTE: The data presented here are from the ATS Annual Report Forms (ARF). Chris Meinzer (chief operating officer and senior director at ATS), who compiled these numbers, suggests they be read with some caution because ARF definitions for these categories have changed over time since they began to be collected in 1990.]

Endnote 12: In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education issued several new regulations that were quite troubling to higher education. One was the "federal definition of a credit hour," the first time in U.S. history that the federal government interjected itself into what had been the academic purview of institutions of higher education (see USDE October 2010 Dear Colleague Letter; see also More Confusion on Credit-Hour Definition from *Inside Higher Ed*, March 11, 2019). Another new regulation required "state authorization for distance education" (see Footnotes 208 and 310). All of these regulations led to ATS creating the "Targeted Issues Checklist" in 2012 for evaluators to ensure that member schools complied with them (see Footnote 303).

APPENDIX A. Listing of ATS Presidents (1918-2024) and ATS Commission Chairs (1934-2024)

Year	Location	ATS President	President's School
1918	Cambridge, MA	William Mackenzie	Hartford
1920	Princeton, NJ	Charles Barbour	Colgate
1922	Toronto, ON	Daniel Fraser	Presbyterian (Montreal)
1924	Evanston, IL	Charles Stuart	Garrett
1926	New Haven, CT	George Stewart	Auburn
1928	New York, NY	Luther Weigle+	Yale
1930	Chicago, IL	Shailer Mathews	Chicago Divinity
1932	Gettysburg, PA	Warren Moulton	Bangor
1934	Rochester, NY	Richard Davidson	Emmanuel (Toronto)
1936	Chester, PA	Arlo Brown	Drew
1938	Toronto, ON	Lewis Sherrill+	Louisville Presbyterian
1940	Lexington, KY	Albert Beaven	Colgate Rochester
1942	Rochester, NY	Henry Van Dusen	Union (NY)
1944	Pittsburgh, PA	Sandford Fleming	Berkeley (CA)
1946	Chicago, IL	Conrad Bergendoff	Augustana (IL)
1948	Dayton, OH	John Mackay	Princeton
1950	Columbus, OH	John Benton	Vanderbilt
1952	Louisville, KY	Edward Roberts+	Princeton
1954	Chicago, IL	Charles Taylor	Episcopal Theol. School
1956	Berkeley, CA	Walter Roberts+	United (OH)
1958	Boston, MA	Ernest Colwell+	Claremont
1960	Richmond, VA	James Jones	Union (VA)
1962	Toronto, ON	Stanley Frost+	McGill
1964	Fort Worth, TX	Olin Binkley	Southeastern Baptist
1966	Alexandria, VA	Robert Moss+	Lancaster
1968	St. Louis, MO	Arthur McKay	McCormick
1970	Claremont, CA	Allix James	Samuel DeWitt Proctor
1972	St. Paul, MN	Joseph Quillian	Perkins
1974	Atlanta, GA	Frederick Whittaker	Bangor
1976	Boston, MA	David Hubbard	Fuller
1978	Toronto, ON	James McCord+	Princeton
1980	Denver, CO	Harvey Guthrie	Episcopal Divinity
1982	Pittsburgh, PA	Vincent Cushing	Washington Theological
1984	Pittsburgh, PA	Douglas Jay	Emmanuel (Toronto)
1986	Kansas City, MO	Barbara B. Zikmund	Pacific School of Religion
1988	San Francisco, CA	Russell Dilday	Southwestern Baptist
1990	Montreal, QC	James Waits	Candler
1992	Pittsburgh, PA	Robert Cooley	Gordon-Conwell
1994	Atlanta, GA	James Costen	Interdenominational
1996	Denver, CO	Dianne Kennedy	Aquinas Institute
1998	Baltimore, MD	Luder Whitlock	Reformed Theological
2000	Toronto, ON	Martha Horne	Protestant Episcopal
2002	Pittsburgh, PA	Davide Tiede	Luther Seminary
2004	Garden Grove, CA	Cynthia Campbell	McCormick
2006	Chicago, IL	Donald Senior	Catholic Theol. Union
2008	Atlanta, GA	John Kinney+	Samuel DeWitt Proctor
2010	Montreal, QC	Richard Mouw+	Fuller
2012	Minneapolis, MN	Dorcas Gordon	Knox College (Toronto)
2014	Pittsburgh, PA	J. Hudnut-Beumler	Vanderbilt
2016	St. Louis, MO	Janet Clark	Tyndale (Toronto)
2018	Denver, CO	Brian Blount	Union Presbyterian
2020	[Virtual for COVID]	Mark Young	Denver Seminary
2022	Pittsburgh, PA	Mary McCormick	Saint Mary Seminary
2024	Atlanta, GA	Margaret Mwenda^	Calvin Seminary

[no COA until 1934]

Mackenzie chaired 1st Exec. Comm.

+ that ATS President also served as Commission Chair, of which ten did.

ATS COA Chair	Chair's School
Luther Weigle	Yale
Lewis Sherrill*	Louisville Presbyterian
Edward Roberts*	Princeton
Edward Roberts*	Princeton
Gould Wickey*	
Gould Wickey*	
Charles Pyatt*	College of the Bible
Charles Pyatt*	College of the Bible
Nevin Harner*	Lancaster
Oren Baker*	Colgate-Rochester
Walter Roberts*	United (OH)
Duke McCall	Southern Baptist
Ernest Colwell	Claremont
Stanley Frost	McGill
Lawrence Rose	General Seminary (NY)
Robert Moss	Lancaster
Alvin Rogness	Luther Seminary
David Stitt	Austin Presbyterian
James McCord	Princeton
James McCord	Princeton
Benton Kline	Columbia (GA)
Frederick Wentz	Chicago Cluster of Schools
Sara Little	Union (VA)
Shelby Rooks	Chicago Theological
Jean-Marc LaPorte	Regis College (Toronto)
Frank Gulley	Vanderbilt
Faith Burgess	LTS at Philadelphia
Harold Songer	Southern Baptist
Katarina Schuth	Saint Paul Seminary
Judith Berling	GTU (CA)
Richard Mouw	Fuller
Thomas Gleeson	Jesuit School of Theol.
Jane Smith	Hartford Seminary
Leland Eliason	Bethel
John Kinney	Samuel DeWitt Proctor
Cecilia Murphy	St. Vincent Seminary
Jimmy Dukes	New Orleans Baptist
Anne Anderson	St. Michael's (Toronto)
David Esterline	McCormick
Ronald Mercier	Saint Louis University
Alton Pollard	Howard
Harry Gardner	Acadia
Leanne Van Dyk	Columbia (GA)
Todd Lajiness	Sacred Heart Major
Betty Holley	Payne
Joe Harrod^	Southern Baptist

*From 1936 to 1956 the ATS Executive Secretary chaired the Commission. The only Executive Secretary not from an ATS school was Gould Wickey (1942-46), who was General Secretary of the Council of Church Boards of Education. In 1956, Charles Taylor became the first Executive Director, replacing the position of Executive Secretary, and the Commission then elected its own chair until 2014.

^The 2024 officers, currently ATS vice president and COA vice chair, will be voted on at the June 2024 ATS Biennial Meeting.

APPENDIX B. Original ATS Standards from 1936

(ATS Bulletin 11, 1936, pp. 41-43; see pp. 16-18 above; 612 words)

1. Standards of Admission. An accredited Theological Seminary or College should require for admission to candidacy for its degrees the degree of A.B. from a college which is approved by one of the regional accrediting bodies, or the equivalent of such a degree.

2. Length of Course and Standards for Graduation. An accredited Theological Seminary or College should offer a course leading to the degree of B.D. [later MDiv] or its equivalent. This should be regarded as a professional degree, the standards of which in intellectual attainment are those usually required in any other field of graduate professional study. Normally it will require three years of two semesters each, or their equivalent, beyond the A.B. degree, or its equivalent, to complete this course. It is undesirable for a seminary that is not an integral part of a university to grant the Ph.D. or the A.M. degree, but it is legitimate for a seminary affiliated with a university to offer a program leading to the Ph.D. or the A.M. degree in cooperation with a university, the degree to be given by the university. No work done towards the first college degree should be used towards a seminary degree.

3. Fields of Study and Balance of Curriculum. An accredited Theological Seminary or College should have a curriculum predicated upon a broad and sound basis in the arts and sciences and should include adequate instruction in the following four areas: Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Practical. The last should include homiletics, religious education, pastoral theology, liturgics, church administration, and the application of Christianity to modern social conditions.

4. Faculty. An accredited Theological Seminary or College should provide adequate instruction in the four fields of study indicated above and should include at least four full-time professors whose instruction shall be distributed over the four areas. In addition to the necessary moral and religious qualifications, competence as a scholar and a teacher (rather than the possession of degrees) should in all cases be considered the essential characteristics of an acceptable member of a faculty. Such professors together with the administrative officer or officers shall constitute a faculty with effective control over its curriculum and the granting of degrees. A weekly teaching load of more than twelve hours per instructor shall be considered as endangering educational efficiency.

5. Library. An accredited Theological Seminary or College should have a library which is live, adequate, well distributed and professionally administered, with collections bearing especially upon the subjects taught and with a definite annual appropriation for the purchase of new books and the appropriate contemporary periodicals.

6. Equipment. An accredited Theological Seminary or College should have such equipment in lands, buildings, and libraries as shall provide adequate facilities for the carrying out of the program of the institution.

7. Finances. An accredited Theological Seminary or College should have sufficient income from endowment or reliable general gifts or fees to support fully the program which the institution offers, including an adequate support for its staff, its library, and the maintenance of its equipment.

8. General Tone. In accrediting a Theological Seminary or College regard should be had for the quality of its instruction, the standing of its professors, the character of its administration, the efficiency of its offices of record and its proved ability to prepare students for efficient professional service or further scholarly pursuits.

9. Inspection. A Theological Seminary or College desiring accreditation shall upon request be inspected and reported by an agent of the Accrediting Commission of this Conference. Only institutions thus inspected and approved by the Commission shall be accredited. The Accrediting Commission shall review periodically the list of accredited institutions and make recommendations for the revision of the list.

APPENDIX C. List of First 46 Schools Accredited by ATS in 1938*

(ATS Bulletin 21, 1938, pp. 15-17; italics = attended first ATS Conference in 1918)

Andover Newton Theological School (Newton Centre, MA) [two schools until 1965, merged with Yale in 2017]
Auburn Theological Seminary (Auburn, NY) [ceased granting degrees in 1939 and withdrew; see Footnote 68 above]
Augustana Theological Seminary (Rock Island, IL) [became part of Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago in 1962]
Berkeley Baptist Divinity School (Berkeley, CA) [now Berkeley School of Theology, part of GTU since 1962]
Bonebrake Graduate School of Theology (Dayton, OH) [merged in 1954 to form United Theological Seminary]
Boston University School of Theology (Boston, MA)
Candler School of Theology of Emory University (Atlanta, GA)
Colgate-Rochester Divinity School (Rochester, NY) [merged with Crozer in 1970 to form Colgate Rochester Crozer]
College of the Bible (Lexington, KY) [renamed Lexington Theological Seminary in 1965]
Columbia Theological Seminary (Decatur, GA)
Crozer Theological Seminary (Chester, PA) [merged with Colgate-Rochester in 1970]
Drew Theological Seminary (Madison, NJ) [now Drew University Theological School]
Duke University School of Religion (Durham, NC) [now Duke University Divinity School]
Eden Theological Seminary (Webster Groves, MO)
Emmanuel College in Victoria University (Toronto, Ontario)
Episcopal Theological School (Cambridge, MA) [ceased granting degrees in 2017 and withdrew from ATS]
Evangelical School of Theology (Reading, PA) [merged with Bonebrake in 1954 to form United Theological Seminary]
Evangelical Theological Seminary (Naperville, IL) [merged with Garrett in 1974 to form Garrett-Evangelical Seminary]
Gammon Theological Seminary (Atlanta, GA) [merged with others in 1958 to form Interdenominational Theological Center]
Garrett Biblical Institute (Evanston, IL) [merged with Evangelical (IL) in 1974 to form Garrett-Evangelical Seminary]
General Theological Seminary (New York, NY)
Hartford Theological Seminary (Hartford, CT) [renamed Hartford International University for Religion and Peace in 2021]
Iliff School of Theology (Denver, CO)
Louisville Presbyterian Seminary (Louisville, KY)
Lutheran Theological Seminary (Gettysburg, Pa) [merged with LTS Philadelphia in 2017 to form United Lutheran Seminary]
Lutheran Theological Seminary (Philadelphia, PA) [merged with LTS Gettysburg in 2017 to form United Lutheran Seminary]
New Brunswick Theological Seminary (New Brunswick, NJ)
Oberlin Graduate School of Theology (Oberlin, OH) [merged with Vanderbilt University Divinity School in 1966]
Pacific School of Religion (Berkeley, CA)
Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological Seminary (Pittsburgh, PA) [merged with Western as Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 1959]
Presbyterian Theological College (Montreal, Quebec) [affiliated with McGill University School of Religious Studies in 1969]
Presbyterian Theological Seminary (Chicago, IL) [now McCormick Theological Seminary]
Princeton Theological Seminary (Princeton, NJ)
San Francisco Theological Seminary (San Anselmo, CA) [merged with the University of Redlands in 2019]
Seabury-Western Theological Seminary (Evanston, IL) [federated with Bexley Hall in 2013 to form Bexley Seabury]
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Louisville, KY)
Southern Methodist University School of Theology (Dallas, TX) [renamed Perkins School of Theology at SMU in 1945]
Temple University School of Theology (Philadelphia, PA) [renamed Conwell in 1960 and merged with Gordon in 1970]
Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church in the U.S. (Lancaster, PA) [now Lancaster Theological Seminary]
Trinity College (Toronto, Ontario) [now Trinity College Faculty of Divinity]
Union Theological Seminary (New York, NY)
Union Theological Seminary (Richmond, VA) [renamed Union Presbyterian Seminary in 2010]
University of Chicago Divinity School (Chicago, IL)
Vanderbilt University School of Religion (Nashville, TN) [now Vanderbilt University Divinity School]
Western Theological Seminary (Pittsburgh, PA) [merged with Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological Seminary in 1959]
Yale University Divinity School (New Haven, CT)

*ATS Bulletin 12 (1938, p. 17) listed three schools not on the initial list of 46 above only because of "reports unavoidably delayed [which] the Commission sincerely regrets." Those three schools were *Chicago Theological Seminary* (accredited in December 1939), *Harvard University Divinity School* (accredited in June 1940), and *Queen's Theological College* of Kingston, Ontario (accredited in December 1939). The first two are still members of ATS; Queen's withdrew in 2015 (a different Queen's in Newfoundland is still a member).

APPENDIX D. ATS Membership and Enrollment Trends (1936-2023)

Year	Total Members	Accredited Members	Students Enrolled		ATS Members Added	ATS Members Withdrawn
1936	64	0				
1938	80	46			16	0
1940	85	56			6	1
1942	95	57			10	0
1944	104	69			10	1
1946	104	69			0	0
1948	105	71			2	1
1950	107	70			3	1
1952	107	73			1	1
1954	111	76			5	1
1956	124	79	20,720	*	13	0
1958	127	82	22,523		3	0
1960	126	82	19,976		5	6
1962	129	85	20,727		5	2
1964	127	90	21,025		5	7
1966	140	97	23,959		13	0
1968	160	100	30,484		23	3
1970	182	110	31,072		29	7
1972	192	124	33,036		15	5
1974	192	143	36,830		6	6
1976	193	149	43,023		3	2
1978	193	155	46,640		6	6
1980	194	157	49,611		4	3
1981	193	160	50,559		0	1
1982	195	164	52,620		4	2
1983	195	166	55,112		0	0
1984	197	169	56,466		3	1
1985	196	172	56,377		0	1
1986	200	175	56,328		7	3
1987	199	177	55,766		0	1
1988	203	177	55,746		6	2
1989	203	181	56,178		0	0

Year	Total Members	Accredited Members	Students Enrolled	ATS Members Added	ATS Members Withdrawn
1990	211	184	59,003	8	0
1991	211	186	59,897	0	0
1992	220	188	63,484	9	0
1993	219	189	63,429	0	1
1994	226	192	65,089	7	0
1995	224	192	64,480	0	2
1996	233	196	65,637	10	1
1997	229	200	65,361	0	4
1998	237	204	68,937	8	0
1999	237	206	70,432	0	0
2000	243	209	72,697	7	1
2001	243	210	73,945	0	0
2002	244	216	76,530	1	0
2003	243	217	78,709	0	1
2004	251	221	80,773	8	0
2005	251	226	80,595	0	0
2006	253	230	80,388	5	3
2007	253	232	79,244	0	0
2008	252	234	76,735	2	3
2009	251	234	75,444	0	1
2010	261	237	76,011	7	3
2011	260	240	74,494	0	1
2012	273	240	74,442	13	0
2013	270	241	72,807	0	3
2014	273	244	71,950	7	1
2015	272	246	72,238	0	1
2016	273	247	72,219	5	4
2017	270	250	73,179	0	3
2018	276	253	78,042	10	4
2019	274	254	77,043	0	2
2020	275	258	77,591	3	2
2021	272	259	78,021	0	3
2022	282	263	77,329	11	1
2023	276	259	76,318	0	6

NOTE: The numbers above rely on the ATS Bulletins, Fact Books, and Annual Data Tables. Some variations occur in these sources since numbers published in one year are sometimes adjusted in later years with later data. From 1938 to 1980, the numbers are based on biennial data because annual numbers for members then were not kept.

*1956 was the first year that ATS published enrollment figures for all member schools. Prior to that, the ATS Bulletins published enrollment data only for accredited members, which left out roughly a third of all enrollments.

Data for 2024 are not yet known but 10 Associate Members (with 791 students) are on the Biennial Meeting agenda for approval by the membership. That would put the total ATS membership at 286 schools with 77,109 students. Six current Associate Members are on the June 2024 agenda of the Board of Commissioners for action on their initial accreditation, which, if approved, would bring the number of accredited members to 265.

APPENDIX E. Commission Milestones

1918 First Conference of Theological Schools in the United Stated and Canada meets at Harvard to "consider the problems of theological education" (attended by 101 "delegates" from 53 schools; 2/3 of 101 were faculty)

1924 Publication of Robert Kelly's *Theological Education in America: A Study of One Hundred and Sixty-One Theological Schools in the United States and Canada*—the first major study of North American schools of theology and "the problems of theological education" (funded by John D. Rockefeller, Jr.)

1934-1 Publication of William Brown and Mark May's *Education of American Ministers*—first ATS-authorized study of the "problems of theological education," four volumes analyzing Protestant clergy and 176 North American schools of theology (also funded by John D. Rockefeller, Jr.; see 1956 below)

1934-2 Birth of ATS Commission on Accrediting (in response to Brown and May's study) to "establish some plan for the accrediting of theological seminaries" (5-member Commission chaired by Luther Weigle of Yale developed first Standards, with help from Lewis Sherrill, ATS's first Executive Secretary, hired part-time in 1935)

1936 Approval of the first "Standards for Accrediting," nine of them, "startling in their simplicity and brevity" with only one paragraph per standard (612 total words)

1938 Publication of first list of 46 accredited schools (all of which still exist, though 18 merged and two ceased offering degrees), 75% of the original 61 applications; all but 12 had "notations" (1938 Bulletin included a 52-page summary of these schools, which averaged 113 students, 8 faculty, and 35,000 library books)

1942 ATS Commission recognized by U.S. government for training chaplains, on a par with the American Medical Association for doctors and the American Bar Association for lawyers; ATS considered briefly adopting a second set of Standards for schools that admitted students with less than four years of college

1944 First recognition of two classes: accredited and associate (latter if "cannot attain accreditation"); passage of U.S. GI Bill and Canadian Veterans Charter, providing federal funds for veterans' education for first time; ATS proposed offering doctorate (discussion lasted until 1952); first Evangelical school admitted to ATS

1946 ATS Commission adopted two classes of accredited members: one for those that admitted only students with four years of college and another for those that had less stringent admissions (lasted until 1956)

1952 First suspension and withdrawal of an ATS accredited school for "reports of strife and dissension" (school reinstated in 1960); also passage of Korean GI Bill, which for the first time limited federal funding of veterans' educational expenses to schools accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. government

1956 Major reorganization of ATS, with first full-time Executive Director, first Incorporation, first Bylaws, and first major gifts—from the Rockefellers' Sealantic Fund—worth over $2 million today (until then, ATS had $5,038 in cash, with "two filing cabinets… 47 reference books, and one second-hand typewriter"); also first time decennial reviews and self-studies required; first permanent ATS office—in Dayton, Ohio

1958 First Report of the Committee on Canadian Affairs "expressing uneasiness" about inattention to Canadian issues, including the name of "American Association of Theological Schools" adopted in 1936 (until 1972)

1960 First probation issued by the Commission on Accrediting for the "Lawson Affair" involving civil rights; first Canadian to chair the Commission; first Association policies adopted (e.g., on academic freedom); first published Procedures Related to Accreditation, including self-studies (originally two types; see p. 43)

1962 First reference to women in the ATS Standards—in preamble; first Standard on governance, first Standard requiring 5-day week for seminary studies (had notation on students working too much from 1958 to 1996)

1966 First Roman Catholic schools admitted to ATS (55 joined in the next six years); ATS added 80 new members from 1966 to 1972, 29 in 1970 alone—both records that have never been approached

1970 First criteria (standards) adopted for clusters (18 of them, involving 99 ATS schools, formed by 1972); first African American elected ATS president (first African American chair of the Commission in 1980)

1972 First of three major redevelopments of Standards (also 1996 and 2020), first two-part Standards: General Institutional Standards and Degree Program Standards; first time Commission formally accredited both institutions and degrees; first standards on evaluation, MDiv (was BD), and DMin; current name for ATS adopted and ATS office moved from Dayton to Vandalia (OH); also from 1972 to 1974 the Commission faced the most challenging single school situation in its 90-year history

1974 First election of women to Commission (and ATS Executive Committee), including first public members; first appointment of Committee on Women in Theological Education

1978 First woman to chair the ATS Commission on Accrediting (first woman ATS president in 1986); first Standard on Minority and Women's Concerns (first Evangelical elected ATS president in 1976)

1980 First Standard permitting off-campus (extension) education; extension enrollment ballooned to 25% of all ATS students by 1990; membership approved change giving back to the Commission the authority to accredit new members (since 1964 required two-thirds approval from membership to accredit a school)

1982 First Roman Catholics elected as president of the Association and as chair of the Commission on Accrediting

1984 First Standard on mission (purpose); revised Standards to admit "non-traditional" students (persons 35 years or older) without a bachelor's degree; revised Standard on placement

1988 First ATS Biennial Meeting since 1964 that no new or revised Standards were proposed and only second one since 1950 (next Biennial Meeting with no new or revised Standards was in 2014)

1990 First Standard on Globalization; revised DMin Standard to eliminate the "in-ministry" option (i.e., option that combined MDiv and DMin into a single professional doctorate, like medicine and law, though 4 years); first Handbook of Accreditation published (replaced in 2014 with Self-Study Handbook)

1992 Adopted new "Criteria for Extension and Distance Learning Programs," with latter called "independent study aided by audio or video" (ATS office relocated from Vandalia to Pittsburgh in 1991); Commission announced 4-year project (The Good Theological School) to redevelop Standards for second time by 1996

1996 Second of three major redevelopments of Standards, doubling their length; large emphasis on evaluation and on meeting increased demands of the U.S. Department of Education; new Standards had four themes: globalization, inclusion, freedom of inquiry, and planning and evaluation

2000 First Standard allowing online learning, with adoption of Standard 10 on Multiple Locations and Distance Education, permitting up to two-thirds of the MDiv to be completed online with special permission (first two "online MDiv experiments" approved in 1997 with some residency; first fully online MDiv in 2002)

2004 ATS reorganized into two legally separate corporations, with Articles of Incorporation moved from Ohio to Pennsylvania, two new sets of Bylaws (replacing ATS Constitution), and two new governing bodies: the ATS Board of Directors (replacing the Executive Committee) and the COA Board of Commissioners

2008 First "reader panels" used by the Board of Commissioners to streamline its workload

2010 First major revision of the Standards since 1996, with adoption of revised General Institutional Standards; one of most contentious ATS Biennial Meetings ("Brawl in Montreal") over proposed Standard requiring women in leadership and an extended debate over one school's application for Affiliate status

2012 Continuation of first major revision of the Standards, with adoption of revised Degree Program Standards, including revised Standard on distance education that allowed almost all degrees to be offered fully online, if granted an exception or experiment (242! granted between 2012 and 2020)

2014 Revised Bylaws to require officers of Board of Commissioners to be elected by membership (per Board of Directors policy); Board of Commissioners began delegating "routine" decisions to staff (now more than half of all accrediting actions); first competency-based MDiv approved as five-year experiment

2018 Membership authorized redevelopment of Standards to be completed by 2020; revised Bylaws to allow for online meetings for Biennial Meeting, Board of Directors, and Board of Commissioners (proved prescient as COVID-19 pandemic moved all meetings online in 2020 and 2021); first School for Peer Reviewers

2020 Third of three major redevelopments of Standards (after 1972 and 1996) approved by membership 198-1, with no amendments during Biennial Meeting discussion—a first for any redevelopment vote or even for any major revision; first (and only) ATS Biennial Meeting to be held completely online due to the pandemic

2022 ATS Biennial Meeting focused on Pathways for Tomorrow project, funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. that awarded more than $200 million in grants to more than 200 ATS schools, including more than $10 million in coordinating grants to ATS—the largest combined grants in the Commission's 90-year history

2024 ATS Commission celebrates its 90th anniversary; in June 1934 a group of 59 seminary leaders from 35 schools authorized the Commission "to establish some plan for the accrediting of theological seminaries"