

INTERNATIONAL NETWORK
OF SOCIETIES FOR CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

- Topic: Catholic Theology Worldwide:
Regional Challenges and New Developments
- Convener: Bradford Hinze, CTSA Delegate to INSeCT
- Panelists: Paulo Fernando Carneiro de Andrade,
Sociedade de Teologia e Ciências da Religião,
Thomas Fliethmann, European Society of Catholic Theology
Neil Ormerod, Australian Catholic Theological Association,
Jennifer Slater, Catholic Theological Society of South Africa,
Vimal Tirimanna, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference:
Office of Theological Concerns

Immediately prior to the CTSA, a historic gathering of presidents and official representatives of societies of Catholic Theology from around the world and selected representatives of nations in Africa and Asia (where few societies of Catholic theology are in existence) took place to discuss regional pedagogical, social, and ecclesial challenges and new developments. The assembly, a project of the International Network of Societies of Catholic Theology (INSeCT), culminated in collective deliberation about the most pressing issues that merit attention by Catholic theologians around the world. Two issues were identified, described by Neil Ormerod at this session. Above all Catholic theologians need to promote greater dialogue and collaboration with people about their daily lived reality in diverse local contexts (especially with women, children, youth, and those living in poverty), with bishops, with theologians across cultures, and with adherents of other religions, and other members of the wider society. Second, there is an urgent need for more nuanced contextual analyses of the “signs of the times” in relation to globalization, intercultural relations, migration, fundamentalism and relativism, secularization and de-traditionalization, and ecology and respect for the earth.

The INSeCT meeting concluded with the continental groups of theologians offering an assessment of what their regional theologies *contribute* to theologians around the world seeking to advance the principal agendas identified and what they particularly *need* from other sectors of the Catholic Church and theology to support their own efforts.

Jennifer Slater reported that African Catholic theologians, based on their history and diversity, are in a good position to promote intercultural dialogue. They have a great appreciation for family values, that is, respect for life, hospitality, interdependence, openness to what it means to be human. Interdependence is axiomatic in Africa. African theologians are keenly aware of the need for transparent partnerships, genuine solidarity, academic facilities, teachers, internet access to theological resources, e.g., books and journals, and the great need for inter-African communication and connections.

Vimal Tirimanna recounted the main contributions from Asia and Australia. One key contribution from Asian theologians is a theology of the triple dialogue of the church with the poor, other cultures, and other religions, and especially their experience in interreligious dialogue which has been occurring in Asia for over thirty years. Asia and Australia provide different views of globalization and its negativity as evidenced, e.g., in migration. Asian theologians have a great need for resources: books, publication venues, and facilities and for more collaboration among Catholic theologians within Asia itself.

Paulo Fernando Carneiro de Andrade described the contributions of Latin American theologians in terms of their strong sense of identity as followers of God, which includes above all working within the Church for the transformation of the world through a preferential option for the poor. Latin American theologians offer unique reflections on the “signs of the times” in terms of feminist theology, interreligious dialogue, ecumenism, and preferential option for the poor. Latin American theologians need to promote, including among themselves, a sense of common identity amidst regional differences. They also need greater collaboration with the peoples and theological traditions of European, Caribbean countries, Africa, and Asia.

Thomas Fliethmann discussed the findings of the Europeans and North American theologians. There is a great awareness of their abundant resources and access to publications and venues worldwide, and of their heritage of skills, openness, and critical consciousness as theologians and researchers who are both teachers and lifelong learners. There is a great desire and commitment to share libraries, resources, teachers, and technological competence with theologians around the world. There is a great need among European and North American theologians to receive the testimonies of experience and theological works of people and theologians from other countries and continents.

A lively discussion ensued. Two issues received special attention. First, various proposals were offered for finding ways to make theological books available to those in Africa and Asia: with the help of the Catholic Library Association, by North American and European theologians as they retire bequeathing the best of their theological libraries to institutions in these settings, and by encouraging publishers and authors to make their books available in computer formats accessible through the internet and more affordable. Second, intercultural education among theologians was emphasized. North American and European institutions need to develop scholarships earmarked for doctoral candidates in theology from the Southern hemisphere, especially from Africa. A new proposal surfaced: develop faculty exchange programs and immersion experiences for younger scholars to learn about African, Asian, and Latin American theologies by teaching for a semester or a year in those settings.

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