

JANUARY 27, 2021



## KAIROS REPORTS

REPORTS FROM INSeCT MEMBER SOCIETIES, 2018-2021

## **Kairos Reports for the General Assembly of INSeCT, 2021**

*Alphabetically by continent and member society*

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# *Africa*

## **General Report for the Africa Region**

### **Introduction**

Africa is the second largest continent. There are three main religions: African Indigenous Religions, Islam and Christianity. The continent is further divided into 5 regions: North, West, East, Central and Southern Africa. There are also linguistic divisions based on colonial legacies: Anglo (English); Franco (French); and Luso (Portuguese). In the midst of economic, political and social challenges Africa continues to spear forward in its quest for liberation and wellbeing of her people. There are challenges of governance, protracted conflicts, poverty, globalization and health including the current covid-19 pandemic. It is in this context and its particular contextual expression in each region and country that the Catholic Church is called to respond to as Kairos. The Catholic Church is one of the fastest growing denominations in Africa. The Kairos question to ask is whether this phenomenal growth has contributed to addressing the issues mentioned and much more in each context. Some of the milestones from 2019 include the fiftieth golden anniversary of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) which “was born out of the wish of African Bishops during the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) to establish a forum in which they could speak with one voice on matters pertaining to the Church in Africa. The establishment of SECAM is therefore the result of the Bishops’ resolve to build a continental structure in order to bring forth the African vision to the whole Church.”<sup>1</sup> Another development was the Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network 2019 Congress in Enugu, Nigeria in honour of the golden anniversary. The volumes were produced from the articles presented in a series entitled “Faith in Action.” There are much more initiatives taking place at parish, country, regional and continental levels.

### **Response to the three questions**

Based on the above the responses are as follows. I want to state on the onset that these are not all encompassing as each country and region have their own specific contextual issues. This is a generalization. I will be responding at a continental level and make the disclaimer that there will be gaps and issues that will not be covered.

Some of the core continental concerns include the following:

- political: governance, repression, elections etc
- poverty and inequality
- coloniality
- triple pandemics of HIV and AIDS, gender based violence and covid-19
- protracted conflicts
- migration and displacement

African theologians, SECAM, theological networks, advocacy groups have been involved in addressing these issues at national and continental levels. Further Catholic organizations such as Caritas are providing humanitarian practical support driven by Catholic Social Teaching.

One of the challenges for theology is working with Pope Francis’ vision of synodality which provides a process for the full participation of the laity. In this context theologians will shift from working amongst themselves to including laity. This is in continuity with the legacy of Kairos where the laity spearheaded prophetic liberation theology that came from their lived experiences of oppression. A laity driven theology in corporation with theologians

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<sup>1</sup> <https://secam.org/about-secam/>

provides an expression of synodality that will serve not only the particular contexts in the continent but also the world church.

As I said from the beginning this is one view that is limited and does not claim to cover everything.

*Dr Nontando Hadebe*

## Asia-Pacific

### Australian Catholic Theological Association (ACTA)

**“A Kairos for Catholic Theology – Serving the Church - Serving the World”**

The Australian Catholic Theological Association chose to defer its 2020 annual conference to July 2021 due to the COVID-19 situation, so the present report reflects our work together in 2018 and 2019, as well various areas of concern and significant contributions of our members.



#### **1. What have been the core concerns, theological responses and topics in your society and region over these past four years?**

Three areas of theological work stand out for theology in the Australian context:

**1. The Plenary Council of the Church in Australia**, which was due to start in October of 2020, but has been postponed to October 2021, due to COVID-19

<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/>

Work on ecclesiological themes such as the ongoing reception and implementation of the event and documents of the Second Vatican Council, and Synodality have been an ongoing focus of our members for some time. The preparation and background work for the Plenary Council has both directly involved members of the Association in the *Plenary Council Executive Committee* and *Facilitation Team* since 2017, and the working groups for the working papers of the Plenary Council, its *Instrumentum Laboris Team*. Some members will also be direct participants in the two sessions of the Plenary Council itself. Our annual conferences over the last three years have explicitly sought to address key themes emerging for the Plenary Council and have invited members of the *Australian Catholic Bishops Conference* who are directly involved in the event to dialogue with us about ways in which we can support and contribute to its success. The themes of our last conferences have sought to explore areas that will provide up-to-date theological depth to the conversations for all the delegates for the Plenary Council. They have been:

2018: *Gospel, Culture and Renewal: The Church in the 21st Century*

2019: *The Theological Issues for the Future of the Catholic Church in Australia*

2020/1: *Theologically Exploring the Plenary Council's Six Themes*

A variety of articles and publications have been published that inform and support the process and execution of the Council.

- Rush, Ormond. *The Vision of Vatican II: Its Fundamental Principles*. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2019.
- Edwards, Denis. "The Spirit of God and the Plenary Council." *The Australasian Catholic Record* 95, no. 4 (10, 2018): 387-398.
- Fox, Patricia. "Power and Leadership of Women within the Catholic Church in Australia." *The Australasian Catholic Record* 95, no. 1 (01, 2018): 10-19.
- Gooley, Anthony. "A Theology Not Received, A Practice Out of Time." *The Australasian Catholic Record* 95, no. 1 (01, 2018): 35-50.
- Lam, Joseph. "Friendship and Synodality: An Ecclesiological Suggestion on the Eve of the Australian Plenary Council 2020." *The Australasian Catholic Record* 97, no. 2 (04, 2020): 156-171.
- McGregor, Peter John. "Synodality and the Australian Plenary Council: Listening to and Looking at those who are Living in the Spirit." *Irish Theological Quarterly* First Published 07 Dec 2020.
- Roper, Elissa. "Synodality: A Process Committed to Transformation." *The Australasian Catholic Record* 95, no. 4 (10, 2018): 412-423.

- Rush, Orm. "Inverting the Pyramid: The Sensus Fidelium in a Synodal Church." *Theological Studies* 78 no. 2 (2017): 299–325.
- Trinidad, Julie. "The Holy Spirit and Lay Ecclesial Ministry: Reflections for the 2020 Plenary Council." *The Australasian Catholic Record* 96, no. 3 (07, 2019): 345-358.
- Waters, Ian. "The Plenary Council and Canon Law." *The Australasian Catholic Record* 95, no. 4 (10, 2018): 399-411.

**2. The creation of a working group on Gender Justice within ACTA** in order to continue and develop the work provoked by INSeCT's 2014-2017 research project, "A Question of Gender Justice: The Role of Women in Decision-Making in Different Areas of Church and Society". While there has been an ongoing concern with inclusive theological work within ACTA over the years, the remit of this group is "to facilitate the continuing research commenced by ACTA on Gender Justice, and to be aware of and liaise with other people and activities." The group has been meeting over the last two years and reports to the Annual General Meeting.

Within the relevant publications, it is noteworthy that reflection on gender issues aligns, in Australia, with theopoetic, non-traditional, creative outputs, as well as discursive work:

- Lynch, Danielle Anne. *Into Silence* [Music CD] (Independent, 2020).
- Heaney, Maeve Louise. "A Hermeneutical Exploration of the Revelatory Text of John 4:1–42, in a Performative Key." *Theological Studies* 81, no. 2 (2020): 278-302.
- Heaney, Maeve Louise. "Nameless" in *Strange Life: The Music of Doubtful Faith* Willow Publishing, 2020.
- Heaps, Jonathan, and Neil Ormerod. "Statistically Ordered: Gender, Sexual Identity, and the Metaphysics of 'Normal'." *Theological Studies* 80, no. 2 (2019): 346-69.

**3. COVID-19's effect on theological gatherings and conferences.** The cancellation of the 2020 ACTA Conference was particularly disappointing, as it coincided with the annual international meeting of The Society of Biblical Literature and would have been a coordinated joint event. While members of the society continue their theological labours in national and international online sessions during this period, we hope that the situation in Australia will allow us to gather again face-to-face, in July 2021.

Relevant publications:

- Fleming, Dan. "Old or young: we all have equal value," *Eureka Street*, 14 May 2020.
- Fleming, Dan. "COVID-19 and the "Trolley Problem": Is there a better way out of the pandemic?" In *ABC Ethics and Religion*, 2 Jun 2020.
- Hodge, Joel. "Special Series: Theology & the Pandemic, Ep. 2, with Joel Hodge: Religion, Violence, And Human Interconnection," *Theology Matters* podcast, Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton USA, 22 June 2020.
- Hodge, Joel. "Reflections on the Coronavirus Pandemic: From Melbourne, Australia: Everyday Heroism", *Bulletin of the Colloquium on Violence & Religion*, May 2020.
- Kheng, Christina. "Covid-19 and building a new normal: An opportune time for promoting integral ways of proceeding," *Ecojesuit: Ecology and Jesuits in Communication*. August 3, 2020.
- Kheng, Christina, "Rebuilding from Covid-19: Pastoral Leadership Towards a New World," *Asia Pacific Mission Studies* 3, no. 1 (2021) (Forthcoming Mar/Apr 2021).

## **2. How is theology in your region helping the Church to be a servant Church, at the service of the world, particularly of the most vulnerable?**

The six themes that have emerged in a nationwide discernment process over more than a year for the Plenary Council reflect the concerns and challenges facing the Church in Australia

and its work for the Reign of God in this country. They address the issues of how the Church in Australia is called to be a Christ-centred Church that is:

1. Missionary and Evangelising;
2. Inclusive, Participatory & Synodal;
3. Prayerful and Eucharist;
4. Humble, Healing and Merciful;
5. Joyful, Hope-filled and Servant;
6. Open to Conversion, Renewal and Reform.

The underlying issues reflect those of a Church in a broadly secular and yet plural society, with the challenges of inclusive, transparent, and collaborative leadership.

Of particular importance to theology in Australia, but with universal impact in terms of Church in the public square, was the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse conducted by the Australian government whose recommendations were published in December 2017. Formulating theological responses to the findings is both a challenge and opportunity in that some aspects of transparency, collaboration and accountability will become a government requirement as well as an area of ecclesiological investigation. In this field, the theme of ecclesial conversion is front and centre, in the run-up to the 2021 Plenary council.

Theologians were also involved in the preparation and publication of a document on Church Governance, released in August 2020, entitled *The Light from the Southern Cross: Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia*. It highlights the theological and ecclesiological shape of the Church in Australia, as it needs to journey forward. Its reception and implementation will be a major focus for dioceses and theologians over the coming years.

The issue of climate change and the ongoing failure of our governments to respond to it and of our church to take it seriously continues to be a focus of theology in Australia. The reception and implementation of *Laudato Si'* is, to date, very weak. However, the work of esteemed ACTA member and colleague Professor Denis Edwards in this area is being recognised and continued.

- Edwards, Denis. *Denis Edwards in His Own Words*. Hindmarsh, SA: ATF Press, 2020.
- Edwards, Denis. *Deep Incarnation: God's Redemptive Suffering with Creatures*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019.
- Peters, Ted, and Marie Turner. *God and the Natural World: Theological Explorations in Appreciation of Denis Edwards*. Adelaide: ATF Press, 2020.
- Ormerod, Neil, and Cristina Vanin. "Ecological Conversion: What Does It Mean?" *Theological Studies* 77, no. 2 (2016): 328-52.

### **3. What are the specific challenges facing theology in your area/region?**

#### **1. Ongoing development of inclusive Presences in Church leadership and Appropriate Responses to the failures of the church in relation to the Sexual Abuse Crisis and the Royal Commission.**

- Ormerod, Neil. "Sexual Abuse, a Royal Commission, and the Australian Church." *Theological Studies* 80, no. 4 (2019): 950-66.
- Collins, John F, and Neil Ormerod. "The Curious Case of a Priest Who Had Lost His Faculties." *Australasian Catholic Record* 97 (2020): 206-15.

**2. Theology and Catholic Education:** In the Australian context, Catholic Education in various States is seeking theological grounding and formation, often framed in terms of exploration of its Catholic identity and mission. Its engagement with Leuven at various stages

and levels is one particularly significant opportunity to engage constructively with theology and fruitfully increase theological culture and literacy.

- Horner, Robyn, Didier Pollefeyt, Jan Bouwens, Teresa Brown, Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer, Maeve-Louise Heaney, and Michael Buchanan. "Openness to Faith as a Disposition for Teachers in Catholic Schools," [In English]. *International Journal of Practical Theology* 24, no. 2 (20 Oct. 2020 2020): 231-51.

**3. Education and Promotion of the next Generation of Theologians:** Diminishing church attendance, students in school of theology and the growing costs of theological education present a challenge for the promotion of young theologians to take theology in Australia into the future.

**4. Integral and Theological Formation of Priests and Ministers:** After the publication of the latest *Ratio Sacerdotalis* by The Congregation for Clergy in December 2016, members of ACTA in collaboration with the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference have been involved in a consultation process for the creation of the National Ratio for Priestly Formation, which was sent to Rome in December 2020 for recognition and approval by Rome. It highlighted the profound need for an integral formation that rethinks Church leadership as collaborative and theological formation that integrates solid research and pastoral discernment.

*Dr Maeve Louise Heaney VDMF, on behalf of the Executive Board of ACTA.*



## **Damdaming Katoliko sa Teolohiya (DaKaTeo)**

### **1. What have been the core concerns, theological responses and topics in your society over these past four years?**



The Philippines is beset with various social issues, which have occupied the thinking and reflection of DaKaTeo and its members. Among them are the populism of Duterte and his "war on drugs," the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing destruction of the environment and its aftermath, human rights violations by state actors, the apparent lack of concern by the powerful about the poor and the vulnerable, the plight of migrant Filipinos, gender issues, fundamentalist interpretations of religion that justify violence, and cyberspace issues.

In our efforts to respond theologically and pastorally to a few of them, DaKaTeo has issued the following statements:

- [Arrest on a Missionary Is an Attack on the Church of the Poor](#) (26 April 2018)
- [Vigilance, the Call of the Times](#) (On the Ouster of Chief Justice Serrano) (14 May 2018)
- [Statement of Solidarity with Bp. Virgilio Pablo S. David](#) (30 Nov 2018)
- [One with the Resistance](#) (On Charges against Church People) (7 August 2019)
- [DaKaTeo Statement against the Anti-Terrorism Bill](#) (6 June 2020)

Our annual conferences have focused on the following:

- Mindanao Peace Studies Conference IV: Poverty, Politics and Peace (20-21 Nov 2018) (Joint Conference with Fr. Saturnino Urios University)
- "Theologizing the Significance of the 500th Year of Catholicism in the Philippines" (14-15 November 2019)
- "Not to Serve but to Serve" (Mt 20,28): Rethinking Leadership and Ministry in the Church beyond 500 Years of Catholicism in the Philippines" (12-13 November 2020)

In 2019, DaKaTeo organized with INSeCT a conference, "Kairos: Common Challenges in Different Perspectives" (12-13 November 2019), in which invited Asian and European theologians gave presentations on common issues that confront us. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our conference in 2020 was indefinitely postponed. With the *new normal*, we held an online colloquium, "Being Church during a Pandemic," on 13 January 2021 which focused on the question of what it means to be church in today's Philippine context.

Our members have also published on a wide range of theological and pastoral issues. An overview of them can be found [here](#).

### **2. How is theology in your region helping the Church to be a servant Church, at the service of the world, particularly of the most vulnerable?**

In addition to the DaKaTeo statements above, the talks, presentations and writings of our members question existing inequalities and injustices and offer theological reflections and pastoral responses to them. Significantly, many of our members utilize the social media, particularly Facebook, in raising important questions about our social condition, in consciousness raising and in offering alternatives to the *status quo*. Many of our members actually live their theology by offering a prophetic stance in the face of social injustice and in serving the vulnerable ones of Philippine society.

### **3. What are the specific challenges facing theology in your area?**

I'd like to focus on two challenges that theology faces in the Philippines:

1. A particular challenge that faces theology in the Philippines is in terms of making theology part of public discourse and using it to contribute to the task of nation-building, particularly with respect to social justice issues. The challenge necessitates the crafting of theologies that question accepted mindsets, practices and attitudes that are contrary to Kingdom values in order that we, theologians, may contribute to the formation of a truly just and inclusive society. We unfortunately live in a populist era in which critical thinking and discourse seem to be frowned upon and in which the personal and ideological agenda of those in power have taken precedence over the common good. A service that good and relevant theology can make in this context is to be able to engage the powerful in dialogue and speak truth to power in diverse ways. Theology needs to offer a narrative in which ordinary people will find resonance and empower them in effecting not only personal but also social transformation.

2. Another challenge that the theological enterprise needs to grapple with is the perception of many of the youth, especially those in Catholic schools, that theology is outmoded and very traditional (read: dogmatic in the negative sense), and in many ways, simply perpetuates the status quo of those in power, whether it be the church as an institution and its leaders, and/or politicians. It seems that this perception, whether accurate or not, is partly based in the way theology is taught in many Catholic institutions. In those institutions, theology is simply seen as a matter of memorizing doctrines and teachings, a process that unfortunately fails to show the Christian faith's relevance not only to ecclesial life but also to life in general. The question then is: How can we educate and form teachers of the faith in order that they may impart a theology that is grounded in the Catholic tradition and at the same time, is responsive to contemporary concerns and questions?

*Ruben C. Mendoza, PhD*

## **Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA)**

### **1. What have been the core concerns, theological responses, and topics in your society and region over the past four years?**

For Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA), the topics we focused on the past four years are about food insecurity and displacement in the region, as these are some of the pressing concerns in Asia that deserve attention. There are sub-topics of concern that revolves around food insecurity, such as, food inadequacy and food waste, which points to unequal distribution of wealth in the region as well as the still unaddressed global issue of climate emergency. Connected to food insecurity in Asia is the displacement of peoples, either due to environmental destruction, wars and conflicts, natural or human-made disasters. Displaced persons include refugees, asylum-seekers, economic migrants, and other migrants.

Nonetheless, displacement is beyond geographical, there are also people being displaced and disqualified due to gender, disability, language, disease, or violation of human rights. It also happens in the ecclesial sphere, where women continue to be placed at the side-lines of the Church concerning the direct participation in ecclesial office or decision-making structures, and overwhelmingly negated representation such as pontifical commissions or synods.

In the past four years, EWA organized two conferences (2018 & 2020) to explore the above topics from feminist theological and pastoral perspectives as well as other disciplines. Two anthologies have been published, namely: *Women Still Claiming their Space in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2018) and *Foodscapes: Beyond the Food Environment –A Feminist Theological Take on Food Issues in Asia* (2019). An upcoming book is *Displacement and Disqualifications: Asian Feminist Theological Perspectives* (2021).

There are new and perennial issues that the region has continued to struggle and at the same time, the people try to deal with. The Covid-19 pandemic as well as social unrest have affected people all over the world, including Asia. Some issues have revealed the weak direction and bad governance of certain leaders in the region, who gave in to the pressures of certain powers at the expense of their citizens. In connection with this, theology must address the increasing violation of human rights in the region and the tightening grip of governments on freedom and individual agency. These issues would be examined in future conferences of EWA.

### **2. How is theology in your region helping the Church to be a servant Church, at the service of the world, particularly of the most vulnerable?**

Asian theologies, including liberation theology and feminist theology, and the Church's social thought can help the Church to be a servant Church that emphasizes justice and mercy at the same time, resulting in solidarity with the poor and the vulnerable. However, praxis of the Church is not always consistent with its teachings and theologies.

The majority of EWA members are affiliated in the academe and some belong to religious congregations. Some of our members teach feminist theology and gender studies whereas others do research and publish works on equal dignity and rights between women and men. Their students are the future teachers or pastoral workers who will promote or practice the importance of being a servant Church.

Besides, there are EWA members who are engaged in lay apostolate and grassroots pastoral works apart from teaching and research work. The Myanmar EWA is our pastoral arm that focuses on the pastoral application of Asian feminist theology in the margins and with the most vulnerable in society. They (MEWA) cater to assisting women who are victims of domestic violence. They not only provide legal assistance, but they also empower women and girls by educating them of their legal rights.

Other than the MEWA, in the Philippine context, some parishes have adapted to the digitization of ministries during this pandemic. This means that some groups (religious and

lay) try to maximize remote ministries via social media platforms, to reach as many people as possible. However, in the process, such ministry digitization has also marginalized the people who have limited or no access to the internet or cyber.

In Hong Kong, there is also a weekly online mass, with sign language on-screen since the outbreak so that people with different abilities can attend Sunday worship. Seminars and spiritual formation were held online instead of face-to-face. Some parishes and Church organizations, such as Labour Affair Commission and Justice and Peace Commission which carry out their mission based on the Church's social teaching, have distributed hygiene products and food to low-income families or unemployed people. The two commissions also advocate for unemployment compensation for local labour, and labour rights of migrant workers. Some parishioners also donated money, despite the unstable financial situation, or acted as volunteers to extend solidarity to the underprivileged.

Further, though the Church's objective is to reach out and be of service to the poor, there remain some sentiments from the most vulnerable which are unheard or appended to the needs of the poor in general. It is suggested that the Church needs to be clear in identifying the most vulnerable in society because, at present, certain groups, such as women, youth, and especially the persons with disabilities still experience barriers that prevent them to fully participate in the life of the Church; the latter must be open to listen, engage, and collaborate with them if the Church is truly committed to its very mission to be universal and inclusive.

### **3. What are the specific challenges facing theology in your region?**

In many Asian countries, the Catholic population only shares a very small proportion, not more than five percent, some even less than one percent. There are not many Catholic universities or may not even have one in every Asian country, except in the Philippines. Theological training is basically for religious/ordained formation in seminary, though certain seminary colleges and church institutes are open to laity's formation in certain places, such as Hong Kong. Thus, not many laypeople and women are trained theologically. Very often, the programs with ecclesiastical degrees in seminary are structured and no space for feminist theology. In certain countries, such as the Philippines, catholic universities do offer theology courses and are required. However, at times this is only at the level of "catechism", rather than equipping tertiary students to theologise and come up with sound theology.

In South Asia, there are deep ramifications of covid-19 due to the pandemic's impact on regional geopolitics and governance. The pandemic situation was used to continue the oppression of the minorities and strengthening the nation-state project of the majority. Many women suffered because of an unexpected economic crisis. Thus, reconstructing the lives of people especially the poor women remains a huge task.

The pandemic also affects tertiary education. For example, in the Philippines, there have been Catholic programs/colleges that closed down due to the low turn-out of enrollees, while other Catholic universities have lessened required theology courses, hence, what remains are barely below the basics. Besides, at the level of theology instructors/facilitators/professors, there remains the "catechetical" approach done, without much progress on critical thinking made for students. All courses are to maintain the status quo, resulting in a meager if not seen as an unnecessary course to be required. In this sense, theology is becoming irrelevant to many collegiate students. To prevent future negation of theology at the tertiary level, academicians must be more open to critical thinking and challenges in the world. There should be an honest conversation and dialogue not only with cultures but also to listening to the varied contexts of peoples.

Moreover, in the past two years, political crisis and social movement occurred in several places, including Hong Kong and Bangkok in Asia. South Asia, in particular, also experienced militarization, authoritarianism, religious extremism, exclusion of women, and

oppression due to the caste system for a long time. Many people feel traumatized, physically, or emotionally. The Church has also experienced enormous challenges. Some Church leaders tried to accompany the injured and the youth who involved in the social movement. They have spoken words of encouragement and gave a message of hope to people at a time of crisis and difficulties. However, sometimes church leaders were also criticized as lacking the courage to play the prophetic role and speak up on justice. In some cases, the Church herself is the target of persecution, such as the Church in China, North Korea, a certain part of India and Pakistan. When Church leaders or scholars speak up on justice, their personal safety may face risk too. Nevertheless, due to the division on political stance among believers, the Church is full of tension. How to bring reconciliation and unity in the Church and the society but at the same time affirming justice and peace became an urgent but difficult task. Theological reflection should consider this.

Furthermore, since theology has to begin with the struggle of people, the Church needs to identify the connection between faith and action as a basis for theology. The Church in Asia needs to take the experiences of the marginalized and the oppressed, especially women as the starting point for deconstructing the theologies that oppress them for centuries, thus reconstructing them.

Theology must engage with people, specifically to the grassroots. In this case, Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) or small faith communities must be seen as vital support of the local church. The BEC, women, and youth are some of the many ‘voices’ of the local church that remains vital in sustaining the life of the church and its communities as well as an avenue for the participation and cooperation of peoples. Sadly though, there are pastors (priests) who consider BECs to be a threat to their status, rather than seeing the BECs as keeping or sustaining the life of the local church. Theology on the ground, at the very fringes of the society, is the heart of the church and not a threat, yet their full potential has not been maximized.

### **The Indian Theological Association (ITA)**

The Indian Theological Association (ITA) was founded in 1977, and has around 230 members. Ever since its inception, the ITA has engaged in critical theologizing on many questions related to the traditional knowledge of God and the interrogations posed to it by contextual realities. Taking stock of India's economic disparity, religious pluralism, the persistent caste discrimination and patriarchal subjugation of women, the ITA has made serious attempts to address concerns afflicting the Indian Church and society at its regular annual meet cum conferences and taken clear theological positions in response to these situations. These theological encounters have opened up avenues for developing an indigenous theology which would foster the process of ecclesiogenesis or the birth of the Local Church in the Indian context.

The ITA celebrated its Ruby Jubilee in 2017. The theme chosen for this memorable event was: Forty Years of the Indian Theological Association: Milestones and Signposts. It was acknowledged that over the past 40 years, the ITA has striven to live its prophetic call to respond to the signs of the times, indicative of the presence of the Reign of God's presence in new terrains and climes. In retrospect, the ITA has left a mark not only on the theological landscape of the Church in India, but also on the Universal Church, through its commitment and dedication to theologizing in the Indian context and its consistent quest for a more relevant theological method. This jubilee celebration provided the ITA an occasion for introspection on its trajectory thus far and a critical examination of its relevance to the Church in India and society at large.

The ITA has brought the issues of the periphery to the centre and stirred up a sense of urgency and restlessness in confronting and addressing the realities of the people at the margins. It has encouraged radical thinking by creating an awareness of the emerging challenges in society and in the Church and motivated its members with respect to personal and collective commitment for the transformation of oppressive elements.

In the light of recent scholarship, and taking into consideration the plurality that makes up the socio-cultural fabric of Indian society, ITA theologians propose Interculturation as an appropriate category to articulate the Gospel-culture encounter in the Indian context. They are strongly in favour of developing a theological approach that looks at multiplicity, duly nuanced, not as a threat but as a blessing, with respect to the growth of gospel values. In the opinion of some of these scholars, such a theology that fosters the mutual enrichment of Christian faith and other cultures ought to become a counter-cultural project by offsetting the negative values embedded in Indian culture like casteism, the manifold expressions of Indian patriarchy, bonded labour and other forms of injustice inflicted on the poor and other vulnerable sections of Indian society. The ITA believes that it is only when one engages in this process of Interculturation that takes seriously the commitment to integral liberation, does the celebration of the Liturgy unfold fully all its prophetic depth.

Contextual mode of theologizing being a characteristic feature of the ITA, it has stressed on listening more intensely to the cries of subaltern, exploited and marginalised groups, and learning from their religio-cultural resources, in order to strengthen its transformative impact at the grassroots. The ITA asserts that Indian sources and Indian ways of theologizing, need to be used, and a plurality of theologies that reflect the varied contexts of those who are oppressed and long for liberation, must be encouraged. ITA's theologizing being praxis oriented, it has promoted liberative theologies like Dalit Theology, Tribal Theology, Feminist Theology and Eco-Theology must be promoted. It has insisted that spaces must be created within ITA for more voices of Dalit and Adivasi/Tribal theologians to be heard.

The ITA has made a specific contribution in articulating Christology from an Indian perspective. It has shown that no dogma, no theological articulation rooted in a particular



worldview can make an exclusive claim to have disclosed exhaustively the mystery of God revealed in Jesus Christ. It has furthermore pointed out that the plurality of Christologies in the NT itself gives us an indication of the possibility and necessity of articulating the Christic experience from different worldviews and communicating them in a language meaningful to those to whom they are addressed. The poor and the plurality of religions are the hermeneutical keys to open the revelation of the mystery of God in the Indian setting.

Over the last three years, the ITA theologizing has focused on major concerns affecting the Indian society, the politicization of religion being a key issue in this regard. In 2018, the ITA deliberated on the theme “Challenges of Religious Nationalism in India Today,” and searched for an adequate theological response to the implied fissiparous potentials of this phenomenon threatening the harmony and integrity of India.

Making an in-depth analysis of the problem of religious nationalism taking into account its religious, cultural, political and economic implications and intricacies, the ITA sensed that the ethnocentric ideology of Hindutva being advocated and enforced through covert and overt politics of polarizations, social divisions, and cultural and religious chauvinism, would radically frustrate India’s fundamental credentials and legacies of religious tolerance, inclusive pluralism. As concerned citizens as well as true followers of Jesus, the ITA members felt the resolve to respond to this ominous scenario in utmost earnestness resonating with wisdom and vision of the Indian Constitution which upheld and fostered India as a federated fellowship of people of multiple cultures, religions, and ethnic groups, living in peace and harmony since the Independence of our country.

In order to respond effectively to the political climate fostered by religious nationalism in India, it resolved to address religious extremism of various kinds and of different groups. The ITA invited the Indian Church to engage constructively in dealing with religious nepotism within and without and reminded the Church that it has the obligation to wipe out the fear from the hearts of our brothers and sisters of other religions through the promotion of a ‘relational identity’. Joining hands with persons of goodwill in civil society and within the broader framework of Hindus, the ITA reminded the Church that it needs to address the Hindutva ideology, not in a confrontational mode, but in a spirit of dialogue.

In continuation with the theological deliberations on religious nationalism and its implications, the 2019 annual meet cum conference of ITA focused on the theme “Whither India? Theological Concerns”. This was taken up against the backdrop of the aggressive religious nationalism intertwined with cultural homogenization that continue to affect every citizen of the country, especially, the minorities and can undermine the pluralistic nature of this nation. In this situation, the minority groups are in a disadvantaged position despite all constitutional protection. This affects more the religious minority groups like Muslims and Christians who carry also the historical baggage like colonial domination and the trauma of partition. They are often treated as ‘alien’ and hence lesser citizens who are called upon to prove their national loyalty repeatedly. Yet, these groups have been an inalienable part of the Indian people for centuries and generations.

In this context, the ITA affirmed that though Christians, are a minority in a sea of majority of other faiths, they are meant to be the salt and light in the country. It consists in bringing to effect a qualitative difference in the social life by becoming a ‘contrast’ community. Christians will become a contrast community when the values of justice, peace, equality and inclusion are lived in a culture that is marked by violence, corruption, discrimination and exclusion. This calls for a new way of being Church in today’s context which implies nurturing relationships and cultivating common grounds with people of good will. For this, Christians need to come out of the ghetto mindset and be committed to a liberative mission involving people of all faiths and communities. Crossing boundaries and embracing our common humanity, the church needs to join hands with people of different

faiths and take steps to protect the environment and enable sustainable development for all. This entails a radical shift from being ritualistic Christians to Gospel Christians who live the Gospel vision with greater intensity and integrity. This implies joining all people of goodwill to defeat the forces of hate and violence by promoting a politics of pluralism and inclusion that ensures justice, equality, liberty and fraternity for all! Instead of Hindutva which divides, the ITA recommends Bandhutva (relationality) that unites.

Against the backdrop of the many controversies and scandals that have afflicted many local churches across the globe and also the Indian church, the ITA had planned its 2020 annual *Meeting Cum* conference on the theme “The Church in India: Credibility and Witness.” It intended deliberating on the crisis of credibility in relation to the question of handling, money, power and sexuality by acknowledging the ground realities in relation to these issues and proposing theological considerations of becoming a credible church today. However, due to the crisis triggered by the COVID pandemic, this conference did not take place and it is planned to conduct the same virtually in April 2021.

In the context of the persisting nationalistic tendencies based on majority religious politics, the ITA conducted a webinar titled “Fear of the Other: Fratelli Tutti as a Christian Response” on 6 December 2020. It was observed that the fear of the other originates within individuals and social groups when they see others not as their brothers and sisters but as a threat to their various identities, a threat to their power structures, even to their religious and national identities. When the fear of the other deepens prejudices against the other grow and ways and people devise means to subdue, oppress and even eliminate others. In this setting *Fratelli Tutti* was presented as giving the theological foundations for a true communion among humans.

The ITA is conscious of its mission that one of the prime tasks of theologians is to interpret prophetically the evolving trends in the Church and society in the light of the word of God and give orientations to the Church to faithfully carry out her mission in the world. In order to clear the theological confusion that, at times, exists in theological centres with regard to the teaching of contextual theology and classical theology, the ITA asserts that the daily life struggles of the people and the Scriptures are non-negotiable in the process of theologizing. The ITA is convinced that it has a special vocation to hear, to distinguish and to interpret the voices of contemporary world, to discover the presence of the Divine in the concrete life-situations of the peoples and to examine them in the light of the Good News announced by Jesus. In this ministry of acting like a meaning-making agent for the community of believers and the society, the ITA wishes to be a link between the people and the hierarchy and collaborate with the Magisterium in raising a prophetic voice against the evils afflicting the Indian society.

*Dr. Kochurani Abraham | Vice-president, Indian Theological Association*



### **Indian Women Theologians' Forum (IWTF)**

The Indian Women Theologians Forum (IWTF) consists of both academic and grassroots feminist theologians, therefore our theological reflections are mostly contextualised in the format of liberation theology with the goal of liberation and transformation.

#### **2018**

IWTF held its annual Meeting in Bangalore on the theme “Political Economy of India – Theologising Vulnerabilities”. We had a paper presentation by Kochurani Abraham on “Theologising vulnerabilities from the perspective of Gender.” We had a reflection on “Wealth & Poverty from the biblical perspective in the context of today”. Special attention was drawn to the Practice of cancellation of debts every 7<sup>th</sup> year especially of the poor people, letting slaves go free, in the Old Testament. In this context we reflected on the most vulnerable people in our country – known as “manual scavengers” who are known as outcasts. Traditionally they have been doing the dirtiest jobs for communities down the ages, even in independent India where people are all equal and supposed to be free. We met with a group of these people from Bangalore led by a man from their own community who had qualified as an Engineer but did not work as one, as he felt it his duty to uplift his community first.

We had a session on “Sexual Abuse in the Church in India”, highlighting power relationships in the Church; silencing; victimizing; & clericalism. At the end of our meeting we had a public meeting where we invited people from the local Church community to join us after which we issued a press statement. (See below)

#### **Press release from the Indian Women Theologians Forum, 20 November 2018**

As a collective voice seeking justice and expressing deep concerns over the manner in which sexual abuse is handled within the Church in India, a letter endorsed by 800 Catholics from around the world has been sent to Pope Francis by the Indian Women Theologians' Forum, with copies to ecclesiastical leaders in India. Internationally, endorsements have come from 24 countries, the highest came from USA and Australia followed by Brazil. There were signatories from 15 states of India, including nearly 500 from Kerala (the state to which the complainant and the accused of the Jalandhar case belong). The signatories included 71 priests from India, over 50 women religious and 16 advocates. In keeping with the need to be transparent in our efforts this letter is also mailed to 250 representatives of the Catholic Church, including all the cardinals and bishops within India.

Other than highlighting the context and facts regarding the case of sexual abuse involving the bishop of Jalandhar, this letter comments on the lack of response and the inappropriate handling of this case by the Church authorities in India. As remedial measures, the letter requests the setting up of an impartial enquiry committee with at least 50 percent women to determine the facts of the allegations; taking adequate steps to support a fair trial in keeping with the Church position of ‘zero tolerance’ of sexual abuse; and the immediate implementation of the CBCI Guidelines, 2017 of the Church in India for addressing sexual abuse, in keeping with the Civil laws applicable to grievance redressal mechanisms of the country.

#### **2019**

The theme of our Annual Meeting was “Towards a Gender Just Church”. The Statement issued at the meeting is below:

*We, the members of Indian Women Theologians Forum, gathered for our annual meeting from 28<sup>th</sup> April to 1<sup>st</sup> May 2019 at Good Shepherd Convent Bengaluru, and deliberated on the theme, “Towards a Gender Just Church”.*

In India, and across the globe, we see more and more women reclaiming their voice and agency in the secular sphere. Their subjugation, marginalization and exploitation are increasingly being exposed, countered and challenged. Inclusion and diversity are now an essential part of any discourse on gender. The emergence of new movements like the #MeToo campaign, the moves for temple entry, the triple talaq debate and the many initiatives by ecumenical churches that are creating platforms for a collective assertion of the rights of women and sexual minorities are indicative of the decisive steps taken by women on the path towards greater freedom and affirmation of their personhood.

The notion of gender justice still remains an ambivalent concept or, more accurately, a mismatch within the framework of the institutional Church. While the Christian doctrine affirms equality between women and men on the biblical foundation of the creation of humans 'in God's image' (Gen.1: 26-28), women's experience of discrimination, silencing and exclusion within the ecclesiastical sphere point to the contrary. We note with pain the indifference and silence on the part of Church leadership to victims/survivors of sexual abuse such as children and women, including religious women down the ages, even when it is brought to surface in the recent times. We are deeply disturbed by the double standards by which the survivors and their supporters are further victimized while the alleged offenders are supported and defended in various ways.

This context impelled us to explore critically the various manifestations of ecclesiastical patriarchy. We reflected on religious life and questioned whether it is lived as a prophetic call or remains merely an establishment preoccupied with survival and security concerns. The servitude that is the lot of a great majority of women betrays male privilege that is normalized in families and in the Church. This situation makes us interrogate whether the '*Gender Policy of the Catholic Church in India*' acclaimed as the first of its kind, has remained a failed promise even after 10 years of its existence.

Engaging in critical conversations on the predicament of women in the Church and in society, we are challenged by Spirit/ Sophia to address the situation with a sense of urgency.

Gathering the liberative voices of biblical women and examining its significance for today's Church, we resolve to create alternative spaces to exercise our theological and spiritual leadership as ecclesia.

Speaking truth to power like the Syrophoenician woman of the Gospels, we reclaim our position, voice and rights as disciples of Jesus in the Church.

Stepping beyond the boundaries of gendered identity constructions that have devalued us over the ages, we wish to retrieve our full humanity as persons created, graced and commissioned by the empowering God to build a new Church and social order which is egalitarian and inclusive.

We resolve to continue our struggle to build a GENDER JUST CHURCH by exercising our collective agency and networking with individuals and communities committed to realizing the vision of the Reign of God in this world.

## **2020**

An annual meeting was planned in Bangalore in April 2020 on the theme: "Prophetic Voices of Women", but it had to be cancelled due to the pandemic. However, IWTF got creative during the pandemic and we held several online programmes.

Our first was a liturgy conducted on line to honour Mary Magdalene the Apostle of Apostles. We had over 100 participants. We also conducted an international liturgy in collaboration with the Catholic Women's Council, which was planned and executed by IWTF. This liturgy had about 170 international participants.

Our member Kochurani Abraham published her doctoral thesis "Persisting Patriarchies – Intersections, Negotiations, Subversions"; Palgrave Macmillan 2020.

On the occasion of India's Independence Day that coincides with the Assumption of Mary on 15<sup>th</sup> August, we conducted an online liturgy "Magnificat of Mary", Indian Freedom Celebration' A counter cultural prayer.

In November, we organized a webinar on "Trafficking" in collaboration with Religious women involved in this issue.

We issued statements on various issues that arose during the lockdown. 1. Statement condemning the rapes of Dalit women in the country. 2. Statement on the arrest and incarceration of 84 year old Jesuit working with tribal people to protect their land.

We also had a prayer and reflection service on the arrest of Fr. Stan Swamy in October.

In September we organized an awareness webinar on the issue of Sexual Abuse in the Church. This was attended by 150 persons and much appreciated.

During advent we had an Advent prayer and reflection on the theme "Birthing Christ the Liberator Today". We met on Sunday's and Wednesday to share our reflections and prayer.

On December 27<sup>th</sup> IWTF organized an international Christmas Liturgy in collaboration with Catholic Women's Council attended by 100 persons.

## Europe

### European Society for Catholic Theology (ESCT)

#### **1. The "Kairos"-Project in Europe (in Cooperation with ESWTR)**

The cooperation of the *European Society for Catholic Theology (ET)* and the *European Society for Women in Theological Research (ESWTR)* has been actualized in four subprojects in the years 2018 to 2020.

We hereby present the activity report and the accounts for these activities. Still open is the publication of subprojects 3 and 4, i.e. the conferences in Manila (November 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>, 2019) and Vienna (February 28<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>, 2020), which will be published in 2021 in the series "Religion and Transformation" (V&R unipress Göttingen, ed. by Kurt Appel et al.). The publication of subprojects 1 and 2 is already available.

The 4 conferences – three of them (subprojects 1, 3, 4) symposia with workshop character, one larger conference (subproject 2) – all pursued the goal to deal with current theological questions on the topic "Serving the Church - Serving the World" in international cooperation and thus to achieve the following goals:

- *To network the locally different challenge scenarios and the respective theological reactions globally in order to broaden the horizon of theological research.*

This goal was achieved to the highest degree: The European conferences, each on highly actual issues at the intersection of theology, church and society, were also attended by theologians from non-European countries; sub-project 3 was designed as a European-Asian dialogue and united participants from different European and Asian regions.

- *To improve communication between theological regions and particular traditions, so that through contextual and intercultural dialogue common goals and concerns can be better addressed.*

This goal was achieved through the workshop character of the symposia and their interdisciplinary orientation. This is also reflected in the publications.

To direct the gaze of theological research and teaching as well as of church leadership to the current challenges of the time in order to give the local churches the necessary orientation in their commitment to the people and to provide them with practical theological support.

The involvement of church leadership was planned for the INSeCT General Assembly in Rome. Since this can only take place online due to the Covid-19-crisis, the involvement of church leadership is possible only indirectly – via the local levels and the publications.

- *To promote dialogue between theology and local church leadership, especially in regions where there is mistrust between bishops and theological faculties and*
- *To identify and communicate priorities and key issues theologically addressed by the various regions and bring them to the attention of the relevant Roman dicasteries in 2020.*

These two goals have to be left to the initiative of the local theological societies since the Covid-19-restrictions do not allow for the big conference that was actually planned for this year. However, a major meeting in Rome involving the relevant dicasteries is still planned for the future.

- *To establish of a forum for dialogue between the global theological community and the universal church leadership in Rome.*

In the preparation of the General Assembly in Rome, some initiatives could already be taken here, which, however, still need further concretization.

### The Subprojects in Detail

#### **Subproject 1: Workshop "Liberative Contextual Theologies" an der KU Leuven (25.-28.10.2018)**

*Identitary Temptations: Identity Negotiations between Emancipation and Hegemony*

Conference Management:

Prof. Dr. Judith Gruber, KU Leuven; Prof. Dr. Michelle Becka, Uni Würzburg;  
Prof. Dr. Stefan Silber, KH Nordrhein-Westfalen; Prof. Dr. Christian Tauchner,  
PTH St. Augustin; Dr. Sebastian Pittl, IWM Frankfurt/Main

This conference, the fifth of the platform "Liberating Contextual Theologies", addressed the challenge of the "identitarian temptation," which refers to the trend toward homogenous and unambiguous identities, the emphasis on collective (cultural, national, and religious) belonging over individual constructions of meaning, the patriarchal model of society, and a binary logic of inside-or-outside, us-or-them.

The conference gathered 40 scholars from Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia and the USA.

The papers are published in a volume of the book series "Concordia. Monographien": *Judith Gruber/Sebastian Pittl/Stefan Silber/Christian Tauchner (Hg.): Identitäre Versuchungen. Identitätsverhandlungen zwischen Emanzipation und Herrschaft. [Identitary Temptations. Identity Negotiations between Emancipation and Hegemony] (CRM 73), Aachen: Verlagsguppe Mainz 2019*

#### **Subproject 2: Conference of the German Section of ESCT: Freiburg (13.-15.12.2018)**

*Between Progress and Regress: The Catholic Church in Times of "Post-Truth"*

Conference Management:

Prof. Dr. Karlheinz Ruhstorfer, Präsident von ET Deutschland  
Dr. Karsten Kreuzer, Direktor der Katholischen Akademie Freiburg

The meeting of the German ET Section was dedicated to the opposing tendencies that can be perceived today in Europe and beyond: On the one hand, the dynamics of accelerated change is rapidly increasing, on the other hand, the need for timeless identity and continuous tradition is growing. Thus, even the concept of truth is being economized, pluralized and perspectivized in such a way that the expressions "post-truth" and "post-factual" have become ciphers for our time. At the same time, there is a radicalized search for support and home, identity and ideal, demarcation and eternal truths.

The tensions between progression and regression alluded to here can also be found in the Catholic Church. The reform process triggered by Pope Francis has set counterforces in motion and made the existing latent divisions more apparent.

To this end, the conference focused on four distinct but interrelated sets of issues: Post-facticity and validity; women, roles, ministries; sexuality, power, history; synodality, participation, responsivity.

These themes were addressed in three keynotes (Marie-Jo Thiel (Strasbourg), Fred Lawrence (Boston), Teresa Forcades i Vila (Barcelona)) and 18 panel contributions.

The conference volume has been published by Herder:

*Ruhstorfer, Karlheinz (Hg.): Zwischen Progression und Regression. Streit um den Weg der katholischen Kirche, Freiburg/Br.: Herder 2019*





**Subproject 3: Asian-European Dialogue Forum: Manila (12.-13.11.2019)**

*Our Kairos – Common Challenges in Different Perspectives*

Conference Management:

Univ-Ass. Dr. Gertraud Ladner, Vertreterin von ESWTR bei INSeCT

Prof. Ruben Mendoza, Präsident von DaKaTeo (Philippines)

Prof. Dr. Gunter Prüller-Jagenteufel, Vertreter der ET bei INSeCT

The INSeCT research topic was actualized in an intercultural conversation by 6 speakers each from Europe and Asia. In the exchange between European and Asian theologies, the different contexts and theological approaches were brought into conversation with each other and overarching approaches to solutions were considered. Participants came from different Asian and European countries and cultures.

The conference took place in close temporal proximity to the annual conference of *Catholic Theological Society of the Philippines (DaKaTeo)* at the Jesuit University Ateneo de Manila, so that the participation of Philippine theologians was possible.

**Subproject 4: Symposium of ESCT and ESWTR at the University of Vienna (28.-29.2.2020)**

*Between Fundamentalism and Secularism: The Contribution of a Multi-Cultural and Multi-Religious Europe for Today's Church and World*

Conference Management:

Univ.Ass. Dr. Gertraud Ladner, Vorsitzende der ESWTR

Prof. Dr. Gunter Prüller-Jagenteufel, Vertreter der ET bei INSeCT

The symposium dealt with the tension between religion and secular society, which has led to different political solutions in European societies. The rise of political Islam now again confronts European societies with the challenge of strengthening their secular profile on the one hand and standing up for general religious freedom on the other.

The symposium in Vienna brought together speakers from different regions of Europe for an exchange on this controversial issue.

The results of subprojects 3 and 4 will be published in 2021 in a joint volume in the series "Religion and Transformation" (V&R unipress Göttingen).

**2. How is theology in your region helping the Church be a servant Church, at the service of the world, particularly of the most vulnerable?**

The theological work of ESCT concentrates on the current situation and tries to find answers to the challenges of our time. This is especially clear if we take into consideration the topics of the big conferences that are held every 2 years:

2017: Strasbourg: *Philadelphia – The Challenge of Fraternity*

2019: Bratislava: *Hope – Where does our Hope lie?*

2021: Osnabrück: *Creation – Transformation – Theology*

The next International Congress of the European Society for Catholic Theology is going to provide a platform for theological and interdisciplinary reflection on questions of ecology, creation and transformation as well as for a creative advancement of the same. Philosophical, systematic-theological, biblical and cosmological perspectives will come into play as well as ethical and practical questions with regards to socio-political realities.

**3. What are the specific challenges facing theology in your area/region?**

1. Europe is the most secularized continent; so one of the main challenges is for a dialogue between the secular and faith. Europe has developed different ways of dealing with that issue during the last 4 centuries, depending on culture and predominant denomination: A dialogue between reason and faith is ongoing especially in central Europe (cf. Pope Benedict) while France has opted for strict "laïcité". In Post-Communist Eastern Europe the difference is more ideological:

catholic and orthodox bishops are in radical opposition to "the" liberal west and team up with right wing or populist regimes (e.g. Poland, Hungary, Russia).

2. Europe right now is focusing on the issue of migration and therefore a society of putting up borders again, fostering xenophobic, anti-islamic and even openly racist ideologies (identitarian movements).

The polarization in society is mirrored by a polarization within the catholic church and churches in general: The gaps are not any more between denominations but rather within each denomination – according to the ideological patterns "left" vs. "right", "liberal" vs. "conservative", "reformist" vs. "traditionalist". But even more now it is a question of outward-oriented ("mission first" – where should we go and how can we serve the Kingdom of God) and inward-oriented ("identity first" – who are we and how can we preserve our catholic Church).

3. Gap between "western", "southern" and "eastern" theologies: the western, shaped by the philosophies of enlightenment, are more reason-oriented and "liberal"; southern and eastern regions have not so much been influenced by this philosophy and therefore sometimes present a kind of pre-enlightenment faith. In the former Communist east this is even more so since the church during that time did not have any chance to pick up contemporary theology or even the ideas of Vatican II. The church in strict opposition to the communist regimes led to a quite strict rule of "we" against "the others" – Communism before, "Liberalism" now.

#### *The Focus of Theology:*

In Europe the main questions would be the stand of the catholic church vis-à-vis "the world", a world which has become significantly more pluralistic in the fields of culture and religions, but also more secularized. While traditionally the church still is serving mainly its own members in parishes, movements etc., the question of outreach and mission in and for the world is arising.

#### *The Facilitation of Theology:*

In Central and Easter Central Europe Theology – even for the formation of priests – is mainly situated in state universities; the influence of bishops is therefore limited to giving – and eventually revoking – the "missio canonica". With the present downsizing of state budgets on universities "encouraging" faculties to look for private funding, theology as well as other humanities is significantly left behind in terms of budget.

Where there are church-run theological schools the theological level is significantly lower than in the full fledged faculties that are situated in universities with the many interdisciplinary opportunities that offers.

So in Europe the call of INSeCT would be to connect those faculties especially to broaden the horizons of the students.

#### *The Impact of Theology:*

While bishops and seminarians unfortunately rather rely on less-than-profound theology, theologians especially in the field of ethics and practical theology contribute a lot in the ongoing discourse of civil society.

So especially in the field of bioethics most of the committees include theologians, mostly those who specialize in ethics and moral theology. (This of course is very different in France where being a theologian all but excludes from any position of political impact.

#### *The Futures for Theology*

The biggest challenge for theology in Europe is arguably the growing secularization of society, in all regions – also East and South. For theology to have an impact has to come up with ideas how to dialogue with a secular society. The temptation is there to concentrate on the remaining group of Catholics, and by that becoming exclusively inward-bound, dealing with questions the larger society does not even know exist (e.g. contraception).

This development leads also to a tendency of churches towards the political right, while the more diakonia-oriented sectors of the church are considered only partly catholic. I consider a more intimate integration of kerygma, diakonia and leiturgia, or in other words, the political and the spiritual, to be one of the main tasks for European theology in the future.

*The Overall Challenge for Catholic Theology in Europe (as identified by the ESCT Committee 2018):*

Europe's specific contribution to the church and the world is the long history of dialogue between faith and reason, theology and philosophy/sciences which also lead to the development of a society that is secular and religious at the same time. In times of growing dichotomy between believers and non-believers, of growing fundamentalist and spiritualist movements also in the catholic church and at the same time growing laicism in the political sphere, we call for theological contributions to bridge that gap and lead to a constrictive partnership of faith and reason in the future.

*Gunter Prüller-Jagenteufel (Vienna)*



## **European Society of Women in Theological Research (ESWTR)**

### **1. What have been the core concerns, theological responses and topics in your society and region over these past four years?**

The ESWTR meets every two years for international conferences; the last congresses were held in Vienna/Austria in 2017 and in Leuven/Belgium in 2019.

The topic of the Viennese conference was “Translation - Transgression - Transformation, ESWTR explores borderline situations on biblical, ethical and interreligious terrain (23rd to 26th of August 2017). The conference discussed the expansions and dissolutions of borders associated with the transformation processes in a religiously plural Europe. With its deliberately theological perspective, it aimed to contribute to the public debate on migration in Europe.

Especially since the Crete conference in 2015 ESWTR as scholarly association stresses the dialogue between religions and denominations as an immediate imperative and a task for theology and religious studies and as an impulse for change and transformation. On different levels – one of them the conferences – ESWTR strives to advance these causes.

The 2019 conference “(De)Constructing Regimes of In/visibility“, took place from 12th to 15th of September 2019. It’s main questions were: Which interests are behind the mechanisms of power and suppression? How does this relate to gender roles and privileges? How does hypervisibility relate to the invisibility of power; how is visibility a way to conceal other aspects? How do intersecting constructions of gender, race and religion form regimes of in/visibility in contemporary Europe? In which ways function religious communities (Muslim, Christian, ...) and traditions as regimes of in/visibility as well as processes of sexualization, gendering and ‘religionization’ that give shape to social regimes of in/visibility? How is daily racism and the ways that religious symbols are used resources to produce social in/visibility? How has Christian theology constructed race and gender in order to make some people/groups visible or not?

Our next conference was planned for August 2021; due to the pandemic it is postponed and will take place in Oslo/Norway from 25-28 August 2022. The theme of the conference will be: *Resisting "Womenhood" - Feminist Theologies Confronting European Nationalisms, Gender Hierarchies and Climate Denial*. With this topic the conference continues the theological and socio-political debate on gender (and so called “gender ideology”), which continues to be a widespread topic of conflict throughout European countries including other urgent issues of our living together on this planet.

Regional ESWTR conferences also take place biannually between the international conferences in Germany and in Central and Eastern European countries.

In a special way, ESWTR Germany took on the task to strengthen the interreligious dialogue among women theologians and to structurally anchor the interreligious cooperation in the association. This is also reflected by the conferences that have taken place in recent years and by the planned conference.

2016, from November 4th to 6th, in Giessen/Germany the conference “Scripture in Dispute - Jewish, Christian and Muslim Perspectives” took place.

2018 in Schwerte/Germany (2nd to 4th of November) the conference “Beyond the borders. Sexism, racism, speciesism” came together to overcome dualistic patterns of thinking.

Again due to the pandemic the next German conference had to be postponed from 2020 to October 29th to 31st 2021, venue is Berlin/Germany. The topic will be “Divers Controversial. Interreligious conference on feminism, gender and queer”:

ESWTR conferences in the Eastern and Central European Countries took place 2018 in Lviv/Ukraine (August 28th to 31st): “Empowering Women in Conflict: Ecumenical Engagement for Peace and Justice” at the Ukrainian University.

The next conference “Women’s Voices and Actions: Inter-religious Dialogue, Migrations and Ecological Justice” planned to be held in Ljubljana/Slovenia in autumn 2020 has been postponed to March 2021, but finally had to be cancelled; lectures will be published.

**2. How is theology in your region helping the Church to be a servant Church, at the service of the world, particularly of the most vulnerable?**

The conference topics as well as lectures and initiatives of individual members address urgent questions and tasks of our societies, especially the topics interreligious dialogue, migration, peacekeeping, environmental and gender issues in religions and societies.

**3. What are the specific challenges facing theology in your area/region?**

There are enormous tensions between differently oriented groups within the churches, religions and societies. The ability of all to dialogue and the will to overcome barriers must be strengthened. In addition, we are facing economic and social problems as a result of the Covid pandemic, all of which are also strongly interwoven with issues of gender justice.

*Gertraud Ladner (Innsbruck)*

### **Forum of Female Catholic Theologians (AGENDA)**

#### **1. What have been the core concerns, theological responses and topics in your society and region over these past four years?**

As the new steering committee of AGENDA which is a network of over 300 roman-catholic theologians in German-speaking countries we have three main goals for our term:

- a) Increase the proportion of women in theology and church to 50% (German Bishop Conference with target of 30%).
- b) Critically reflect on theological self-image  
Theological faculties are asked for missionary qualification, warning about instrumentalization, if church wants to remain socially relevant, it needs effective and discursive theology.
- c) Lobbying for Catholic women theologians  
Different theological disciplines combine and change theology (gender mainstreaming means justice and not only advancement of women), advocacy for visibility of women theologians in their positions in church and society

We organize conferences, places for networking, strategical meetings. We are in intensive contact with Theologanda in Argentina.

#### **2. How is theology in your region helping the Church to be a servant Church, at the service of the world, particularly of the most vulnerable?**

Almost all members are working within the church, in religious education, in responsible jobs in political or societal settings, as professors at the University, some are studying, many are working on her PhD or her 'Habilitation'. We all envision a gender equal church which also means a church without excluding people. We have a high number of women being active in women's church networks and being engaged for a vision of a new church. We are all fighting for a church who take the responsibility for the sexual abuse and really changes.

#### **3. What are the specific challenges facing theology in your area/region?**

In Germany, Austria and Switzerland we are realizing that women start leaving the church in quite high numbers. Many women are too tired, wounded and fed up with the patriarchal structures. However, many still take part, e.g. in the so called "synodaler Weg" and try to find new ways for more equality.

*Gunda Werner (Graz)*

## *Latin America*

### **Teologanda**

#### **Short Report on the work of Teologanda in the last three years (2018-2020)**

In recent years, Teologanda's life has been enriched by the incorporation of new members and the obtaining of academic degrees from some of them. Every year the Compact and Intensive Seminars were held with different topics in the area of dogmatics, bible, spirituality and ethics. Some of the topics were on feminist theologies, gender, sexuality, anthropology, spiritual life, body etc. All of these seminars were open to the community. They were also made

Specific conferences and workshops on different research topics. In addition, Teologanda conducted internal writing workshops to help and train student members and study groups on feminist theology and spirituality.

Between 2014 and 2017, a second cycle of research was started in which the popular spirituality of various human experiences lived in large cities was studied. The research, novel due to the incorporation of the ethnographic method that allows for an even more dialogue with the socio-cultural reality, culminated with the publication of the following volume: Azcuy, V. (2018), *Teología Urbana, Practicas de Espiritualidad Popular*, ed. Agape.

#### **How COVID-19 has affected theological and ecclesial life**

Our country, Argentina, implemented a strict quarantine throughout the territory as of March 2020. However, at our institution, Teologanda, an attempt was made to meet the objectives set for 2020. For this, institutional life needed to be adapted to virtual work.

Our main products in this year 2020 were the following:

- At the beginning of the year we managed to carry out our Compact Seminar "Feminist Theologies. Rethinking corporality and sexuality from the historical experiences of women" and our Intensive Seminar in which we work on the problems of aging and gender.
- Within the framework of the agreement with the Catholic University of Córdoba, an online course was organized and carried out: "Conversations on Feminist Theologies: a pending matter" in which people from other Latin American countries participated.
- Furthermore, as a result of the same agreement, the research team published the book "Travesías de Teólogas Feministas Pioneras", under the coordination of Virginia Azcuy, Eloisa Ortiz de Elguea and Nancy Raimondo (Editorial Universidad Católica de Córdoba).
- Given the new possibilities of communication via the web, we were able to initiate a path of interaction with other institutions similar to ours that we hope to continue developing.

Teologanda continued to be linked to ecclesial life adapted to new possibilities through virtual platforms. The formal and informal meetings continued, and spaces for listening and contention were created, as well as collections to help members in need, all initiatives that further forged the cohesion of our group in tune with the Argentine ecclesial community.

#### **Informe sobre la vida de Teologanda en los últimos tres años (2018-2020)**

En los últimos años la vida de Teologanda se fue enriqueciendo producto de la incorporación de nuevos miembros y la obtención de grados académicos de parte de algunos de ellos. Todos los años se realizaron los Seminarios Compactos e Intensivos con diferentes temas en el área de dogmática, biblia, espiritualidad y ética. Algunos de los temas fueron sobre teologías feministas, género, sexualidad, antropología, vida espiritual, cuerpo etc. Todos estos seminarios fueron abiertos a la comunidad. También se realizaron.

Conferencias y Talleres específicos sobre diferentes temas de investigación. Además Teologanda realizó talleres internos de escritura para ayudar y formar a los miembros estudiantes y grupos de estudio sobre teología feminista y espiritualidad.

Entre el año 2014 y 2017 se inició un segundo ciclo de investigación en el que se estudió la espiritualidad popular de diversas experiencias humanas vividas en las grandes ciudades. La investigación, novedosa por la incorporación del método etnográfico que permite dialogar aún más con la realidad socio-cultural, culminó con la publicación del siguiente volumen: Azcuy, V. (2018), *Teología Urbana, Prácticas de Espiritualidad Popular*, ed. Ágape.

### **Modo en el cual COVID-19 ha afectado la vida teológica y eclesial**

Nuestro país, Argentina, implementó una cuarentena estricta en todo el territorio a partir de marzo 2020. No obstante, en nuestra institución, Teologanda, se intentó cumplimentar con los objetivos programados para el año 2020. Para ello la vida institucional se vio necesitada de adecuarse al trabajo virtual.

Nuestros principales productos en este año 2020 fueron los siguientes:

- A principios del año alcanzamos a realizar de manera presencial nuestro Seminario Compacto “Teologías feministas. Re-pensando la corporalidad y la sexualidad desde las experiencias históricas de las mujeres” y nuestro Seminario Intensivo en el que trabajamos la problemática de envejecimiento y género.
- En el marco del convenio con la Universidad Católica de Córdoba se organizó y realizó un curso on line: “Conversaciones sobre Teologías Feministas: una materia pendiente” en el que participaron personas de otros países de Latinoamérica.
- Además, fruto del mismo convenio, el equipo de investigación publicó el libro “Travesías de Teólogas Feministas Pioneras”, bajo la coordinación de Virginia Azcuy, Eloisa Ortiz de Elguea y Nancy Raimondo (Editorial Universidad Católica de Córdoba).
- Dada las nuevas posibilidades de comunicación via web, pudimos iniciar un camino de interacción con otras instituciones semejante a las nuestras que esperamos poder seguir desarrollando.

Teologanda siguió vinculada a la vida eclesial adaptada a las nuevas posibilidades a través de plataformas virtuales. Se continuaron con las reuniones formales e informales, y se crearon espacios de escucha y contención, colectas de ayuda a los miembros necesitados, iniciativas todas que forjaron aún más la cohesión de nuestro grupo en sintonía con.

## **Sociedad Chilena di Teología**

### **1. What have been the core concerns, theological responses and topics in your society and region over these past four years?**

The Chilean Society of Theology in recent years has been reflecting and dialoguing on how the national and international reality affects theological work. They take a critical look at the cultural and faith crisis that has affected our Chilean people in particular for some years now, and which is reflected in the conflicts of abuse in our ecclesial communities. Responding to this challenge, in the last three years they have worked on the following topics:

- **2018:** The spirit in Latin America. Inquiring the place of the Spirit in our theological practices.
- **2019:** Vulnerability, Recognition and Reparation: Road to a Theological Ethics.
- **2020:** The current context of crisis: environmental, social, institutional, ecclesial and the health emergency.

As a result of these days of reflection and dialogue, in 2020 they have prepared a compendium in which they collect the main ideas of the understanding of the current situation of the theological task in the current situation, second these topics:

- (1) Social Crises
- (2) Church Crises
- (3) Theology and spirituality
- (4) Theology in dialogue
- (5) Ecological problem
- (6) Go from diagnosis to action

### **2. How is theology in your region helping the Church to be a servant Church, at the service of the world, particularly of the most vulnerable?**

The Chilean Society of Theology has proposed to continue walking during this year 2021:

*“The challenge of dialogue has been raised within our institutions, making them a space for discernment that helps transformation. It is proposed to share the experiences that we are living in our academic units. We see the importance of listening to the voice of young people (students in our centers).*

*On the other hand, at this time of profound changes, it is suggested that each center work on certain reflection questions that help us to attend to reality: how do we theologically read this reality? What does it tell us? What questions does it propose us in the way of doing theology?”*

The Chilean Society sees the need to reformulate certain practices in their way of doing theology: a theological reflection with a strong ethical imprint, which is built from the critical discernment of reality. They also realize the need to connect the reflection with life, so that the theological exercise does not end in a rationalization of the problems or in a partial rationality, that is, in a speculative work disconnected from reality.

For them, when dialoguing, we must ask ourselves where we want to focus: in which areas of theology? In the training tasks we have? In teaching methods? However, rather than conquering outwards, might it not be that we have to look inside ourselves first? It would be interesting to consider and reconsider the methods of theological reflection that we use. How are the concepts built?

## **Sociedade de Teologia e Ciências da Religião (SOTER)**

### **1. What have been the core concerns, theological responses and topics in your society and region over these past four years?**

Over the past four years, SOTER at its annual congresses has dealt with the following themes:

- (1) 2017 Religions and Reformation: 500 years later
- (2) 2018 Religion, ethics and politics.
- (3) 2019 Decoloniality and Emancipatory Practices: New Perspectives for the Sciences of Religion and Theology
- (4) 2020 Congress canceled due to COVID 19

SOTER has more than 650 members and its congresses have had a large participation, exceeding the number of 500 people. In the last Congress (2019) in addition to the main Conferences, it had about 361 scientific papers presented, distributed in Working Groups (WGs) and Thematic Forums (FTs). Each congress generates the publication of a book with the main conferences, in addition to the Annals and the summaries notebook with their own ISSN, available on the SOTER website.

The new website, in Portuguese, Spanish and English can be accessed at the following address:

[www.soter.org.br](http://www.soter.org.br)

### **2. How is theology in your region helping the Church to be a servant Church, at the service of the world, particularly of the most vulnerable?**

Since its foundation, SOTER has assumed the Latin American theological perspective of the Option for the Poor, and while remaining an academic society, it maintains collaborative relations with the Catholic Church and the Brazilian Society, encouraging an engaged theology that reflects on the needs of our time and that leads to new emancipatory practices.

In Brazil, collaboration between theologians and the Church is frequent and intense. Many of the members are advisers to the Brazilian Episcopal Conference, and some bishops apply to participate in the SOTER Congresses. It is good to remember that although SOTER is a Civil Society, it was founded at the request and encouragement of prominent members of the Brazilian Episcopal Conference in 1985.

### **3. What are the specific challenges facing theology in your area/region?**

Today we are experiencing the challenge of an radical right political advance in Brazil, with the support of conservative Christian sectors and the challenge of COVID 19, which in addition to threatening and taking the lives of so many people (more than 210 thousand dead in Brazil until January 2021) has increase social inequality, which is aggravated by the ultraliberal and ultraconservative political project that denies science and does not present possible solutions to adequately face the pandemic. Theology has the urgent task of denouncing the incompatibility of this project with Christianity and of encouraging the struggle for life, for equality and freedom.



### **Conclusion (Latin America)**

In conclusion, we can affirm that we have in South America the development of a dynamic Theology, in dialogue with the human and social sciences, attempt to the challenges posed by the current times. The Latin American Theological Societies, in a special way, seeks to stimulate and promote this theological reflection that presents itself as a service to Society and the Church in the search for the establishment of an engaged Christianity relevant to the construction of a more socially and ecologically just world, and in the development of a better future for all, according with the desired of God for all the Creation, expressed in the announce of the Gospel of Jesus.



## North America

### Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS)

#### **1. What have been the core concerns, theological responses and topics in your society and region over these past four years?**

Over the last four years, a core concern is to have an open access space for Latinx theological scholarship to exist in a peer reviewed academic journal. The *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* was relaunched in this manner in 2019. Four journal volumes have been published since. The open access journal may be found at <https://repository.usfca.edu/jhlt/>



*To Set the Captives Free*, our Colloquium in June 2017, was held jointly with the Black Catholic Theological Symposium (BCTS). Together we examined the ways in which racism and the myth of white Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism dominates the criminal justice system, specifically the incarceration and detention systems that were the focus of our meeting. These injustices cannot be examined without an examination of conscience of how these ideologies are reflected in the larger Catholic Church throughout its history in the U.S. In the broader U.S. context dangerous and scandalous forms of racial, ethnic, and cultural biases fueled by ideological movements make cheap use of religion as a vehicle and a platform to harm flesh-and-blood people, usually vulnerable women and men in our society, mainly for political and economic gain.

The topic of the 2018 colloquium was “A Communion of Creation” and focused upon Environmental Concerns. Some of the articles from the 2018 colloquium may be found at the following link for the *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* <https://repository.usfca.edu/jhlt/vol21/iss1/>

The 2019 colloquium, “Together en La Lucha: Seeking Justice Through Religion and Human Rights?” discussed the theological history of human rights as well as specific human rights issues in our time. Some of the articles from the 2019 colloquium may be found at <https://repository.usfca.edu/jhlt/vol21/iss2/>

The 2020 colloquium was postponed and is being reworked as we consider numerous factors including physical distancing and lack of financial support for members to travel. As part of the postponement of the 2021 colloquium, an informal gathering called “Cafecito en la placita” was held in June 2020. This gathering provided space for members to connect with one another. The group *Ecclesia en America* asked to partner with us at this gathering. They launched their official website during these days and in partnership with ACHTUS. The ACHTUS/FTE mentoring partnership program also had a three day mentoring opportunity for 19 Latinx persons interested in PhDs in theology, religion, biblical studies, etc.

As has been mentioned above and following the long-standing partnership with the Black Catholic Theological Symposium, ACHTUS has begun building partnerships with organizations which support the mission of ACHTUS and in which ACHTUS also helps the organizations fulfill their mission. These partnerships include an internship program with the Hispanic Theological Initiative and a mentoring program funded by the Forum for Theological Exploration. The Louisville Institute has also been a regular sponsor of the colloquium reception for three years (2017 - 2019) and had committed to sponsoring the reception in 2020 as well.

As a professional organization, the ACHTUS board has passed a Professional Conduct Policy found at <http://achtus.us/>.

As an organization we continue to explore our meetings format because of the ramifications from the COVID-19 pandemic and general decreasing funds from institutions to support scholars attending conferences. As an organization without an Executive Director,

as other theological organizations in the USA have, finding ways to be very fiscally responsible remains important.

Many of the same concerns from our 2017 report to INSeCT continue and some have been exacerbated by the Executive branch of the USA federal government which has both through public word and policy attacked Latinx communities.

We have not been able to train enough Latinxs at a high enough level to attend to our communities' needs. Partially we all face challenges with the parish structure—the way that it is so dependent on what the leader of the parish decides to do in terms of community empowerment. The training of pastoral agents, growing in popularity and numbers especially after Vatican II, is tempered by the lack of adequate pay in our churches, and the lack of institutional commitment to specifically Latinx initiatives.

Catholic systems of higher education are not friendly to Latinx theology. At the moment we only have 7 tenured/tenure-track faculty in doctoral granting institutions. How can Latinx theologies be taught and expanded throughout the U.S. church if the numbers of Latinx theological faculty remain so low? In addition to the number of retirements facing a number of “first generation” Latinx theologians, we are unsure whether the financial situation of many institutions of higher education will allow the solid number of Latinx doctoral students to be employed and gain promotion and tenure in their field of expertise.

Within the broader religious context of the U.S., perhaps the biggest threat that all faith communities are facing is the rapid expansion of secularization. In 1991, only 3% of people in the United States self-identified as non-religiously affiliated. In 2017, about 25% of the entire population self-identify as such. By the middle of the century, if the trend continues, about half of the U.S. population will not belong to any church and most likely will not consider a parish community relationship relevant at all in their lives. The closing of more than 2,300 Catholic parishes and almost 6,500 Catholic schools in recent years is symptomatic of the fact that Catholicism is losing major ground in the broader U.S. society. This is negatively compounded by the clerical resistance of clericalism to make way to for how the Holy Spirit is inspiring new ways of doing ministry and theological reflection. New forms of this ecclesial illness emerge here and there.

## **2. How is theology in your region helping the Church to be a servant Church, at the service of the world, particularly of the most vulnerable?**

The United States of America is a rich and complex context in which theology and the study of religion happens in many contexts. Catholics in the United States barely constitute 20% of the entire U.S. population. The largest organizations dedicated to the study of religion are interdenominational, ecumenical, and interreligious. In terms of Christianity, most Christians self-identify as Protestant and Evangelical. U.S. Catholics are also a diverse community. Although white Catholics remain a strong and still numeric majority, this an aging population (median age 55) and growingly in decline. About 45% of all Catholics in the country are Latinx/Hispanic, about 5% Asian, and about 4% Black (including African Americans and Black immigrants from various parts of the world). Within each of these groups, there is also a major diversity of perspectives and experiences that lead to a diverse range of theological discourses. If this is of any help in response to this question, the first we must say that theology in the United States, in all its expressions, helps the Church to be a servant Church, at the service of the world, and particularly of the most vulnerable by holding together, sometimes in conversation and sometimes in tension, a rich diversity of simultaneous discourses. No Catholic theological discourse prevails in the United States or represents the many Catholic voices in the country. Anyone who affirms otherwise most likely does not understand the current U.S. Catholic sociodemographic and cultural landscape.

From here on, we will focus more explicitly on U.S. Latinx Catholic theological efforts, which are the primary commitment of the ACHTUS members.

U.S. Latinx Catholic theological discourses in general espouse a liberationist approach expressed through methods, research, publications, ways of communicating our scholarship and writings.

These particular discourses help the Church to be a servant institution at the service of the world and particularly the most vulnerable insofar as they constantly remind Catholics in the United States that we cannot abandon our identity as a poor church at the service of the poor, as Pope Francis has insistently reminded the Catholic world. These discourses come largely from a community that struggles in the belly of an empire, an empire that many Catholics, mainly white and Euro American but also from other cultural backgrounds including Latinxs, openly serve and preserve for various reasons. This is what we could call a result of the fast “Americanization” of U.S. Catholicism and many of its theological discourses and institutions.

U.S. Latinx Catholic discourses raise awareness among Catholics about the need to pay attention to the cries of the poor, starting with those who are materially destitute. Our theologians regularly engage in activism denouncing abuses against Latinx women and men who live in irregular migratory status, work as farmworkers, belong to gangs, experience discrimination, and are exploited by unjust labor practices, etc.

Many people in the United States, Catholic and non-Catholic, do not like to hear these discourses. They resist them. They feel that they challenge their rather comfortable status quo. In fact, their sense of normativity is threatened. As indicated in the response to the above question, many Latinx Catholic theologians are not supported or promoted. Many struggle to get hired in academic institutions or to serve in ecclesial settings. There is a tendency among many Catholic institutions and other secular venues to hire “safe” theologians or “quiet” scholars who just teach and serve their institutions.

Consequently, many Latinx Catholic theologians and many expressions of Latinx Catholic theological discourse are de facto prophetic and speak from the margins. The vast majority of Latinx bishops are not theologians. Although 45% of all U.S. Catholics are Latinx, not even 2% of all theologians teaching in Catholic seminaries and universities are Latinx. The institutions that dare to hire Latinx theologians and support Latinx Catholic theological discourse, usually institutions sponsored by religious orders, are a small number despite the fact that there are more than 260 Catholic colleges and universities, and more than 120 seminaries and houses of formation.

Yet, we remain there. Our presence, small as it is, is not a quiet presence. We walk in solidarity with the vulnerable of our communities. We start with immediate concerns that are clear, namely those of the Latinx women and men with whom we live, pray, build church, and discern our faith. From there we walk in solidarity with Black, Asian and Indigenous communities that experience racial biases. We hear the cries and support every cultural group that is affected by poverty and discrimination. We raise our voices every time we know our own church, the millions of Christians who do not self-identify as Catholic, and members of other religious traditions fail to live according to their faith and moral values. We participate in the various political and social processes of our nation in various capacities, as citizens and non-citizens. We exist, we are, we speak, we teach, we write.

### **3. What are the specific challenges facing theology in your area/region?**

Once again, we respond to this question from the particularity of our ecclesial and theological commitments as Latinx Catholic theologians. As such, we wish to highlight four major challenges that theology faces in North America and we think deserve some discussion:

One, the present sociodemographic and cultural transformations that Catholicism is experiencing call for ecclesial and academic leadership that is more representative of the communities that constitute the church in this part of the world. Such transformations demand engaging in a process of “letting go” on the part of those who still control most access to theological resources and ministry in the church, and “assuming more responsibility” on the part of the emerging voices and communities that are renewing U.S. Catholicism.

Two, more intentional participation in international and global conversations. The Catholic theological world in the United States enjoys access to significant resources: thousands of theologians, hundreds of universities and seminaries, millions of books in our libraries, incredible resources for scholarship, solid financial support, dozens of high quality publishing companies (especially university presses), a large pipeline of potential scholars nurtured by the Catholic educational world, collaboration with scholars from different fields and institutions, etc. All within the same country. Yet, many theological efforts emerging in the U.S. remain provincial and self-centered in the small U.S. Catholic world (barely 5% to 6% of all Catholics in the world live in this country). U.S. Latinx Catholic theologians participate in these same structures. Having so many responses presents the temptation to assume that we do not need to rest of the world, Catholic and non-Catholic. Consequently, the challenge that arises is that of engaging in international collaborations with other theologians, especially those from the new hubs of the Catholic world in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

Three, the rate of secularization and disaffiliation in the United States grows fast (see answer to first question). This means that Catholic theology in this century will need to be more sophisticated in its dialogue with non-religious partners. At the same time, we need good theological reflection that addresses why so many Catholics in the U.S. in recent decades (about 35 million) stopped self-identifying as Catholic. This also means that we will need to see Catholic theologians more involved in grassroots conversations and processes in churches and neighborhoods, in ministerial contexts and beyond. The current realities seem to call for a new breed of Catholic theologian that already exists in minoritized communities as in the case of U.S. Latinx Catholic theologians.

Four, this is perhaps the most obvious challenge. Catholic theologians in the United States must find a way to participate in the process of reconstruction after the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the resurgence of the evil of racism (among other social evils), and the ideological fragmentation undermining what was considered one of the most stable democracies in the world, especially following one of the most disastrous presidencies in recent times (i.e., the forty-fifth president of the U.S.). All these dynamics revealed major fissures in the larger U.S. society and in the Catholic Church. We find ourselves before the urgent need of a public theology that heals, rebuilds, and inspires trust.

*Neomi De Anda, Ph.D. and Hosffman Ospino, Ph.D.*

### **Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA)**

The Catholic Theological Society of America, led by President Dr. Maria Pilar Aquino (whose report gave me the bulk of the information for this report) and President-elect Dr. Christine Firer Hinze, will hold their annual meeting this summer, online. The theme "All You Who Labor..." Theology, Work, and Economy" carries over from last year's annual meeting, which was cancelled due to the pandemic. The structure of events and the plenary speakers carry over too. The terms of office of all CTSA leaders were extended one year by vote of the board to ensure the smooth, temporary transition to holding an online meeting, and returning to face-to-face meetings in 2022.

In lieu of the 2020 Convention, the CTSA held our annual Liturgy Memorial which is a tradition when we begin our annual meetings. Our executive director, Mary Jane Ponyik, CTSA liturgist Dr. Antonio Alonso of Emory University, and the other officers of our group organized this online memorial service. It celebrated the 75th anniversary of the Society and remembered those of our Society who died during 2019-2020. 170 members attended and colleagues delivered tributes to those who died. Fathers Charles E. Curran (25th President) and Roger Haight, S.J. (50th President) delivered the homily and closing reflection, respectively.

On that same day the liturgy was held, the CTSA also hosted a virtual publisher exhibit and an event for new and junior members with Commonweal Magazine.

The CTSA continues to encourage submissions of proposals for funding local CTSA Bishop and Theologians Reading Groups programs. This facilitates dialogue between Catholic theologians and their local bishops.

CTSA By-Laws did not allow for authorized transaction of business in an electronic format. To resolve this problem, Dr. Aquino appointed the "Ad Hoc Committee on Amendments to the CTSA By-Laws on Electronic Procedures" to work on developing and proposing amendments to the Board for review and ratification. The Board will submit to the membership those amendments ratified by them for approval during the business meeting.

The 2020 Proceedings is available online through the normal online portal, as well as the Proceedings of all previous conventions. The regular publication of the Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America will resume in 2021.

Last year, at the June 2019 meeting, the Board approved a \$10 increase in the annual dues payment, the first in fifteen years.

*Ramon Luzarraga, Ph.D., CTSA Representative to INSeCT*



## **Société Canadienne de théologie**

The German-Canadian theologian Gregory Baum shown that "Catholic theology of Quebec", as a contextual and original theology, was born within the context of the cultural revolution known as the "Quiet Revolution"<sup>2</sup>. He also explained that the *Société canadienne de théologie* is the historical home of this theology, beyond the various theological institutions. Unlike the Anglophone *Canadian Theological Society*, it brings together Francophone theologians of Canada, historically and mostly established in the province of Quebec.

In the social context of the 1950s and 1960s, Catholic intellectuals from the Catholic Action enjoyed immense credibility, as much when they spoke of the Church of *Gaudium et Spes* and of *Lumen Gentium* as when they defended the project of a democratic and just society<sup>3</sup>. However, one of the major features of the "Quiet Revolution" is institutional and cultural secularization, which made Quebec a strongly secularized society, increasingly de-Christianized. In Canada, the evolution of the theological network since 2017 is part of this long-term trend.

### **Collapsing of the Catholic Church**

The churches are in rapid decline and the impending disappearance of the Catholic institution in Quebec is more and more openly mentioned, except as one subculture among others. Since the only real social capital of the Church is its moral credibility, the scandalous crisis of sexual abuse is accelerating this process. This decline is accelerating, to the extent that Catholic dioceses will run out of funds within 5 years to pay most of their pastoral staff. It is not difficult to imagine the consequences for the academic centers of theology –but what will be the function and the organization of theology in the humble Church which will result from this collapse?

### **Institutional changes**

As we explained in our 2017 report, three (3) Quebec theological faculties were closed, between 2015 and 2017. They were replaced by secular institutional structures, within multidisciplinary humanities faculties<sup>4</sup>. For the theologians who continue to work in these universities, this new situation poses an increased challenge of scientific relevance in an interdisciplinary context. Theology and Christianity? philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists and historians can study them, in their own way and very well. But only theology can *do* theology. However, what place does it have left in public universities? There is only one Quebec Catholic theological faculty left at Laval University with its regional schools. It also has partnerships with evangelical and orthodox centers, which are very interesting, and which compensate for the erosion of the Catholic side.

In 2017, this situation only affected public universities and theological institutions only in the province of Quebec. However, some current events give rise to fears that the most important private theological institution in Quebec is in danger of closure. If so, the

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<sup>2</sup> Gregory Baum, *Le nationalisme : perspectives éthiques et religieuses* ([Saint-Laurent, Québec] : Bellarmin, 1998); Gregory Baum, *Vérité et pertinence. Un regard sur la théologie catholique au Québec depuis la Révolution tranquille* (Montréal : Fides, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Baum, *Vérité et pertinence. Un regard sur la théologie catholique au Québec depuis la Révolution tranquille*.

<sup>4</sup> In 2018, the Société canadienne de théologie held a symposium on these institutional changes. Some of its contributions have been published : Jean-François Roussel. « Liminaire », *Laval théologique et philosophique* 75, n° 2 (2019) : 177-78. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1070832ar>; Marc Dumas. « Vers une existence théologique de plus en plus fragile... », *Laval théologique et philosophique* 75, n° 2 (2019) : 179-88. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1070833ar>; Solange Lefebvre. « Changement paradigmatique de la théologie catholique à l'université à la lumière d'une étude de cas », *Laval théologique et philosophique* 75, n° 2 (2019) : 189-211. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1070834ar>; Gilles Routhier. « Effets des déplacements institutionnels récents sur la pratique théologique d'une faculté inscrite dans une université publique », *Laval théologique et philosophique* 75, n° 2 (2019) : 213-22. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1070835ar>.

institutional environment of Quebec Catholic theology would emerge greatly impoverished, reduced to a single significant institution, the Faculty of Theology and Religious Sciences of Laval University.

The theological ecosystem is profoundly transformed by these transformations. The *Société canadienne de théologie* maintains a membership of approximately 50 members. In addition to its annual congress and symposia, it strives to disseminate theology through public activities, as theology remains necessary for believers, inside or outside the University.

## **2. What have been the core concerns, theological responses and topics in your society and region over these past four years?**

### ***Climate crisis***

On the social level since 2017, one of the issues perceived as the most important by the population, and certainly the most important for young people, is the ecological crisis, in particular its climatic dimension. Two clues show this: an eco-anxiety expressed in the "climate strike". The largest international gathering took place in Montreal in September 2019. However, the COVID-19 pandemic is bringing the ecological crisis into homes, even into the most ordinary daily concerns. This is clearly the most decisive issue for our societies and for those of the coming centuries. The Canadian Theological Society will hold its 2022 conference on this theme.

### ***Immigration and secularity***

Immigration is transforming Canadian society and fueling the same heated debates as elsewhere in the Northern Hemisphere. In Quebec, an important aspect of these debates concerns the relationship between immigration and religion. As religion is often viewed negatively, we tend to see certain ethnocultural communities as obstacles to a secular social and political project. However, for a good part of the population, it is the religion of others that we fear the most, in the name of Quebec culture: Catholicism is seen there not as a community of faith but as a vague symbolic marker of a homogeneous society, having to defend itself against foreigners who threaten its "values". This oxymoron has been named "catho-secularism". The current government of Quebec is popular in large part thanks to its double work to reduce immigration and complete Quebec secularism: a secularism that it understands as an opposition to religion rather than as the neutrality and equality of citizens regardless of their affiliations. and beliefs.

Canadian theology has been interested in religious diversity for several years. In recent years, the issue of migration has been the subject of theological work in French-speaking communities. The *Justice and Faith Center* (Jesuit) made it a priority issue, as did theologians and theologians. But the theological community finds itself trapped as soon as it tries to assert a more open position towards faith communities, even when it supports the fundamental principles of secularism. The interventions made on this subject by certain theologians have ended in failure. The *Société canadienne de théologie* has considered preparing a public intervention to criticize a bill on secularism. We finally decided that our intervention would be disqualified from the outset, since it would be perceived as that of a religious lobby, in a social context that had become strongly resistant to such a thing.

However, feminist theologians have shed light on the subjugation of women, not only in religions but also in government policy choices in matters of religion. In the name of religious freedom, governments allow religions to discriminate based on gender. And when the time comes to establish rules for the management of religion in the public space, they put

in place rules which the Muslim women who bear the Islamic veil are the most numerous citizens to bear the brunt<sup>5</sup>.

### **3. How is theology in your region helping the Church to be a servant Church, at the service of the world, particularly of the most vulnerable?**

#### ***Sexual abuse of minors and women***

The case of sexual abuse of minors and women tears down the credibility of the Catholic Church. Among the theologians who have studied this question, Jean-Guy Nadeau has published in-depth research, from a practical theological perspective, which has had an excellent reception<sup>6</sup>. Saint-Paul University (Ottawa) has just set up a Centre for Safeguarding Minors and Vulnerable Persons: a training that gives pride of place not only to theology but also to the social sciences which can help prevent sexual abuse or manage them in an ethical and efficient manner.

#### ***Indigenous peoples***

Since 2017, Canadian society has attached more importance to the issues of Indigenous peoples. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada delivered its final report on the history of residential schools, organized in a national network and administered by churches between the 1880s and the 1990s. This report showed the multiple violence of residential schools and their lasting impact on the Indigenous peoples of Canada. Public institutions (schools, media, etc.) are beginning to sensitize the population to this heritage as well as to the reality of indigenous peoples today. The Canadian colonial heritage is increasingly recognized and criticized, particularly among young people. This is an important and encouraging development. The TRC called on churches, including the Catholic Church, to engage in the work of "reconciliation"<sup>7</sup>. Nonetheless, the responses from the Holy See and the Canadian episcopate are mixed. Theological institutions have not yet developed much training in indigenous realities. At the same time, since 2018 there have been several new cases of sexual abuse by missionaries of Indigenous children or women. For many Aboriginals, this accelerates the break with the Catholic Church. The reconciliation issue is carried by a handful of motivated people, in an ecclesial institution that does not make it a priority nor does it fully understand its decolonial scope<sup>8</sup>.

#### ***Aging and new vulnerabilities***

A good number of theologians are working on the situation of the spiritual accompaniment of the elderly or at the end of their life. In Canada, people often end their lives in hospital settings, out of their families, creating new vulnerabilities for older peoples. Medical aid in dying is now legalized in Quebec and has created new spiritual needs, which are new to the Church as well. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic emphasizes an older and more lasting evolution, towards socialization and rituality at a distance.

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<sup>5</sup> Journal *L'Autre Parole* No. 140 (2014) – « Laïcité et religion majoritaire au Québec : perspective féministe » : <https://www.lautreparole.org/revues/no-140-laicite-et-religion-majoritaire-au-quebec-perspective-feministe/>

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Guy Nadeau, *Une profonde blessure. les abus sexuels dans l'Église catholique* (Montréal : Médiaspaul, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Among the TRC's demands are (1) a formal apology by the Pope, on behalf of the Catholic Church, for the Church's involvement in this cultural genocide; (2) official repudiation of the doctrine of discovery and adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a framework for reconciliation with indigenous peoples; (3) the integration of a training component about the history of residential schools and indigenous spiritualities in the theological training centers.

<sup>8</sup> Jean-François Roussel. « Les réactions des Églises devant l'histoire des pensionnats autochtones (1969 – 2017) : entre résistances et engagement pour la réconciliation », dans *La blessure qui dormait à poings fermés: l'héritage des pensionnats autochtones au Québec*, dir. Marie-Pierre Bousquet et Karl Hele (Montréal : Société Recherches amérindiennes au Québec, 2019), 217-46.



***International solidarity***

The Canadian Catholic Church has a long history of commitment to international solidarity, with the episcopal organization *Development and Peace*, which plays an important role in supporting various projects in the Southern Hemisphere, with a view to empowerment and release. In recent years, this organization has come under criticism and attack from conservative and influential bishops. In particular, it was demanded that D&P review the funding of organizations involved in women's reproductive health. This damages D&P's credibility in the Church, in society and outside of Canada. In this regard, some theologians continue to defend D&P's vision and trust its ability to see-judge-act, in the best of the social teaching of the Church.

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