

## In Service for a Servant Church

# Religion and Transformation in Contemporary European Society

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# In Service for a Servant Church

*Outlines and Challenges for Catholic Theology Today.  
Documentation of the INSeCT Conferences in  
Manila 2019 and Vienna 2020*



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# Foreword

The 'International Network of Societies in Catholic Theology' (INSeCT) is a global network of theological societies, founded 1996 as a joint venture by theologians from Europe, Latin America and North America.<sup>1</sup> During these last 26 years, this theological network has not only expanded to a number of 35 member societies from all continents. It has also gained profile by identifying the most urgent challenges for theological research and developing it by fostering international and inter-regional collaboration to discuss these issues. After having studied the question of gender justice in the research triennium 2014–17<sup>2</sup> the General Assembly identified as most important issue for the research period 2017–20 the role of theology in serving the church and the world by analysing pressing problems, discussing possible solutions and sharing insights not only in the academic field but also feeding them into the respective ecclesial and secular decision-making processes.

The European Society of Catholic Theology (ESCT) in collaboration with the European Society of Women in Theological Research (ESWTR) and the Filipino Society for Catholic Theology (DaKaTeo) has taken up this challenge and organized two international conferences in the years 2019 and 2020. The overlapping question was to identify the most pressing concerns of today's societies and discuss them from different theological angles. The keynote papers of these conferences are collected in this volume.

In November 2019 the Catholic Theological Society of the Philippines, DaKaTeo, hosted twelve theologians at the Ateneo de Manila University, six Asian and six European, from a number of different countries. The topics were dealing with one crucial question: What does it mean to be a follower of Christ in contemporary times? The participants discussed peace and conflict resolution; justice and democracy; the integrity of creation; migration; and family and sexual relationships. Each of these topics was dealt with by an Asian and a European theologian, so to start a theological dialogue based on different perspectives and experiences from a dozen different ecclesial, spiritual and societal cultures.

Ruben Mendoza and Gunter Prüller-Jagenteufel discuss the general question of Christian life in contemporary society from a Filipino and an Austrian perspective. The obstacles and chances for realizing peace in our time are

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1 For detailed information pls. see: <https://insecttheology.wordpress.com/>.

2 The statement can be found on the website: <https://www.insecttheology.org/post/insect-statement-on-gender-justice>.

discussed from an Indian point of view by Kochurani Abraham. Rasika Pieris and Dániel Deák discuss the problems of politics and democracy focusing on Sri Lanka and Hungary. A special Filipino perspective on the issue of ecology from a biblical perspective is given by Maricel Ibita (Philippines). One especially hot topic was and still is the question of migration and how this problematic affects European and Asian countries in different ways. Gemma Cruz from Australia and Regina Polak from Austria share their analysis from their respective perspectives. The last dialogue of this conference dealing with matters of family and sexual relationships was given by Joseph N. Goh (Malaysia) and Gertraud Ladner (Austria); a topic that shows that it is not only differences but also shared challenges and perspectives that link theologians from the Global South and the North.

The second part of this book presents the main papers from a symposium organized at the University of Vienna in February 2020, dealing with the issue of whether and how Europe – with its history of devastating religious wars as well as its experiences of multi-cultural and multi-religious plurality – might contribute to a global culture of tolerance and understanding. Boris Rähme (Italy) analyses the difference of religious and non-religious disagreements; András Máté-Tóth and Réka Szilárdi (Hungary) discuss the phenomenon of securitization and religion in Central and Eastern Europe; Judith Gruber (Belgium) focuses on the problem of migration with a cultural focus; Matthias Smalbrugge (Netherlands) deals with the question of secularization and religion as rather political than individual narratives; Marie-Jo Thiel (France) gives a critical view on the French concept of *laïcité*; Winfrid Löffler (Austria) explores the connection between secularism and fundamentalism and Gertraud Ladner (Austria) analyses the question of fundamentalism and secularism from the perspective of gender studies. The concluding essay gives insights from an outsider's perspective: David DeCosse is a US American theologian in the role of a process observer.

To publish this book has been made possible only by the support of a considerable number of persons and organizations that supported the idea and the process of this research triennium. Therefore, in the name of all the editors, I give thanks to the partner organizations DaKaTeo, ESCT, and ESWTR and their representatives who subscribed to the idea of the INSecT Research Triennium 2017–2020. I also thank all the organizations that supported the project by donating a considerable amount of money: the Conference of Religious Congregations of Austria, the Diocese of Innsbruck, the Faculty of Catholic Theology of the University of Vienna, Misereor, the Peter-Hünemann-Foundation, Renovabis, Weltgebetstag der Frauen, and an especially generous donator who wants to stay anonymous. Thank you all for

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Vienna in November 2022  
Gunter Prüller-Jagenteufel