

Article

# Pursuing Ethics by Building Bridges beyond the Northern Paradigm

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**Abstract:** This essay narrates and explores the work of Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church (CTEWC) in developing a network that connects roughly 1500 Catholic ethicists around the world. It highlights the impact that CTEWC has had in encouraging Christian ethics to become more inclusive, active, and mindful in advancing a network that builds bridges beyond the northern paradigm. In this narrative, we see how CTEWC planned and realized three major international conferences in Padua, Trento, and Sarajevo and six regional conferences in Manila, Nairobi, Berlin, Krakow, Bangalore, and Bogota. Together with its monthly newsletter, CTEWC has also sponsored a visiting scholars program in Bangalore, Manila, and Nairobi, a PhD scholarship program for eight women in Africa, and an international book series with eight volumes and over 200 contributors. Throughout, we respond to the challenge of pluralism by answering the call to dialogue from and beyond local culture. As it enters its second generation with new leadership, CTEWC pursues critical and emerging issues in theological ethics by engaging in cross-cultural, interdisciplinary conversations shaped by shared visions of hope, but always mindful that we must engage the Global South and go beyond the northern paradigm where most contemporary theological ethics occur.

**Keywords:** Network; conferencing; theological ethics; cross-cultural communications; bridge-building; northern paradigm; local culture; virtual tables

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## 1. Introduction

This account about our network, Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church (CTEWC), is not about how we imagine ethics in terms of new conceptual insights or new methods of investigation or of reporting, but rather about recognizing the need to expand our collegiality. This is a case for developing the field of Christian Ethics by enhancing the possibility of being more connected to more distant and isolated colleagues and their research so as to realize that our local investigations need to be connected to theirs.

Our understanding of global challenges like sustainability or migration, economic inequality, or gender identity is always developed by the resources and discussions that are accessible to us in our own localities. In the Global North, for instance, we have a plethora of pathways to research. However, often we do not hear or have access to research from those in the Global South because those ethicists are not as connected to the journals, forums, and universities of the Global North as we are and we do not often follow their journals or forums.

We in the Global North often cite our colleagues from the Global North because they are our interlocutors and therein we continue to work with unacknowledged biases in which the investigations remain in a privileged context and the questions asked, the agenda that is set, and the findings that are reported all concern the perspectives of those of us from the North. This is what we refer to in our mission statement below as “the northern paradigm”; it encases most of the

presuppositions that assure that most of our research remains focused on colleagues from the Global North.

The metaphor of “bridge-building” is instructive here. Bridge-building suggests that two different locations can meet and when ethicists build bridges they are trying to create conversations beyond one’s own locality so as to engage another’s. Yet often enough, these bridges are built in the Global North, and somehow the encounters that they sponsor have those coming from the Global South as visitors. In a manner of speaking, often at these meetings, conferences, or intercultural dialogues, those from the Global North seem to presume that the dominant (nay, universal) way of understanding an ethical method, say regarding the virtues or human rights, is their way and that those from the Global South propose their “distinctively” different world views. In a critical essay, Lúcas Chan (Chan 2011) asked whether when bridge-building, we recognize the ways that we might water-down, reduce, or worse, assimilate the claims or proposals from the Global South into the northern paradigm. Is the bridge-building adequately conveying the distinctiveness of the world-views of each of the participants or are they filtered through the dominant, though regional language-games? Throughout this text, then, when we see bridge-building, we are proposing a form of meeting that tries not to compromise the world-view of others but rather acknowledges not only the congruities but the contrasts among the positions of the differing participants in the encounter.

The network that I describe here begins with the simple assumption that we ethicists need to be better connected.<sup>1</sup> We also realized during our years of work that we had to extend our network to those literally on the margins, to those whose voices have not been heard, and whose insights have not been recognized. That is, we began simply with the need to be connected with fellow ethicists but, in time, we realized we needed to extend ourselves in our connectedness geographically. Through our conferencing, our book series, our monthly newsletter, and our scholarship programs, we have tried to ask, is anyone missing, is there anyone we need to support or engage, is there anyone we have failed to recognize? Our network has become, then, a catalyst for re-envisioning how we investigate ethics and how we report our findings better by being better connected globally, through multitudinous localities, respecting the contributions of each. This is then a descriptive narrative of the somewhat organic developments of our discovery of the importance of our mission statement in trying to go beyond our contexts by encountering others long overlooked. Through a narrative of our expanding projects and decisions, I hope to convey the lessons we learned in our first generation of existence and to express our plans for the second generation.

Acting on the need for cross-cultural theological discourse began long before the international meetings of CTEWC theological ethicists at Padua in 2006 and Trento in 2010. This was, after all, the conciliar vision of the founders of the international Catholic journal *Concilium*, which has published for the past 54 years five issues a year in five different linguistic (English, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish) editions.<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, women especially have taken the lead in such discourse, making it almost always ecumenical in scope. In 1989, in Africa, the Methodist Mercy Amba Oduyoye established the “The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians.”<sup>3</sup> From the United States, Regina Wentzel Wolfe and Christine E. Gudorf (Wolfe and Gudorf 1999) edited cross-cultural case studies on ethics and world religions. In Asia, the *Ecclesia of Women in Asia* movement has hosted Pan-Asian conferences among women theologians since 2002, publishing two (Monteiro and Gutzler 2005; Brazal and Lizares 2007) collections of their conference papers.<sup>4</sup> Still, CTEWC, while like *Concilium* being almost exclusively Catholic in its participants, marks a significant development in the history of theological ethics and this essay hopes to capture its *raison d’être* and the course of its development.

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<sup>1</sup> At the end of this essay, I return to this claim to highlight how it applies to all ethicists in religion or theology and how the narrative here helps to make that case.

<sup>2</sup> <https://concilium.hymnsam.co.uk/>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.thecirclecawt.org/profile.html>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://ecclesiaofwomen.ning.com/>.

## 2. Getting to Padua and Trento

In 2002, while teaching at the Gregorian University in Rome, I invited a visiting colleague from Boston College to a dinner with four ethicists from the two major faculties teaching Catholic theological ethics in Rome. Two were teaching at the Gregorian University, and the other two at the Alfonsianum University; each had taught for at least fifteen years in Rome and each had an internationally respected reputation; their universities were less than a kilometer apart. At the end of an exciting dinner, I asked, how often they gathered and discovered they had never met. I decided then to bring together Catholic theological ethicists from across the globe.<sup>5</sup>

I shared my idea with Paul Schotsmans at the Catholic University of Leuven, who helped me to present it to a major Catholic foundation. With Schotsmans and the foundation's support, I hosted an international Planning Committee of Catholic ethicists at Leuven in 2003 where we began imagining an international conference. At that time, we (Schotsmans 2019) articulated three reasons why Catholic ethicists needed to host such a conference. First, being on the practical side of theology, Catholic theological ethicists are often interlocutors with others from very different disciplines—medicine, public health, economics, political science, sociology, etc.; therefore, it would benefit our inquiries if we met once simply among ourselves. Second, before the twenty-first century, Catholic ethicists were for the most part trained at one of the Roman universities. In the 1950s, students of moral theology began attending other European universities as well. Since the 1970s, they began studying for doctorates at universities on their own continents. In the globalized world, the occasion for studying together became more and more rare and, we believed, that it would be good for those trained on the different continents to meet at least once together. Third, distinctive approaches to Catholic theological ethics subsequently arose on each continent. We needed to develop ways of communicating wherein the developments on one continent were known on the others. Our Catholicity was at stake.

Three fundamental decisions were made at Leuven. First, we developed a name: "Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church" and articulated a mission statement:

"Since moral theology is so diffuse today, since many Catholic theological ethicists are caught up in their own specific cultures, and since their interlocutors tend to be in other disciplines, there is the need for an international exchange of ideas among Catholic theological ethicists. Catholic theological ethicists recognize the need: to appreciate the challenge of pluralism; to dialogue from and beyond local culture; and, to interconnect within a world church, not dominated solely by a northern paradigm. In response to these recognized needs, Catholic theological ethicists will meet to refresh their memories, reclaim their heritage, and reinterpret their sources. Therefore, Catholic theological ethicists will pursue in this conference a way of proceeding that reflects their local cultures and engages in cross-cultural conversations motivated by mercy and care."<sup>6</sup>

Second, to be truly international, we would have to underwrite the travel and housing of most participants from the Global South. This would require major fundraising. Third, since some members of the planning committee had difficulty securing visas, we soon learned that Italy was the most hospitable Western European country in terms of granting visas. Deciding on Italy, we quickly selected Padua. The city of St. Anthony was a pilgrim's city but it was also the seat of one of Europe's oldest universities. The academy and the church were very present there.

To forge our catholicity at Padua, we had two different types of plenary presentations. First, we had continental panels from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America, wherein each panel had three presenters each from different parts of the continent but each responding to the

<sup>5</sup> The term moral theologian has been used in the past to define Catholic theologians working in the field of personal ethics as opposed to those working in social ethics. In our network, we include both moral theologians and social ethicists as well as bioethicists and business ethicists under the title "theological ethicist." Throughout this essay, I will use the more inclusive term.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.catholicethics.com/padua/info/mission.php>.

same three questions: what are our moral challenges, how are we responding to them, what hope do we have for the future? We also hosted panels on four fundamental issues: the sources of our tradition, the question of pluralism, justice and globalization, and *sensus fidelium* and the magisterium. On these panels, we looked to achieve balance by having a truly diverse spectrum of presenters; a case in point, the notable debate between Paul Valadier (Valadier 2007) and Monsignor Giuseppe Angelini (Angelini 2007) over *sensus fidelium*, that is, the normative claim that the laity's faith has on the articulation of magisterial teachings.

On 8 July 2006, we hosted for the first time in history an international meeting of Catholic theological ethicists: 400 came from 63 countries to Padua. The major theme of the conference was listening, listening to voices beyond our own local culture. The meeting was a great success; the plenary papers were published by Continuum Press (Keenan 2007), though five other presses subsequently published them as well so as to assure international distribution. Linda Hogan (Hogan 2010), the co-chair of the CTEWC Planning Committee, edited a volume of the applied ethics papers.

From Padua, four developments emerged. First, more specific steps had to be taken to ensure the involvement of women in the field, especially out of Africa. For instance, after the three African speakers gave their continental addresses on African challenges, focusing on civil strife, colonialism, graft, and trade, each of the three African women participants challenged them on why not a word was mentioned on AIDS, healthcare, or, even, women. Their voices resonated throughout the conference and conference organizers responded with a pledge to secure funding for African women to begin graduate studies.

Second, cross-cultural initiatives began right at Padua. The forty African participants held their historic first meeting of African Moral Theologians at the conference. Days later, the Asians met as well. Immediately afterwards, Catholic ethicists (Chummar 2010) pursued other similar initiatives such as an "International Symposium on Natural Law" that was held eight months later at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, Kenya. Similarly, Mary Jo Iozzio with Mary Doyle Roche and Elsie Miranda (Iozzio et al. 2008) engaged Paduan participants to contribute to a collection of essays by Catholic women theologians on the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Like the Padua conference, these global projects supported rather than diminished the concerns that were expressed locally: the local was *not* antithetical to the universal, but rather grounds for the possibility of the universal.

Third, eventually we began to receive comment on the papers from Padua. Only five months after the conference, *Rivista di Teologia Morale* published reports by several participants (Onyema 2006; Lourdusamy 2006; Fabri dos Anjos 2006; Cimperman 2006; Lorenzetti 2006) from across the world. From Padua itself, the senior theological ethicist Giuseppe Trentin (Trentin 2009) offered a critique concerning method, exhorting the plenary speakers to further more rigorous argumentation. Many other reports (see Steck 2011) on Padua would follow.

Fourth, the closing assembly unanimously called for a second international conference.

Four years later, the second international CTEWC conference was held in Trento, the site of the historical Council. The conference was even more successful than the first, with 600 participants from 72 countries. Inasmuch as at the sixteenth-century Council of Trent moral theology was established as a specific field of theological inquiry, the conference was designed to consider the past, the present, and the future of the field. It helped us establish a much stronger network because of five subsequent major developments. First, we built a website, [www.catholicethics.com](http://www.catholicethics.com). Second, we launched a monthly newsletter, that contains regional news, updates, book launches, job openings and the now widely successful "Forum," a monthly op-ed section that posts essays by contributors from each of the five continents. Then, we also started a book series with Orbis Books. Keenan (Keenan 2011) edited the first volume, the plenary papers from Trento, that three other presses also published. We decided that each subsequent volume would have two editors from different continents and roughly 25 contributors from around the world. Each would be developed according to the specific themes. Then followed volumes on feminism (Hogan and Orobator 2014), environmental sustainability (Peppard and Vicini 2015), migrants and refugees (Brazal and Davila

2016), biblical ethics (Chan et al. 2018), and finally, the theological ethicist in the local church (Autiero and Magesa 2018).

With over 150 different contributors in these six volumes, the series has so affected theological and ethical research, that no one today addressing any ethical theme would publish a volume that was not international, and in particular, did not engage the Global South; the series has prompted all theological ethicists to think globally, to look beyond their localities and to try not to be dominated by the northern paradigm.

Fourth, we developed a visiting scholars program where ethicists would have the opportunity to teach at participating schools in Manila, Bangalore, and Nairobi. A scholar's services were pro bono, but the room, board, and hospitality were provided by the hosting institution, and the travel was supported through grants secured by CTEWC. Finally, reflecting on an initiative by the Filipina Agnes Brazal (Agnes Brazal et al. 2010) who invited ethicists across Southeast Asia to Manila in 2008, we decided to host continental conferences. We hosted the first pan-African meeting in Nairobi in 2012. Realizing the need to build bridges between Western and Eastern Europe, we met first in Berlin in 2013, and a year later in Krakow. These first four regional conferences hovered between 40 and 50 participants for each conference. For three years, one of our Planning Committee members, Lúcas Chan (Chan et al. 2016), began preparing with Shaji George Kochuthara a pan-Asian conference for more than 100 Asian theological ethicists; sadly Chan died of heart failure on its eve in summer 2015. Finally in 2016, we (Cuda 2017) hosted another large regional conference in Bogotá.

With our regional networks secured, it was time to call a third international conference. We decided on Sarajevo, a city that is neither the industrialized North nor the Global South, but instead a place in-between that tries to bridge both worlds. In the wake of its historic siege (1992–1995), Sarajevo offered three vital contexts: peace building in the aftermath of ethnic conflict; inter-religious and cross-cultural dialogue in a predominantly Muslim city (85%); and, economic struggle (40% unemployment).

Furthermore, we wanted to make our network more effective to address three compelling issues; the climate crisis; its impact on already marginalized populations; and, the tragic banality of contemporary political leadership that pretends to contradict the urgency of the first two issues. We went to Sarajevo, therefore, because as ethicists, we need to be further engaged. In a world where nationalistic populism tears apart any global cooperation, where the abandonment of the Paris accord mirrors the abandonment of migrants and refugees, where civility is sacrificed by the banality of self-interest and the common good is trampled underfoot, we need to be globally connected and active, abandoning the domination of the Global North and looking beyond local interests. In order to achieve these goals, we needed to rethink what a Catholic international theological conference should be.

### **3. Planning a New Form of Conferencing for Sarajevo**

As we finished our conference in Bogotá, we began developing a whole different type of conference for our international gathering in Sarajevo. First, we needed younger leadership; we turned to Kristin Heyer, a noted ethicist from Santa Clara University, to join Hogan and me as co-chair of the Planning Committee and to take charge of the entire program design for Sarajevo. We also asked another committee member, Andrea Vicini, an Italian Jesuit teaching at Boston College, to oversee and accompany the recruitment of participants.

Second, we decided that we needed to go to Rome and to meet with church leaders to introduce them to our network. In March 2017, seven of the planning committee members met with Mons. José Rodríguez Carballo, ofm, and the Congregazione per i Religiosi; Cardinal Kevin Farrell and his Pontificio Consiglio per i Laici, la Famiglia, la Vita; Cardinal Fernando Filoni and the Congregazione per l'Evangelizzazione dei Popoli; Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi and the Pontificio Consiglio della Cultura, Cardinal Peter Turkson and the Pontificio Consiglio della Giustizia e della Pace, and Cardinal Giuseppe Versaldi and the Congregazione per l'educazione cattolica. At each meeting, we were welcomed warmly. Our delegation also presented our work at three major Roman universities: the Alfonsianum, the Gregorian, and the Urbanianum. We met too with the newly elected Father

General of the Society of Jesus, Arturo Sosa. And, finally, we met for nearly an hour with Pope Francis on 17 March.

These meetings helped us to realize that we needed to think of the conference not as connecting ideas first, but instead as connecting actual persons. We needed to meet one another as we are, not primarily as we write. Moreover, we needed to appreciate the diversity we had developed in our network. Just as we developed in Europe a bridge between Western and Eastern Europe, we needed to connect our theological ethicists worldwide with one another. Instead of attending to political diversity, we wanted to make sure that we had voices of the church from everywhere we could find an ethicist, so as to understand what their actual challenges and hopes were. Thus, we needed a conference that would train us for global partnership in a challenging and troubled world further compromised by poor political leadership.

At Sarajevo, we (Heyer 2019) decided that we would start the conference in July 2018 by going through five stages. First, there was a word of welcome. While we invited Sarajevo's Cardinal Vinko Pujlic to welcome us, we also wrote Pope Francis if he would send us a word of welcome. He sent us a detailed three-page letter expressing how well he understood our work of building bridges, not walls.<sup>7</sup> His letter gave us immediate international recognition.<sup>8</sup> Finally, on behalf of the planning committee, Keenan offered a word of welcome, concluding that after sixteen years of developing a network, CTEWC had now arrived at a second generation and that it was time for him and Hogan to step down and make room for new leadership, announcing that Heyer, Vicini, and Kochuthara had agreed to assume the new responsibilities. The conference started then with enormous support, hope, and vitality.

Then, we attended to our immediate context, the church and people of Sarajevo. We invited Fr. Darko Tomasevic, the dean of theology at the University of Sarajevo, and Zilka Siljak, a Muslim feminist theologian. Each spoke about struggles of Sarajevo during and after the siege. We concluded the opening session with a film about the early days of the siege when the national library at city hall was fire-bombed and burned for four days, and then in one of our first of many religious acts, we held a procession through the old city, from our conference site, the major Catholic high school of Sarajevo to the newly restored city hall where we hosted our opening reception. Here we saw tangibly the fruits of reconciliation, solidarity, and restoration.

We began the next morning with listening to the voices of seven of our world-wide members, not talking about their projects, but rather talking about being connected. After we heard two senior voices, we heard from young, emerging voices; the first woman theologian from India, a lay woman from Uganda, and a dynamic lecturer from Hungary. In each case, though they were new to the field, they shared with us the vocation of the theological ethicist and the importance of their being connected to us as they worked as newcomers to the field. Finally, we concluded with voices from isolated contexts: the singular woman ethicist from Bosnia and the first woman ethicist from Vietnam. Here, we were meeting those on our margins who were defining us by being connected.

Next, we held a memorial service for all those who died since Trento. This call to prayer through remembrance and mindfulness of our friends and colleagues brought us great consolation as thirty-two people described their colleagues and lit candles of witness to our late colleagues and friends. We stayed, again, connected with one another, including those in glory.

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[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2018/documents/papa-francesco\\_20180711\\_messaggio-etica-teologica.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180711_messaggio-etica-teologica.html).

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<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2018-07/pope-francis-message-conference-theological-ethics-ctewc-sarajev.html>;  
<http://www.lastampa.it/2018/08/04/vaticaninsider/a-sarajevo-abbiamo-cercato-di-offrire-risposte-positive-a-lle-sfide-del-mondo-ftUJj3It56UP1yB9WU10DN/pagina.html>;  
<https://www.ncronline.org/news/theology/francis-tells-500-theologians-world-needs-renewed-leadership>;  
<https://www.google.fr/amp/s/www.la-croix.com/amp/1200956548>.

Finally, we hosted a large poster session. Here a word of explanation is needed. Scientific conferences have poster sessions where scholars post their findings and others read their work. Theologians do not normally present posters, but prefer to give papers. At Trento, for instance, we sponsored a poster session but only 24 posters were submitted. Instead, we ceded to others' requests for presentations and hosted three concurrent sessions with twenty-five panels of three presenters each. This meant that 225 ethicists presented their papers. However, in every session, a person had the opportunity to attend only one panel and not the other 24! This meant that, though everyone heard nine presenters during the three sessions, we missed the other 216!

In preparation for Sarajevo, Heyer continuously encouraged participants to present posters. She limited the program to only two concurrent sessions of 25 panels, with two presenters, leaving only 100 slots for papers. Heyer argued that presenters would have more and better encounters if they did posters. The posters, moreover, were not about one small focused project as one finds at most conferences. Rather, for CTEWC, one's poster was to serve as an introduction to the trajectory of one's work, thus furthering our goal of connecting us to one another.

Then, 136 participants brought their posters to Sarajevo and, by the end of the conference, they were glad they did. Heyer hosted two extended poster sessions during which participants could meet all 136 presenters. The results were extended conversations about one's work. Of the many, many responses that we received, praise for the poster sessions was the greatest. Assuredly, posters will be at more and more theological conferences in the future.

Finally, Heyer hosted later in the day a second extended plenary panel, this time inviting two junior scholars from each of the five regions to explore how the method of theological ethics in each continent developed from Padua to Trento to Sarajevo. This was a remarkable session that helped us to appreciate the wide array of methodological advances that had occurred throughout the past twenty years. For instance, the Africans presented how their contextual/liberation theology let them deepen their appreciation of their original historical cultural context while still being critical of those cultural biases that might hinder the flourishing of persons and communities. The Asians spoke of inter-religious dialogue and North Americans described how virtue ethics has taken a distinctively social turn in examining social structures of virtue and vice. Europeans highlighted how the earlier language and agenda of autonomy was now being replaced by the more relational, social claims and responsibilities of human rights. Finally, Latin Americas described how the advocacy of liberation theology had morphed into a closer-to-the-ground encounter with poor through the so-called "theology of the people." Here, showcasing young theologians who knew their own emerging methodological issues well, we built bridges inter-generationally within each of the regions while highlighting how extensive of a turn to the social was embedded in local developments in moral methodology.

At the end of the day, we returned to prayer, this time for peace. First, we invited from Sarajevo, *Youth for Peace*, an inter-religious fellowship that works for reconciliation across the generations of Bosnia and Herzegovina. They witnessed how their own solidarity brought them healing and peace. Then, our liturgy committee brought us a call for peace from each of the five regions.

On the third day, we heard in the third plenary four presentations on the triple theme of the conference: climate change, its impact on migration and the marginalized, and the disenfranchising leadership of nationalist politicians. These papers mirrored the work of the 100 panel presentations and 136 posters. Indeed, throughout the conference, these three themes were the stuff of our concern.

However, the plenaries were designed less for hearing about these issues and more toward taking us through a social training ground that would form us as a network into greater solidarity as well as greater freedom and competency for social action. In a way, the conference was designed to be transformative, whence the importance of a variety of spiritual and ethical practices. Thus, right after the panel on climate and political crises, we invited each of the five regions to meet with their respective colleagues and reflect on how well they have networked regionally during the first generation of CTEWC. The first of two such "Continental Discussions" was specifically labeled as a collective examination of conscience. After these discussions, Charles Curran (Curran 2019) gave a

powerful presentation on how theological ethics has become more conscious of its social orientation as it calls persons and societies to work more inclusively together toward greater justice and mercy in the world.

Later, we broke for the first of the two extended concurrent sessions. Again, these sessions were designed to bridge-build on each panel. For instance, one panel on global climate action had someone from Kenya speaking with someone working in Switzerland; at a panel on the far-reaching consequences of climate change, an Indian moralist working with local farmers presented alongside someone from Zimbabwe. The entire session reflected the three topics cast through the vision of bridge-building. Then, our fourth plenary engaged us in a session on ethics and public discourse, led by a journalist who coached all the participants into understanding how to connect with the media so that their research would not simply be for academics but for the greater public square and the entire church. Other ethicists (from Brazil, the Philippines, and Spain) complemented the journalist's counsel with their own testimonies of bringing ethics out of the academy and into the public sphere.

We moved to the cathedral for the Eucharistic liturgy on Saturday evening. Cardinals Vinko Pujlic of Sarajevo and Peter Turkson of Ghana presided, while Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago, reflecting on John 6 and the feeding of the hungry listeners, invited us to enter into history to effect long-standing social change. Reminding us that the call to respond to the work of God not only belongs to the past and the future, but more immediately to the present, Cupich urged us to hear the immediate summons to serve and act collectively.

The final day began with a plenary on three networks that aim through dialogue for peace and reconciliation, exemplifying the call we each shared. Then, the regions gathered for the second continental discussions, this time working for strategies for action in hope. A second concurrent session followed, structured much like the earlier, one allowing us to descend into the particular challenges of climate change, migration, and poor political leadership by bridge-building.

The final afternoon turned to three events. First, speakers presented other organizations that network for social change. Then, we moved to prophetic calls from Pablo Blanco (Blanco 2019) of Argentina, Emmanuel Katongole (Katongole 2019) of Uganda, and Linda Hogan (Hogan 2019) of Ireland, who called us to a new vulnerability and a new solidarity to consider and accompany the marginalized as the Gospels summon us. Finally, at the closing banquet, Cardinal Turkson called us to attend to human development.

Throughout the conference, but most especially in the poster sessions, there was a hermeneutics of generosity among the participants. Besides this basic disposition, there was something deeply liturgical about our programmatic call for social transformation. Besides celebrating the Eucharist each day, we processed, remembered the dead, examined our consciences, heard the call to reconciliation, prayed for peace, and dismissed the assembly with a prophetic missioning. Certainly not everyone may have found it as Heyer and the rest of us planned it and certainly some of the participants may have wanted more political diversity than the diversity that was easily in evidence. Others, too, remarked how the coffee breaks, dinners, and other opportunities for conversation were extraordinarily rich and wished for more colloquies. However, these wishes and admonitions were within the strong bond of solidarity for sharing the same vocation as a theological ethicist, working locally and globally.

#### **4. A New Form of Conferencing for Whom?**

Hosting the conference in Sarajevo meant many more challenges than Trento. In Trento we were the beneficiary of many gifts from the province, the city, the University of Trento, and the archdiocese. Sarajevo had no such local beneficiaries, though they assisted us every step of the way. We knew that we would have to provide all our own resources.

Moreover, logistics were limited; Trento provided facilities that accommodated more than 600 and thus we could welcome whoever would come; Sarajevo, on the other hand, had its limits that would force us to think otherwise. Because the high school auditorium could only accommodate 450 people, and because we had over thirty other participants who were not theological ethicists (translators, technicians, local speakers like Youth for Peace), we could only host the conference with



any respect for global diversity by invitation only. Sarajevo's challenges became ours and, in truth, we learned a lot from them as they accompanied us throughout.

Furthermore, the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina had very few consulates outside of Europe and securing required visas, especially for those from Asia and Africa, would prove extraordinary. For this reason, after we asked Heyer to construct the program, we realized how challenging Vicini's work would be in accompanying our registrants.

At the opening, Vicini (Vicini 2019) gave a rich account of our participants; 422 theological ethicists participated: 140 women and 282 men. For the first time in any of our conferences, one third of the participants were women. The participants were young too: 71 were new faculty; 29 of them were women, and of those, 19 were from the Global South. Another 48 were doctoral students. Together, these young people nominated by senior scholars made up nearly a third of our participants. Of the 140 women present, 118 were lay women and the rest religious sisters. Among the 282 men, 147 were lay men and 135 ordained and 97 of these belonged to religious congregations.

Of note, 78 countries were represented. From the Global North (Australia, Israel, Japan, Western Europe, Canada, and the USA), there were 169 participants; from the Global South, there were 253 participants. As Vicini (Vicini 2019, p.13) announced: "We are very pleased that, for the first time, the countries and the colleagues from the Global South are the majority of the participants."

This sea change took us years of bridge-building. For instance, because of interventions made at Padua by the three African women ethicists, CTEWC pursued funding for doctorates in theological ethics for women in Africa. Under the leadership of Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, S.J., as well as Hogan and Keenan, we developed a doctoral program for eight women in Africa. At Sarajevo were five of these women. This program served as a catalyst for others to support and sustain African women's voices. Thus, at Sarajevo, there were 15 of the now 24 women Catholic ethicists in Africa. Similarly, when we met in Trento, the Europeans were overwhelmingly from the West, but in Sarajevo, 46 of the 116 Europeans came from Central and Eastern Europe.

Getting people to Sarajevo was another challenge. Vicini secured the help of an ethicist in Sarajevo and the collaboration of the Bosnian Foreign Ministry and processed over 100 Bosnian visas. All but one were secured.

We supported many, though not all, from the Global South to come. We covered the flights for 238 participants and contributed part of the traveling expenses of a few doctoral students. Vicini also brilliantly secured housing for 260 colleagues. In short, the mission statement we developed a generation ago continues to guide us as we build bridges for networking in Catholic theological ethics.

At the end of the conference, Heyer, Vicini, and Keenan edited the plenary papers for our seventh international volume *Building Bridges in Sarajevo: The Plenary Papers from CTEWC 2018*, which will appear in October 2019. At the same time, the new leadership asked Autiero and me to remain on the new CTEWC Planning Committee and invited three others to join the new Planning Committee: Michelle Becka from Germany, Alexandre Martins from Brazil, and Toussaint Kafarhire from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Along with the CTEWC administrator, Toni Ross, the nine members meet virtually monthly to continue directing the network.

## 5. Plans for the Future

Immediately after the conference, Mark McGreevy, the founding director of the Institute for Global Homelessness, hosted a conference in November 2018 for ethicists and advocates to work together for greater responsiveness to the challenge. McGreevy engaged us in CTEWC and nearly half of the participants at the conference were members of our network. Learning that no ethicist had ever published as much as an article on the topic, Keenan and McGreevy (Keenan and McGreevy 2019) decided to edit a volume on *Street Homelessness and Catholic Theological Ethics*, which became the eighth volume in our series. This marks the first time CTEWC is partnering with another global network and is publishing a collection by authors who are either housing experts or ethicists. The volume is due out this November. In a similar way, The Centre for the Protection of Children, an

initiative that follows the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic church and that is stationed at Rome's Gregorian University, began plans, again with the assistance of CTEWC, to host an international conference called, "Doing Theology in the Faces of the Sexual Abuse Scandal." In March 2020, 100 theologians and ethicists will gather in Rome from across the globe to reflect on the crisis.

At this juncture, we have entered our second generation and the public effectiveness of our network is more and more in evidence. For this reason, our new leadership has called for a meeting in Munich in October 2019 of roughly 50 of the most active members to consider further developments within our network. At the same time, they commissioned from the Center for the Applied Research in the Apostolate an extensive survey of the membership to estimate the effectiveness of our structures and to generate new ideas and programs for the second generation. The survey has been completed and the results will be shared at the Munich meeting.

Through our Planning Committee we have earmarked a number of projects for greater consideration. Among these, Heyer has already begun to redesign our website, to become a more accessible archive for the work of our members and to develop our site's capacity for greater on-line engagement of the "Forum" contributions. Second, we hope to develop our book series to continue to take on concrete issues erupting locally, but known globally, that need to be given a Catholic ethical hearing, like sexual abuse, the collapse of democracies, religious intolerance, and sexual minorities. Third, we want to expand our visiting scholars program. Fourth, in a similar way, we want to see institutions, particularly universities and major seminaries, participating more clearly in our network. For instance, already the Ateneo de Manila and St. Vincent's University in Manila, Dharmarham in Bangalore, Catholic University of East Africa, and Hekima College became hosting institutions for the visiting scholars program. Similarly, Boston College began awarding post-doctoral fellows to the eight African women PhDs and then visiting fellowships to other faculty from the Global South. New York's St. John's University dovetails by hosting some of BC's fellows at their institution, while Trinity College Dublin offered a scholarship to an African woman for PhD studies.

Finally, we are considering two other major projects. First, just as the Europeans decided to bridge-build from Western to Eastern Europe, several leaders from the United States are planning on building border initiatives of solidarity with those in Mexico to respond to the on-going crisis generated by President Donald Trump's own border initiatives in that region. Second, we want to meet more often and effectively to address increasingly urgent issues and we are planning on developing virtual tables that will host continued discussions with committed leaders and members. This might become our most ambitious project, which first emerged at Sarajevo, when younger members proposed that colleagues offer set themes at different tables during our Saturday luncheon. More than 27 different thematic tables were sponsored then on that day. At Munich, we will decide how to sponsor virtually six or seven such tables on major themes like sustainability, economic inequity, global migration, peace-building, and sexual abuse. These tables will meet with some regularity (every six weeks?) with a set chair and members who will decide how they will discuss the issues and what actions they may need to take in light of their meetings. Together with our newsletter and newly revamped website, this final initiative might provide us with a way of deepening our network without having to meet internationally again. We will not know how successful the virtual tables project will be until we try them.

## **6. Assessing Our Work for This Volume**

At the beginning of this essay, I claimed that ethicists need to be better connected and then presented a Catholic instance of nearly twenty years developing on multi-levels a network of connectedness. In a moment, I shall try to highlight the specific lessons we learned in CTEWC, but first I want to return to my general claim in light of having presented the narrative with the many apparent goods that such connectedness yielded.

Our claim that ethicists need to be better connected stands as a witness and as a challenge to how we need to re-envision Christian ethics today. At first sight, this might seem easily valid, but as a matter of fact, the academy and its allies do not readily promote or recognize the merit of such

connectedness. Certainly we know ethicists who believe in the sufficiency of their own ideas, who believe that they do not need to be connected beyond their usual bibliography, their usual academic cohort, or their own locality. Academic publishers support that stance in as much as they show greater interest in publishing and marketing singular authors and their contributions rather than edited collections, and effectively undermine the efforts of connectedness. Similarly, they argue that collections require subventions, while single authored works generally do not. If one asks them why, the response is “sales.” University administrators, too, in their assessments of faculty members’ academic performance, often underestimate the significance of editing collected works; therein again dissuading such work of connecting. The single authorship of a manuscript is incomparable in institutional merit to the work of a faculty member who plans and realizes a conference and then sets about editing in a sophisticated way the subsequent papers for a publication that offers a multi-perspectival read on a singular, but diversely realized, global problematic.

These institutional strategies to promote the individual as individual belong in a very particular way to the humanities faculty member. As Keenan (Keenan 2015) argues at length in *University Ethics: How Colleges Can Build and Benefit from a Culture of Ethics*, the humanities professoriate differs remarkably in its isolated individualism from almost any other type of contemporary professional. While police officers, physicians, nurses, lawyers, financial consultants, and political advisors all work in teams, the humanities professor works alone, writes alone, teaches alone, and holds their own singular office hours. The dissertation as the capstone entry into the professoriate is marked usually by two to three years of extraordinarily solitary labor and is unlike any other professional entry qualification. Not all university faculty work this way. Today, in university labs, faculty members in the sciences research together with their students and other colleagues and publish collectively authored papers routinely. While being connected is self-evident to most other professionals and even other faculty like scientists and social scientists, only the humanities faculty and their administrators and publishers need an argument for being connected. It was therefore not surprising that, at that Roman dinner with which I began this narrative, none of the four faculty teaching at institutions within a kilometer of each other had ever met during their more than 15 years of work there.

For nearly one hundred years, we have known from sociologists like Karl Mannheim, that research needs to be multi-perspectival. Today, in the field of ethics, we know that the two most challenging global tasks, climate change and migration, have no real singular privileged viewpoint. We cannot credibly address climate change without the research coming from the varied populations affected by climate change locally. Similarly, we cannot appreciate the overwhelming challenges of migration without understanding the multitudinous reasons for why more than 60 million people are now on the move.

Just as we need to be connected in order to understand the issues, we need to be connected to act responsively to these issues, for the end of all ethical investigations is to act. In his terrifying introduction to the *Future of Ethics*, Willis Jenkins (Jenkins 2013, p. 1) writes “Ethics seems imperiled by unprecedented problems. The accelerating expansion of human power generates problems that exceed the competency of our laws, our institutions, and even our concepts. What does justice mean for climate change, a problem in which humans from many nations, traditions, and generations find themselves collectively responsible for how a planetary system will function over centuries?” Indeed, now more than ever, we realize the inevitable importance of connection. And so, this essay is an invitation to hear the urgent summons to connect as the very first step to re-envisioning Christian ethics.

Yet, now let me conclude with what we learned from hearing that summons in 2003. From our first meeting until today, as we prepare for our strategy meeting in Munich in October 2019, we have grown consistently as a network of Catholic theological ethicists, influencing theological inquiry across the world and throughout the local churches. More than anything, we grew organically, trying always to expand our connectedness throughout the world and, in particular, throughout the extensive Global South. We have, through it all, avoided any formal memberships, while rotating frequently regional directors, forum writers, planning committee members. We have always

attended to newly emerging junior scholars and remote or isolated colleagues, while deeply committed to the global struggles to provide platforms, especially for women to express their own voices and have them heard. Though fundraising has been essential, what guarantees our success is that we have worked and deliberated collectively.

We have re-envisioned Christian ethics interpersonally in praxis. We have created contexts for encounter and engagement, whether through our international or regional conferences, our forum and newsletter, our visiting professors program, or our book series. In each context, we have sought to expand and deepen the connectedness of our network while sharing insights, methods, and challenges. Our first volume on feminism, for instance, was edited by Hogan from Ireland and Orobator from Nigeria and the contributors whom they invited into the project represented a diversity that most discussions on even feminism have not been able to realize. Similarly, our work on sustainability and resource extraction took us from islands in the Pacific to the heart of Africa. Those contributors, in turn, became involved in our conferencing.

Yet we wonder whether we should continue with large-scale conferencing or whether we should construct more frequent encounters in virtual reality. After three major international conferences, we wonder whether we can transition into these virtual connections. Yet, what other choice do we have when, as ethicists, we find it hard to validate a conference that has 600 international flights? We know we have to connect and we hope that, after 16 years of building the network, we might be able to try more ecologically ethical strategies to meet and work together. That is why we are going with a small group to Munich.

Now, we find ourselves connecting with other networks, while becoming more virtual in our praxis. We still continue to connect as Catholic ethicists, though each of us is connected to regional guilds and networks that are ecumenical or even inter-religious, whether through the Society of Christian Ethics, *Societas Ethica*, the Circle of Women in Africa, or the Ecclesia of Women in Asia. This Catholicism is what we try to embody, a Vatican II Catholicism that appreciates the global or universal, but realizes that it is only understood and alive in the local. And in that, our network has quite an affinity to the on-going reforms of Pope Francis, who raises up continuously the local church so as to understand its universal Catholicism.

Still, we ethicists are not solely mindful of our church. We realize that, in a world like ours where political powers and movements are avowedly anti-bridge-building, particularly in considering the Global South, we believe that we are on the right path of envisioning Christian Ethics for these troubled times. And while we might not have a fixed vision or a set method of what our world should become, we at least know that our interlocutors are now available in nearly every corner of the world precisely so that in these trying times we can together teach, publish and act effectively, collectively, and ethically. And perhaps in that solidarity, we can offer a model and a vision that is not often seen.

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