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**The Third International Conference of Catholic
Theological Ethics in the World Church (CTEWC)**

**A CRITICAL TIME FOR BRIDGE-
BUILDING: CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL
ETHICS TODAY**

Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 26-29 July 2018

“We are called to recognize every sign and mobilize all our energy in order to remove the walls of division and to build bridges of fraternity everywhere in the world,” said Pope Francis in a letter addressed to the participants of the international conference of moral theologians held at Sarajevo from 26 to 29 July 2018.

The conference, “A Critical Time for Bridge-Building: Catholic Theological Ethics Today,” was the third international conference organized by Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church (CTEWC). About 500 moral theologians from 78 countries from all the five continents participated in it. The conference focused on the urgent crises facing the international community, namely global ecological crisis, the refugee crisis, and the lack of political leadership to address these issues, and the need of global solidarity to address these issues through building bridges between nations, cultures and religions. The conference, which had about 40 keynote and plenary papers, above 100 concurrent session papers and 120 academic posters was an opportunity not only to critically evaluate the present crisis, but also to try to address the issues through renewed hope and committed action in solidarity.

The choice of Sarajevo as the venue of the conference was particularly meaningful. Sarajevo is the capital city of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a Muslim majority country. The city of Sarajevo can be literally called a city of bridges because of the number of bridges across the river Miljacka that passes through the city. During the

siege of Sarajevo (5 April 1992 to 29 February 1996), the Catholics stood by the Muslims. During the siege, which is the longest of a capital city in modern times, thousands of people were killed. The signs of the siege can be seen even now – marks of shelling in old buildings, ‘Sarajevo Roses,’ namely marking places where three or more people were killed, etc. However, after the siege, it became a model of peace building, without hatred or animosity or retaliation. The Christians and Jews live peacefully in this Muslim majority country, enjoying equality and religious freedom. Thus, the city can be said to be an icon of bridge building – a meeting place of East and West, of different cultures and religions. Different initiatives have helped in peace building after the siege. For example, “Youth for Peace,” a network of youth belonging to different religions, has been working for peace building and they were actively involved in the organization of the conference in Sarajevo. In the words of James F. Keenan, the co-chair of CTEWC, “Sarajevo offered three important contexts for reflection – peace building in the aftermath of ethnic conflict; interreligious and cross-cultural dialogue in a predominantly Muslim city (85 percent); and economic struggle (40 percent unemployment).”

Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church (CTEWC) (<http://www.catholicethics.com/>) was born in 2002 under the initiative of Fr James Keenan, SJ, renowned moral theologian and professor at Boston College, USA. Following a series of planning committee meetings, the first international conference was held in Padua in 2006, in which more than 400 moral theologians participated. In the second international conference in Trento in 2010, more than 650 moral theologians participated. A series of regional conferences also were organized: Nairobi (2012), Berlin (2013), Krakow (2014), Bangalore (2015) and Bogota (2016). James Keenan and Linda Hogan (Ireland) were the co-chairs of CTEWC and for the Sarajevo conference Kristin Heyer (USA) also joined as the co-chair. Besides three of them, Andrea Vicini (Italy/USA) and representatives from different continents and a local team under the leadership of Darko Tomasevic worked together to organize the conference in Sarajevo.

Antonio Autiero (Germany/Italy), one of the speakers of the first plenary sessions of the conference emphasized that theologians need to network “to overcome the self-referentiality of our individual visions and to develop the fundamental attitude of dialogue and of openness to the theological vision of the other person.” According to him, if we do not network, we prevent

plurality from “becoming shared riches.” A rich array of internationally recognized theologians, as well as junior scholars including doctoral students presented papers and participated in the conference, showing an important aspect of networking, namely, between generations. Most of those who presented papers began reflecting on their particular context and tried to identify similar trends and contexts elsewhere and showed the need of networking.

From the beginning, CTEWC stated its mission as: “Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church (CTEWC) recognizes 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.” This mission was even more emphatically put into practice in the Sarajevo conference. More than half of the participants were from the global South. From Asia, there were about 100 participants. This emphasis on the global South was also clear in the selection of plenary speakers. “Changes in the global climate have been occurring naturally, across centuries and millennia... Now we have realized that humankind’s activities are significantly accelerating this process by increasing the atmospheric concentration of heat-trapping gases (Green House Gases, GHGs),” said George Kodithottam, speaking on “The Climate Crisis and its Impact on the Environment and Marginalized Populations in the Indian Subcontinent.” He argued that developing nations should have a grater role in the international institutions where the broader questions surrounding climate change are shaped.

Voices of women theologians were clearly heard at the conference. Many women from all the continents addressed the conference. Sr. Vimala Chenginimattam (India) pointed out that, “Moral theology can become rather contradictory if it does not develop from both genders.” Narrating the story of her journey as the first woman moral theologian from India, she invited moral theologians “to reach out and tackle ethical problems like internal and external violence against girls and women, human trafficking, sexual objectification, etc.” Zorica Maros, a laywoman from the university of Sarajevo said, “Sincere dialogue is not just a method of thinking, but also becomes a way of being... Ethics, just like the bridge, is a symbol of human victory over the forces of nature.”

In his homily during the mass for the Conference participants, Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago pointed out that “in *Evangelii Gaudium*... Pope Francis makes clear that there is no magisterium which is not social, because it is in the lived life of people that God works and manifests himself, especially in the dynamic of human

relationships.” He also emphasised that moral theologians should empower “people to trust in their ability, in their creative capacity to bring about transformation.” (The Cardinal could not arrive in time for the mass, since his flight was delayed; the homily was read by James Keenan; Cardinal Cupich joined the conference later). Besides Cardinal Cupich, Cardinal Vinko Puljic of Sarajevo and Cardinal Peter Turkson, head of the Vatican’s Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, took part in the conference and addressed the participants.

Charles E. Curran (USA), highlighted the phrase ‘Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation,’ to deal with contemporary moral problems such as corruption, ecological devastation, and climate change. Based on classical moral theology and Catholic Social Thought, citing various examples from history, he proposed three basic principles for action: “1) It is not enough just to determine whether an act is right or wrong, but there is a need to make what is right more present in our society. 2) The consideration of the morality of acts is not enough. Attention must be given to the person who can bring about change. 3) Other actors based on the principle of subsidiarity.” Curran emphasised that “to carry out the work of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation we need committed individuals, mediating institutions, voluntary associations, and government. But, all these actors need to try to overcome the sinful social structures that support many of the problems facing society today.”

Kenneth Himes (USA) invited the moral theologians to utilize the Catholic political imagination “to challenge political crises generated by the rise of populist demagogues,” particularly those who misuse religion. Elias Omondi Opongo (Kenya) underscored the importance of peace building.

Linda Hogan (Ireland) called for a politics that “unites rather than divides.” Pablo Blanco (Argentina), one of the speakers of the concluding plenary called the participants to say ‘no’ “to an economy of exclusion and the new idolatry of money; to a financial system that rules rather than serves; to inequality that spawns violence; to selfishness and spiritual sloth; to sterile pessimism; to spiritual worldliness; to the surrender to cultural imperialism; and to the tragic banality of contemporary political leadership in too many countries”; and to say ‘yes’ “to a new relationship brought by Christ; to safeguard human dignity and creation; to join men and women committed to truth, justice, solidarity and peace; in summary, to say ‘yes’ to a ‘bridge-building’ theological ethics.”

Besides, listening to scholars from various contexts, the conference was a God-given opportunity for moral theologians from different continents to meet others not only from other continents, but also from their own continents who are otherwise not well-connected. A deep conviction of the need to network and to explore ways and means to network was visible in the participants.

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