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INSeCT (International Network of Societies for Catholic Theology) De Paul University, Chicago June 14-16, 2011

The Rapidly Changing Global Context:

In the past fifty years the world population of Catholics has doubled. At the same time, the centre of gravity in the Catholic world has shifted from Western Europe to the Southern Hemisphere. The largest concentrations of Catholics live today in Brazil, the Philippines, and Mexico. Even more remarkably, the Vatican Yearbook reports that the Catholic population of Africa has increased by 33% in the past decade alone. By the year 2050, it is expected that fully 70% of Catholics will reside in the global south. These are signs of the health and vitality of global Catholicism.

With these rapid transitions come many new and often unanticipated challenges. While the number of Catholics worldwide has increased, the overall number of priests has declined. Today almost one quarter of all Catholic parishes do not have a resident pastor. Despite an impressive increase in seminary enrollments in Asia and Africa, churches in these regions do not have the capacity to meet the pastoral needs of a fast growing community. Lay women and men are taking on a significant share of work in the ministries of pastoral care, catechesis, and theological education.

These trends all have an impact on the pastoral task of theology in the service to the church, and on theological education in particular. Seminaries and theological schools now dedicate much of their resources to the education and formation of lay students.

As Catholicism sets deeper roots in a rich diversity of cultural contexts, we witness a flourishing of new contextual theologies. Such theologies are born from the effort to recover forgotten voices and to encourage a genuine inculturation of the gospel message. In many cases, they have nourished a renewed sense of agency among the local churches. Yet, in many regards, their fruits have yet to enrich the catholicity of the whole church's theological reflection.

Demographic and cultural shifts in global Catholicism are occurring against the horizon of seismic shifts in world populations and global economic development. An unprecedented migration of peoples is giving rise to urban societies marked by increasing religious pluralism and rising numbers of those of "no religious affiliation." Within

this changing context Catholic theology seeks to dialogue with other traditions, with contemporary culture, and other sciences as listener, learner, and as one among many voices (Gaudium et Spes 62).

A Need for Theological Reflection:

Against the background of these trends, INSeCT (International Network of Societies for Catholic Theology) desires to gather together representatives from its member societies, associate members, and other communities of Catholic theologians worldwide. Each representative is invited to report on the face of Catholicism is changing in their specific context, and on how these and other global trends are influencing the profile and location of the Catholic theological community, and the work of theological education. Participants are invited to prepare a brief report on trends in theology within their specific context. It is our hope that through this collegial exchange we might begin to identify more clearly a number of specific challenges affecting the future of Catholic theological scholarship and education and begin to consider some appropriate responses.

Elements of the Program:

Dr. Bryan Froehle, co-author of *Global Catholicism: Portrait of a World Church*, (Maryknoll, 2003), will introduce our theme and will assist us by preparing an instrument to generate a more precise demographic profile of the member societies of INSeCT. The results of this survey will be made available on the INSeCT website and assist us in sketching a portrait of Catholic theologians today. The regional reports presented by participants in the colloquium will be posted on the INSeCT website where they can serve as a resource for others who are interested in trends in Catholic theology today.