

INSeCT Executive 2011 – 2014

Minutes of the visit of the INSeCT Steering Committee to the Ivory Coast

June 25 – July 1, 2012

(Profs Conway, da Silva, Clifford)

Catherine Clifford, Valmor da Silva and Eamonn Conway met in Abidjan from June 25th to July 1 2012. Until then, despite being an International Network, all meetings of the Council, since its inception in the 1990s, had taken place in the USA, and all meetings of the Executive had taken place in either the USA or Europe. This Executive decided that it would make a definitive option for promoting and developing the Network in countries and regions thus far under-represented by holding its meetings elsewhere. The mission and vision of INSeCT is clearly to be a place of encounter between theology societies globally and this now demands active engagement with the southern hemisphere.

An active supporter of the Network, Prof Gaston Ogui, a native of Benin, and who teaches at the *Universite Catholique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest* (UCAO) in Abidjan agreed to be our host. Apart from conducting our own business we had an opportunity to visit a number of other theological institutes in the area and to meet with several theologians. See Appendix 2 to this letter for further information. Please note that this, and all meetings of the Executive, was undertaken at no expense to INSeCT member Societies.

We learned first hand the struggle that theologians in Africa have to try to meet regularly and to share their research. We felt strongly that INSeCT has an important role to play in facilitating and challenging member Societies to support and engage with their colleagues in other continents. We will be bringing a number of concrete proposals in this regard to the next Council meeting.

We were graciously welcomed by Dr. Gaston Ogui, Professor of the Université catholique de l'Afrique de l'ouest, and stayed as guests of the Regional Episcopal Conference of West Africa (CERAO/RECOWA), Abidjan. The following is a detailed account of the visit.

Tuesday, June 26 2012

Meeting with Patrice Jean Aké, Vice-President of the *Université catholique de l'Afrique de l'ouest* (UCAO), followed by a discussion with members and students of the faculty of theology, and a festive lunch with professors of the faculty. During conversation with the professors, we learned of the initiative to establish the Association for Theology in Africa (ATA), through the leadership of Yaouvi Nathanaël Soédé (UCAO).

In the afternoon, Gaston brought us to the disadvantaged area of Port Boué, to meet a Brazilian community of Claretian sisters who live and work there to provide schooling and life skills training for young women.

These meetings gave us some appreciation for the great challenges faced by colleagues in the Ivory Coast to carry out their work with very limited resources and in a context of great political tension, and thus reinforced the commitment of the Executive to helping INSeCT be more at the service of the Global South.

Wednesday, June 27 2012

Our driver and guide, Tony, took us on a four hour ride over 260 kms. of rough winding roads into the interior of the country and the city of Yomoussoukro. We travelled north of the city to the Dominican Institut Saint Thomas d'Aquin, a small monastery on 50 hectares of land in the countryside. Friars Cyril and Modeste spoke of the SANKOFA Center for the Study and Research on the Theology of Development, affiliated with the Faculty of Theology at the Université catholique de l'Afrique de l'ouest. The Centre offers a number of first cycle courses to complement the course of study given in Abidjan, and a Master's program with a concentration in development studies. It was interesting to see the effort of the Dominican Institute to integrate the rich tradition of Catholic social teaching across the cursus of study. More interesting was the friars' effort to live by these same principles and provide a living model of sustainable development by becoming self-subsistent organic farmers themselves.

Visits to the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Foundation, the presidential residence and the campus of a polytechnical school in the area. These grand symbols of Houphouët-Boigny's aspiration for the country struck a note of discord with us against the backdrop of the daily struggle of the majority people.

Thursday, June 28 2012

Mass at the Notre Dame de la Paix Basilica and return to Abidjan.

Business meeting of the Steering Committee: reflections on our visit thus far, looking ahead to Brazil 2013 (Steering Committee and SOTER annual meeting) and 2014 (Triennial Network Council meeting).

Friday, June 29 2012

Visit to the *Institut théologique de la Campagne de Jésus* (ITCJ), and conversation with Victor Adangba, SJ, Rector (ITCJ), Yvon Elenga, SJ, Prefect of Studies (ITCJ), and Edoh Bedjra, Rector of the Centre de formation missionnaire d'Abidjan (CEMA).

Visit and lunch with Sister Lucia, a Brazilian missionary, who shared with us her ministry of care for newly born children, orphaned at birth.

Afternoon visit to the Centre de recherche et d'action pour la paix (CERAP) in the quarter of Cocody; documentation centre, the publishing house of Les Éditions du CERAP, and conversation with, among others, Hyacinthe Loua, SJ, Director, Adou Kevin, Secretary General.

Return to the Université catholique d'Afrique de l'ouest for a conversation with Joseph, librarian and Dean of Philosophy, regarding library and online resources.

Saturday, June 30 2012

Morning Business meeting of the Steering Committee at CERAO.

Afternoon visit to local artisan village, and final dinner with Gaston Ogui.

Sunday, July 1 2012

Mass in local parish community, lunch at CERAO and departures.

Please note that this meetings of the Executive was held at no expense to INSeCT.