INSeCT Research Project 2014–2017

A QUESTION OF GENDER JUSTICE: 
THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING 
IN DIFFERENT AREAS OF CHURCH AND SOCIETY

Background

The International Network of Societies for Catholic Theology (INSeCT) has launched a three-year global research project, its fourth such project.

The delegates at the INSeCT Council meeting of July 2014 in Belo Horizonte unanimously decided on the topic “A question of gender justice: the role of women in decision-making in different areas of church and society”, seeing it as the logical follow-up from the previous topic (“The nature, function and location of theology, with particular attention to the power of theology to overcome power abuse in church and society”). Today’s global challenges – poverty, violence, war, ecological disasters, and human rights violations resulting from ethnic, religious, and gender discrimination – all especially affect women. Gender issues, therefore, require the special attention of the church and all disciplines of theology.

The issue

INSeCT wants to take up the call of Pope Francis who, in Evangelii Gaudium (nos. 103-104), urged theologians to contribute to an up-to-date theology of women:

*I readily acknowledge that many women share pastoral responsibilities with priests, helping to guide people, families and groups and offering new contributions to theological reflection. But we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church. Because “the feminine genius is needed in all expressions in the life of society, the presence of women must also be guaranteed in the workplace”¹ and in the various other settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures. [...] This presents a great challenge for pastors and theologians, who are in a position to recognize more fully what this entails with regard to the possible role of women in decision-making in different areas of the Church’s life.*

Of course there is much discussion today about the concept of “the feminine”. Further, it is impossible to redefine the role of women in church and society without also discussing the role of men. So our task will include a broad theological discussion on sex and gender. We are aware that the arguments about gender are highly controversial, within the church as well as in non-Christian and secular contexts.

Within the Catholic Church there is a tendency to lump all gender theories together and label them “ideological”. In response to this tendency, an open, differentiated discussion is essential, because the refusal to engage in open dialogue and discourse is itself ideological.

Gender justice, gender equality, and the basic human rights of men and women are key questions for a worldwide ethical discussion, especially with regard to the role of religion(s) in society. The commitment to gender justice and equality requires further sociological, anthropological, and theological reflection. As theologians we are challenged to make a contribution, all the more because this is a precondition to “recognize more fully what this entails with regard to the possible role of women in decision-making in different areas of the Church’s life” (EG 104).

So INSeCT encourages all its member societies to engage in open and diverse discussion about this topic, with an open mind, an unambiguous option for the underprivileged, and a clear outlook on particular regional and historical contexts.

Some possible topics have been suggested at the INSeCT Council meeting:

- **Biblical perspectives:**
  - from Gen 1:27 to Gal 3:28
  - the ministry of women in the first church communities
- **Anthropological perspectives:**
  - steps towards a truly inclusive and gender-just theological anthropology
  - the place, role, and function of women in the various local cultural traditions
- **Christological perspectives on women as imago Christi; consequences for the role of women in church and society**
- **Perspectives on Mariology and the role of women in church and society**
- **Ecclesiological perspectives: possible future (new) roles for women in the church**
- **Institutional perspectives: a gender sensitive reflection on decision making processes in church and society**
- **The Bishops’ Synod on the Family: (new) perspectives on the role of women in the family**
Theoretical perspectives on gender: The dispute about gender and ideology; a deep and differentiated exploration of gender studies

Please feel free to come up with your own suggestions.

Networking

We ask each member society of our Network to interpret and respond to the research project in a way that is relevant to their specific regional contexts. The results will be presented at INSeCT’s next Council meeting in the summer of 2017. Following the suggestion of the Network Council, we will aim towards a large congress on this issue one or two years after the Council meeting.

We suggest that each member society nominates a person to promote and coordinate research projects within its own theological society and keep in contact with the respective delegates of the other societies.

In order to promote an interpersonal as well as interdisciplinary and international exchange, you are asked to share information about your publications on this issue, on academic research projects or conferences

- at the Webpage of INSeCT (http://insecttheology.wordpress.com) sending an e-mail to insecttheology@gmail.com
- or posting on Facebook https://www.facebook.com/groups/insecttheology (if you are a member of a theological member society of INSeCT, but not yet a member of the INSeCT Facebook group, feel free to join it).

We look forward to an interesting, fruitful debate and exchange of ideas and research results!

With kind regards on behalf of the Steering Committee,

Martin M. Lintner
President of INSeCT

Brixen/Bressanone – Italy, October 2014