

Theologians come together to promote a united and diverse América

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(Translation by Suzana Regina Moreira)

As an outcome of the Ecclesia in America International Seminar, an open network between North and South American theologians arises to address the challenges of the continent with a broader view from mutual enrichment between Latin American and Hispanic theology.

If politics and the economy place barriers between North America and Latin America, theology seeks to build bridges and open roads. From October 16 to 18, in Rio de Janeiro, a seminar was held to celebrate the twenty years of the apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, in order to update the invitation of St. John Paul II: to identify “all that is common to the peoples of the continent, including their shared Christian identity and their genuine attempt to strengthen the bonds of solidarity and communion.” (*Ecclesia in America*, 5).

The event was held by Cátedra Carlo Maria Martini and the Theology Department of the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio, Brazil), who warmly and thoughtfully welcomed the attendants. Representing CELAM, Fr. Ronald La Barrera participated, the vice-rector of CEBITEPAL. Several attendants were from theological institutions like the Centro Teológico Manuel Larraín, Sociedad Argentina de Teología, SOTER, Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS), Catholic Theological Society of America and the Equipo de Antropología Trinitaria of CELAM.

The working group was composed of 30 theologians, from 8 countries in the Americas, between 35 and 88 years old, and from various theological areas. Based on a methodology that prioritized dialogue and mutual knowledge, leaving aside keynote presentations and opting for activations by a Latin American representative and an American Latino, the seminar was able to take the pulse of the reflection on the experience of God in América.

The topics addressed, which favored a great exchange and communion, were: Theological methods; Pastoral and formative methods; Approaches to the teaching of Pope Francis; Women and feminism; Ecology and theology; Cultures and interculturality; Inter-religious dialogue; Decolonial theology and native peoples; Credibility of the Church in América; Future of Latin American theology in the US and the theology of Latin America.

The dialogue and communion exercise allowed us to identify common concerns beyond theological diversity, such as the loss of sociocultural relevance of the Church, the serious consequences of the neoliberal and technoscientific system, the challenging pluralism that grows and is adopted from polarization and traditionalism.

It was also possible to identify joint consensus paths to reflect on: the option for those excluded from the system, to adopt the paradigmatic change of integral ecology, to move towards a true ecclesial synodality. All this work allowed us to plan for the articulation to strengthen the theological work. A promising way opens up to promote a theological movement that breathes the same spirit that runs through all of América while keeping the contextual specificities and richness.

With the journey and wisdom of life that characterizes him, Fr. Juan Carlos Scannone described what he lived and reflected during the three days of intense work: *“The reality of América is polyhedral, we are one and at the same time different. It is important to strengthen not only the unity of Latin America and the Caribbean but of América. There is something typical of América that differentiates us from Europeans.”* The Jesuit continued by stating that *“this meeting represents something new and different to other similar events. It hasn’t been something merely*

academic and, at the same time, something emerges strongly that challenges us: the issue of difference and of those below. We are not peripheries, because we are the academy. We can place our service there where there is wisdom of life, the future of new life that arises from below. From here can be born a seed of university response at the service of the mission of the Church, in favor of the cry of the earth and of the poor.”