

THEOLOGY IN SOUTH AMERICA

To most theologians in North America and Europe, South America is as well known as the heart of Africa. For many reasons the work of the South Americans has not reached the attention of students in other parts. Moreover the South American conditions imposed on intellectual activities of a more abstract nature are not sufficiently propitious to make a significant contribution probable. In consequence the last edition of Ueberweg's objective and accurate history of philosophy in its five volumes dismisses all of Latin America with a single meagre paragraph.¹ However, since the publication of that work in 1928, South America, especially in Buenos Aires, has shown that it must be reckoned with, when philosophical discussions are in order.

What has it done in theology? Obviously, Catholicism has had much to do with the formation of South American *mores* and *Weltanschauung*. Great saints loved and labored in the southern continent. St. Peter Claver worked among the negro slaves in what is today Colombia. Blessed Mariana of Jesus hallowed the Quito of her time. St. Toribio, St. Rose of Lima, St. Francis Solano and Blessed Martín de Porres were contemporaries in sixteenth-century Lima, the metropolis of colonial Spanish America. Sainly missionaries found the martyr's death in Brazil, Chile, and Argentina. Catholicism not only erected monuments of sanctity, but also built temples of learning. The University of San Marcos, the oldest university in the new world, antedating anything in the United States, is no longer a Catholic university, but it was founded by the Church. The Church also founded many other universities, most of which have disappeared, though some still thrive under other auspices, for example, the University of San Felipe, which today is a flourishing institution known as the University of Chile. These universities were centers of theology; for in colonial times university activity was principally dedicated to divinity and law.

Obviously, then, South America had a theological tradition. What is left of it, and what does it produce? First of all, it must be admitted that South American theology, whether of yesterday or today, has made no transcendental contribution; on the other hand, it has not been reduced to sterile stagnation. No great movements can be discerned, although genuine life is evident in many places. Hardly any South American name rings familiar to northern theologians, though Penido of Brazil, by reason of his

¹ Cf. *Friedrich Ueberwegs Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie* (12th ed., Leipzig, 1928), V, 414.

study of analogy is an author recognized by modern scholars;² however, this theologian is identified with the University of Fribourg rather than with South America.

It is the aim of this short article to indicate the best known centers of theology, where serious work is being done and where we find an earnest effort to reach high levels of scholarship. The writer speaks in terms of an extended experience in Latin America, but all experience is limited and the continent is vast. Hence it may readily be that some center will not be mentioned, though it merits consideration. It should also be borne in mind that this survey contemplates South America alone and excludes Central America altogether.

Beginning in the extreme north, we find a theological center in the faculty of theology of the Universidad Javeriana at Bogotá in Colombia. As a matter of fact, this faculty is little more than the house of studies of the Colombian province of the Society of Jesus, under whose guidance the whole university is conducted. The faculty does not publish an exclusively theological journal, but the *Revista Javeriana* carries articles on theology and allied sciences. Among other able professors at this University, it would be fair to mention Fathers Luís Carlos Ramírez, S.J., Vicente Andrade, S.J. and Efrein Zuluaga, S.J.

Below Colombia along the west coast lies Ecuador. The usual seminaries exist, but we find no center of theology, though there is a vital group anxious to found a faculty of theology in Quito, and Dr. Manuel Paz of Guayaquil and Father Julio Armijos, S.J., of Quito are enthusiastic promoters of the project; both men are trained theologians. In Peru, the next republic to the south, the faculty of theology of the ancient University of San Marcos is identified with the Lima seminary. Ever since the constitution *Deus Scientiarum Dominus*, this faculty, which is empowered to give pontifical degrees, has been striving to rise to the level of true scholarly activity, and its teaching corps is made up of professors of many nations. They are confronted with many difficulties, but their efforts merit praise. Without wishing to ignore other good men connected with this group, yet we cannot pass by without mentioning Dr. Noriega, who has shown great promise.

The next country to the south is Chile, where the greatest zeal for theological work is found. This is due to the foundation of the faculty of theology of the Catholic University of Chile in Santiago in 1935. Here are gathered teachers from all over the world, and the students, both secular and regular, come from all parts of the country and beyond. In 1940 the faculty

² M. T-L. Penido, *Le rôle de l'analogie en théologie dogmatique* (Paris, 1931).

founded a review (for the time being, annual) under the title *Los Anales de la Facultad de Teología*.³ The articles are serious essays, labors of sacrifice for the writers who are overwhelmed with work of all kinds. Of this group one must single out Msgr. Eduardo Escudero, one of the ablest theologians of South America, the brilliant canonist Dr. Carlos Hamilton, and the younger men of promise: Father Francisco Clodius, P.S.M., Father Julio Jiménez, S. J., Fray Agustín Martínez, O.E.S.A., Fray Pedro Moure, O.P., and Fray Eduardo Rosales, O.F.M.

Next to Chile, over the Andes, lies Argentina, the wealthiest and most imposing of all the southern republics. It should not be surprising to find there a center of theology, and it is less surprising to find it near Buenos Aires, the most progressive and elegant city of South America. This center is dual but it can be considered as one, because the professors of both institutions are in large part the same men; I refer to the diocesan seminary of Villa Devoto and the Colegio Máximo of San José at San Miguel.⁴ Both institutions have the right to give pontifical degrees and both prepare students for the doctorate. The teachers are mostly Argentinians and they are interested in publications. There exists a project of publishing various philosophical and theological works under the enthusiastic direction of Father Ismael Quiles, S.J. Although there is no exclusively theological journal connected with this group, yet its members publish theological articles in *Ciencia y Fe*, a review of a more general character.⁵ The men of this group include Fathers Jorge Sily, S.J., Fernando Pérez-Acosta, S.J., and Vicente Alonso, S.J. When speaking of Argentinian theology, we must not omit the name of Dr. Juan Sépich, who is one of the leading intellectuals of the republic and who has published theological works. Dr. Juan Straubinger, likewise, is making serious contributions through the medium of a biblical review which he himself founded.⁶ Neither of these two men is connected with the San Miguel group. An interesting theological phenomenon is the Buenos Aires Institute of Theology for laywomen, where the name of Father Gaynor, P.S.M., is prominent, and where formal integrated courses of theology are given to women who throng to the institution. There likewise exist the *Cursos de Cultura Católica* for men, where something similar is done. Buenos Aires manifests a decided theological ferment.

³ It is a publication of the general *Revista Universitaria*, Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago, Chile.

⁴ This institution is the scholasticate for the Jesuit students from Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, Chile, and Peru.

⁵ *Ciencia y Fe*, a quarterly review, organ of the faculties of theology and philosophy of the Colegio Máximo de San José, San Miguel, Argentina.

⁶ *Revista Bíblica*, a monthly review, La Plata, Argentina.

One cannot conclude without saying a word about Brazil. Seminaries function, of course, but it is impossible to name a center where theological investigation is a fervent and prominent reality. But one cannot omit the name of Father Joseph Mors, S.J., whose series of theological handbooks has given satisfaction in many parts of the world, a testimony to the merits of its author, who is professor of dogma in the Jesuit theologate situated at São Leopoldo in Rio Grande do Sul. Perhaps the still youthful Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro will develop to include a faculty of theology which could become a nursery for the future theologians of Brazil.⁷

The foregoing survey was interested only in institutions where theology is cultivated along strictly scientific lines. Naturally there are many seminaries in South America, frequently conducted by European religious. However, such schools are rarely interested in divinity *per se* and a complete catalogue of such houses would be a labor foreign to the scope of this study.

Our slim report necessarily raises certain questions. First of all, from the data given, it is evident that theological work is being done. Since this is so, why is it not better known? Secondly, what is the quality of the work produced, for it is impossible to conceive a center of study without some kind of production that can be objectively evaluated?

The answer to the first question is not difficult. Except for *Los Anales* of the theological faculty of the Catholic University of Chile, I know of no organ dedicated exclusively to theological studies. The result is that South American efforts have no known vehicle of communication that is formally and exclusively a theological journal. Besides, the Southern theologians do not publish much, nor do they leave the continent often enough or in sufficient numbers to become known to their colleagues elsewhere. In consequence, the rest of the world is quite in the dark as to what is being done under the Southern Cross.

This makes the second question more urgent. What are they doing and what is the value of their labors? In general, the South American theologians are doing spade work. For them the pursuit of theology is a difficult mission, to which they cannot give their best. The number of full-time professors of the sacred sciences is not great, and many who are considered full-time teachers, really do much work in other fields. The scientific training of the leading theologians makes them apt lecturers on cultural subjects and popular teachers in other branches. As a result they lecture on much that is not theology. The lack of priests which is a woeful phenom-

⁷ There exist two important reviews that carry many articles on theology: *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira*, a quarterly review, published by the Franciscans, Petrópolis, Brazil; and *Vozes de Petrópolis*, Petrópolis, Brazil.

enon of the South American scene forces the theologians to engage in the multiple works of the sacerdotal ministry, and take leading parts in the intellectual movements of Catholics. They are also spiritual guides, preachers, and retreat-masters. Most of the theologians are engulfed in a profusion of external activity, which makes quiet and constant study all but impossible. The result is that if they write, they themselves are not satisfied with their product, because they know that sufficient study has not entered into their work.

Likewise, all attempts at investigation are hampered by the lack of organization of the instruments of research. Over the vast continent are scattered many interesting and valuable books. However, to find them requires a patient and expensive search, which may lead to some far away *convento* up in the mountains where the book needed lies hidden on the dusty shelves of an ill-kept library. The best theological library that I know in South America is in San Miguel. The library at Chapinero, Bogotá, thanks to the zeal of Father Juan María Restrepo, S.J., whose death in 1944 was a loss to theological progress in South America, is an adequate workshop. If we can judge from the excellence of the Dominican library in the *Recoleta* of Santiago, Chile, the Dominican libraries elsewhere should be good, especially in their central house of studies in Cuzco, Peru. But these older libraries lack the modern works that are so necessary for the theologian of today.

Even if the books are found and the study finally terminated, the theologian will have great difficulties with publishers and the press. The ordinary publishing houses, even when under Catholic auspices, are not interested in scholarly work, which appeals to so small a public. In the vast majority of South American cities it will be impossible to find Greek and Hebrew type, and if by merest chance it be found, it will not be the size desired. The mere printing of Latin is no easy chore, in a world where Latin is not well known. Finally it is one thing to learn the proper presentation of a printed work in the class of methodology, and quite a different thing to make this understood by the printer who is not accustomed to such demands. All these difficulties make the sheer physical production of literary labor an heroic endeavor.

The psychological obstacles are also immense. The evolution of South American culture makes the present-day *Sudamericano* disinclined to metaphysical penetration. Even detailed historical investigation according to the norms of strict scientific method is not congenial to his mind. He likes to paint with a large brush in order to present a general and rapid survey in colors and lines easily assimilated by a mind impressed only by the palpable concrete. He has a nice sense of dialectics, but he uses his gift in

legalistic polemics or passionate criticism rather than in philosophic meditation. He is highly intelligent but he has greater faith in spontaneous intuitions than in detailed analytical thought. The result is that even when a spirit of investigation is inculcated into young men, their environment is rather disdainful of their labors. One practical consequence of this attitude is that no money will be devoted to scholarship, and the theologians, who rarely have adequate incomes or supporting foundations, are thus deprived of the financial means required for their research.

In the light of these observations, the former question returns: what are the South American theologians doing? The answer is that they are accomplishing effectively an ungrateful task; they are proposing with vigor and efficiency the meaning of theological scholarship and the need of it, and arousing vocations to it on the part of many of their students. The classes are imbued with this spirit; the lectures are constructed to illustrate this truth; students are directed toward scholarly habits and procedure. A consciousness is being awakened everywhere in favor of a vital, progressive, and scientific theology. The old ideal of knowing by memory what the text-book says and confounding such knowledge with theological insight is rapidly giving way to the recognition that theology is a living thing that can be grasped only by a faithful and laborious meditation of the various sources of faith, according to a rigorous scientific method. As the first fruits of the efforts of the theologians, we note among the students a deep appreciation for theological work and an enthusiastic affection for the science as it is now presented.

This work began only yesterday. We have no right to expect that it will flower overnight in published studies that will rock the world. If and when the environment grows to esteem the value of scholarship, there will come forth at once notable contributions, because the students who attend today's classes in the important centers will be prepared to work positively and with love along the lines so fervently indicated by their former masters and in the workshops that these same men with patience and sacrifice filled with all the necessary tools for sound research. The theologian who works in South America today labors to be surpassed. He does not know how long the present phase of his task will last, but he has hopes in the future of South American theology. Optimists and pessimists would evaluate these hopes differently and it is impossible at the moment to know which of the two evaluations will be confirmed by the years to come.