

Introduction

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In 2019, the Conference of the International Academy of Practical Theology was held in Brazil, the first time in Latin America. We were immersed in the concepts of liberation and hope, both central motives of Liberation Theologies, deeply rooted in Latin American cultures. We gathered in São Leopoldo, a city in the South of Brazil, a place first inhabited by the indigenous Kaigangs and which in 1824 was the birthplace of German immigration to the area. Members and guests from over 20 countries attended the conference and contributed their knowledge and research. There were people from India, South Korea, China, Australia, Germany, Sweden, Belgium, Finland, Norway, Slovakia, Denmark, Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, Canada, the United States, Mexico, Ecuador, and Brazil. The conference was in both English and Portuguese, with simultaneous translation for the main lectures, and we had a translator for the paper presentations. Some attendees even learned a little bit of Portuguese.

The chosen theme for the Conference was *(De)coloniality and religious practices: liberating hope* which oriented the keynotes, roundtables, plenaries and paper presentations. Together, we all discovered the ways in which practical theology is and should be challenged by local knowledges. The conference didn't intend to show Latin America as a case study for theology or to offer an illustration of practical theology. Rather, the conference hoped to show that other forms of thinking and doing practical theology can be carried out away from Europe and the United States.

Latin America is still haunted by colonization, and coloniality is everywhere. The continent continues to be marked by social and economic contrasts, by violence and corruption, by ecological destruction, stealing and plundering. By contrast, cultural

and religious effervescence and diversity permeate all social levels, and hope and joy are an intrinsic part of our culture. The heritage of diverse and multifaceted spiritualities is a source of resilience for people, especially the poor.

People live at the crossroads of so many encounters, renewals, creations and transformation. Conviviality, food, hospitality, various forms of different forms of knowledge production rituals, sensualities, all forms of art, popular religion and pop culture are some expressions that connect us to various ways of living for an unfolding future. Undoubtedly, these cultural, social and religious manifestations always surprise us with their contradictions, power, and unexpected flourishing.

These paradoxical or contrasting realities are evident in the different ways in which Christian religions, theologies and institutions articulate their reflections and practical engagements, whether through traditional and contextual theologies, Pentecostal theologies, the prosperity gospel, Neopentecostal movements or interreligious crossings. Latin America's religious landscapes are certainly changing. Pentecostal and Neopentecostal churches are growing fast and are set to outgrow Roman Catholicism in the near future. We are also seeing the strengthening of Afro-Brazilian religions and Indigenous spiritualities. Buddhism and Islam are growing religions as well, and the fluctuation between major Christian religions and these religions is complex and extensive.

It is from within these complexities that we must think about the many forms of practical theologies: indeed this was the background to our preparation for the conference. Our Brazilian group organized two seminars prior to our event with Latin American practical theologians, Biblicists, sociologists, philosophers, artists and other people in order to





provide a more expansive notion of *Decoloniality* in this context.

The book you have now is the result of the keynote speeches and some of the papers presented during the conference. We kindly thank all our colleagues who participated in the Conference and presented papers, and especially to those who offered their contribution for this publication. This volume has been divided into the following three sections.

Decolonizing theological concepts and practices

In this first section, the articles discuss the theories, methods and approaches of decoloniality, describing and analyzing the roles of practical theologies in relationship to colonialism, postcolonialism, and decoloniality across local, regional and international contexts, paying particular attention to historical and socio-political markers. Moreover, the major keynote speeches and a selection of other papers dealt with a plurality of theological approaches, and the demand that practical theologies should position themselves to be rooted within local knowledges, from the grassroots engaging with local challenges and perhaps contributing to new cultures of liberation and hope. In the wake of critical theological approaches in Latin America, decolonial theology offers an opportunity to unveil and investigate the different mechanisms that construct and control the economy, genders and sexualities, subjectivities and knowledges from other forms of practices and thinking, power and privilege, as well as the earth itself.

Religious Practices, cultures and spirituality

The second section engages with religious practices, cultures and spiritualities. It explores the roles of practical theologies in diverse global contexts as well as diverse practices and religious pluralism, particularly where historical churches and/or theologies find themselves facing new religious challenges. The chapters look at religious, spiritual and cultural practices which unfold through topics such as hospitality, different forms of resistance, wage equity (income equality), power and violence. The authors cover religious identity formation, religion and national constitutions, religion and migratory move-

ments, contextual theologies and the new religious movements, such as neo-Pentecostalism. Finally, they describe to us the significance of cross-cultural mourning rituals and the notion of *sentipensar*.

Liberating Hope: practical theology in action

In the third and final section of the book, decoloniality is articulated within practical theology as a practice of hope. The authors go on to explore counter-cultural theology in churches located on the border, interreligious transformations between Christians and Muslims, beauty and the body and the image of God. We learn of various challenges to accessing the digital world, about memory, theological formation and liturgy.

The framework of decoloniality is new to many people. As editors of this book, we recognize that several of the texts presented here are the result of the authors' first approach towards the theme of decoloniality. For other contributors, they may be further along in their journey. We hope the book brings an unusual, innovative and thought-provoking variety of approaches and perspectives.

We thank the members of the editorial board and other members of the academy who diligently reviewed the submitted texts, corrected and decided to publish the texts that make up this book. We also thank Ivan Kiper Malacarne, postgraduate student of Faculdades EST, for his support in the editing of this volume.

The painting illustrating the cover is called *Exodus*. Local artist Flávio Scholes (www.fscholles.net) seeks to express the many exoduses that constitute Brazil and in particular, the region where we find ourselves today, the Vale dos Sinos. Through perpetual colonization and decolonization processes: of indigenous, African, European (primarily Spanish, Portuguese, German and Italian) and Japanese people, among several other groups, we are in constant and symbolic exodus. Some more than others. With this work of art, Scholes expresses the reality of the bodies and lives of people who are permanently reconstituting themselves – individually and as collectives – in the struggle to survive, to be recognized and respected as part of a lived reality that is in a spontaneous and violent transition. We thank him for granting permission to use his art.

Over the months in which we collected and organized this volume, the world was struck by the



Covid 19 pandemic and we still live in an unrecognizable world, with millions of people around the globe infected, and thousands dying. The economic crisis which brings with it unemployment, poverty, hunger is ubiquitous. To add to this, the planet is seriously in danger with droughts, flooding, criminal fires devastating forests and ecosystems such as the Amazon and Pantanal in Brazil, fires in the

United States and Australia. This brings us to the undeniable seriousness of the theme of (De)coloniality. We emphasize that practical theology cannot distance itself from these issues anymore and has a task to build and liberate hope into the future.

With celebration and gratitude we offer you this book