

INSeCT (International Network for Societies of Catholic Theology) Chicago 2011

THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES IN BRAZIL

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This conference was prepared for the Third International Colloquium of INSeCT which took place in Chicago from the 14th to the 16th of June, 2011. The subject of the conference was: The Changing Face of Global Catholicism: Implications for Theology and Theological Education. The text follows questions which serve as guidelines as proposed by the committee responsible for the colloquium. The content has the contribution of SOTER's ex-president, Alfonso Maria Ligório Soares and present-vice president, Geraldo Luiz de Mori, as well as the presiding secretary, Pedro Ribeiro de Oliveira to whom we are grateful.

Profile of SOTER

SOTER (The Society of Theology and Sciences of Religion) was founded in July, 1985 as a non-profit association with headquarters in Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

The objectives of SOTER are: support and incentives for teaching and research in Theology and Sciences of Religion; the publication of the results of religious research, the promotion of services rendered by theologians and religious scientists to communities and ecclesial organisms with a preferential option for the poor; the facilitation and cooperation among members and the defense of free speech (Statute, Art. 3).

After 26 years SOTER has a membership of nearly 500 associates. It encourages new memberships, especially, women. SOTER is organized in six regions according to the geographical division of Brazil: North, North East, Middle West, South East, São Paulo and South. The regions of São Paulo and the South have the most membership.

A statistical analysis offers the following data: With a membership of 500, 115 are women; that is, 78% of the members are men, while 22% of the members are women (according to the last updated register of July, 2010). It is worth noting that all the feminine proper names in the Bible account for only 11% in relation to the masculine proper names.

With regards to church statistics there exists the following (approximately): Priests 30%, Religious men and women 10%, Pastors 10%, Laymen and Laywomen 50%.

When we take academic formation into consideration approximately 60% are trained in Theology and Sciences connected; that is, Systematic Theology, Sacred Scripture, Moral Theology, Canon Law, Liturgy, Spiritual and Pastoral Theology. Nearly 40% are trained in Sciences of Religion and sciences in a wider perspective such as: Philosophy, History, Anthropology, Psychology and Pedagogy.

Diverse areas of theological knowledge possess their own specific associations in Brazil such as: Sacred Scripture, Moral Theology, Canon Law, Liturgy, Philosophy of Religion, History of Religions, Graduate Programs in Sciences of Religion, etc. SOTER supports and maintains contact with the related associations.

Localization of Theology and Sciences of Religion

When one considers employment approximately 40% work in universities, 40% in seminaries and 20% in other pastoral activities.

About 70% are Catholics and nearly 30% are Evangelical.

One should inform that in Brazil the areas of Theology and Religious Studies are undergoing an intense discussion in what refers to their legal status on an undergraduate and graduate level with federal authorities.

Official recognition is granted by CAPES (Coordination of Personal Achievement on the Superior Level) to 17 Graduate Programs on the Master's level, 7 of which confer the Doctorate. Of these programs 7 are in Theology and 10 in Religious Science (www.capes.gov.br, consulted in 05/25/2011).

MEC (Ministry of Education and Culture) validates almost 123 undergraduate courses with the Bachelor of Theology. 12 undergraduate courses in Sciences of Religion are officially recognized by State Boards of Education, 9 of which are Teacher Training degrees and 3 Bachelor's degrees (www.emec.mec.gov.br, consulted in 06/14/2011).

Profile of Theological and Sciences of Religion Institutions

Theological institutions in Brazil normally have a confessional profile. The majority of courses are offered in seminaries, Catholic and Protestant. However, there are universities that offer courses in Theology open to laymen and laywomen. Seminarians that study in universities exist, e.g., two cases in Brazil, UNICAP (Catholic University of Pernambuco) in Recife and The Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais in Belo Horizonte.

The official recognition of these courses in Theology is being discussed by MEC with the Federal Government, taking into account the advantages and disadvantages that this represents. In November, 2010 a public hearing was held concerning Theological curricular guidelines. In a previous consultation 73 courses of Theology had sent their guidelines. That sample gave an idea of the distribution of subjects in the curriculum. According to the minutes of the public hearing there were 32 Catholic, 2 Adventist, 19 Protestant, 1 Spiritist, 8 Evangelical, 1 Umbanda, 6 Pentecostals, 1 Messianic and 3 Interconfessional.

In Brazil much interest in the last few years has arisen in Sciences of Religion. Three out of 10 graduate courses are offered in public universities, 4 in Catholic universities, and 3 in Protestant universities. Undergraduate and Teacher Training courses are offered in public and private institutions, generally, nonsectarian.

The interest in Sciences of Religion has grown much due to the importance that religious study has, being offered in grammar school and, in some states, high schools. This subject, according to the Federal Constitution is obligatory and nonsectarian. Consequently, it can absorb many professionals for its instruction. Recently, however, the debate was reassumed due to the concordat between the Vatican and the Brazilian State that permits the return of confessional religious study. Nevertheless, this polemical question has to be tried by the Supreme Court that could possibly invalidate the agreement on the grounds of unconstitutionality.

Student Tendencies

Student tendencies and involvements are exceedingly varied in accordance with the area, the profile of the school, the confession and other factors. In general, the number of laymen and, above all, women has grown. As a result preoccupations revolve around gender, ministries, democracy in the Church, ecological problems and social, political and economic questions of the society.

Another tendency in Theological schools is maintaining the perspective of Liberation Theology, in spite of less interest in the ethical-political questions that had so much publicizing during the 70s and 80s of the last century. Little is remembered about the time when students of Theology were in a passionate manner politically and socially engaged.

Still another tendency, especially in seminaries, possesses a strong clerical accent with students who are self-centered, preoccupied with appearance, clerical dress, liturgy, canon law, etc.

One last tendency is that identified with the Pentecostal churches and with non-supportive theologies, foremost, the Theology of Blessing and Prosperity. Those theologies, in general, have a fundamentalist bent. They form the faithful for their church's internal needs, and do not insert themselves in the context of overall theological dialogue. They possess, however, political and economic power in order to influence debates and the casting of votes, on the national level, concerning major ethical and moral issues.

The tendency of students of Sciences of Religion now identifies itself more with academic and scientific aspects and less with ecclesiastical questions. In general, they are people inserted in the university environment with interest in the religious phenomenon, above all, in their interaction with Literature, Sociology, Theology, Philosophy, Anthropology and History.

Student job expectations

In the ambit of Theology the formation of religious and seminarians aims at the exercise of the ministry, a very needy field of work according to traditional molds.

As of late, the participation of laymen and laywomen has grown in seminary courses as well as the creation of specific theological courses for lay people. Laymen and women, in general, seek the well-grounded foundation of their personal faith and the consequent gratuitous activity in pastoral works. Many would prefer a greater presence and action in the Church itself, or in teaching, but they are confronted by the obstacles of the ecclesiastical apparatus. Nevertheless, little by little, new work fronts are opened in consultancies together with non- governmental organizations, tribunals and business. In this sense, the official recognition of theological courses by MEC will extend the public scope well and beyond the confessional boundaries.

Presently, in the ambit of Sciences of Religion, expectations are distinct and have teaching as their objective. Scientists of Religion possess more varied job opportunities, although college work prioritizes formation for teaching Religion in the schools. In the case of graduate work, students are directed, in order of priority, to university teaching in the most diverse areas.

Priority themes

Here are the historical achievements of SOTER during 26 years of the Society:

- 1) The defense of the autonomy to research in comprehensive areas, above all, in Theology.
- 2) A committed socio-political and economic reflection.
- 3) The constant analysis of Liberation Theology.

The actual presidency, besides maintaining former commitments, assumed the following preoccupations in the order of priority:

- 1) The maintenance of a balance between Theology and Sciences of Religion without privileging one, while prejudicing the other.
- 2) Emphasis of the academic character of the Society, while not forgetting its pastoral aspect.
- 3) Privileging ecumenical inclusion, given that Society has historically privileged Catholic participation.
- 4) Privileging the inclusion of gender, with a greater participation of women, due to the historical dominant activity of men.

In March, 2011 a contract was signed with the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais in Belo Horizonte to chair the secretariat of the Society. According to the contract the Pontifical Catholic University yields a room for the secretariat and its secretary with telephone, computer and printer. The congresses occur annually but not necessarily at the Pontifical Catholic University.

The regional meetings of SOTER (North, North East, Mid-West, South East, São Paulo, South), with their respective counselors, are encouraged to have regular encounters/ symposiums in their areas in preparation for the themes to be discussed at the annual congress.

SOTER maintains relations with similarly minded organizations; that is to say, INSeCT (International Network for Societies of Catholic Theology), FMTL (Global Forum for the Theology of Liberation), Amerindia, ANPTECRE (Association for Post Graduate Programs in Theology and Sciences of Religion), FONAPER (Permanent National Forum for Religious Education), ASETT (Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians), ASTE (Association of Theological and Evangelical Seminaries), CETELA (Ecumenical Latin American and Caribbean Theological Community of Education), SCT (Chilean Society of Theology), CONIC (National Council of Christian Churches of Brazil), CEBI (Ecumenical Center of Biblical Studies).

The publication by Paulinas of SOTER theses is in its third edition by means of which prizes are endowed to students of Doctoral theses defended in Graduate Programs of Theology and Sciences of Religion. The best thesis of the year is published by Paulinas Editions.

The conferences that are treated in the congresses are normally published in a book, generally, before the congress. The complete set of annuals of the last congresses is published as eBooks on the Cybertheology webpage:

(<http://ciberteologia.paulinas.org.br/ciberteologia/index.php/livros-digitais/>).

Other publications are supported by SOTER.

Presently, a few projects particularly occupy the attention of SOTER:

- 1) The negotiation by the Federal Senate of a bill concerning the Theological profession with which several diverse members of the civil society have become involved since the last triennium, being that presently one person, who represents SOTER, accompanies the unfolding process of the bill in its political instances. The last news received is that the bill was shelved.
- 2) A debate in the National Council of Education concerning the curricular parameters of the Bachelor of Theology degree, also accompanied by some members of SOTER and with extended discussion of Teacher Training for the Sciences of Religion degree.
- 3) The implantation of Religious Education in Brazil, accompanied officially by FONAPER, which includes members of SOTER.

SOTER holds annual congresses, the next being the 24th Congress, which will be held in Minas Gerais at the Pontifical Catholic University from July 11 to 14, 2011 on Religion and Education for Citizenship.

Each Congress publishes its book. There has also been a virtual publication from 2008 which can be found in Cybertheology with a translation in Portuguese, English and Spanish.

2008 – The Sustaining of Life and Spirituality

(port)<http://ciberteologia.paulinas.org.br/ciberteologia/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/02congressoanualsoter.pdf>

(eng)<http://ciberteologia.paulinas.org.br/ciberteologiaen/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/02AnnualCongressSoter.pdf>

2009 – Religion, Science and Technology

(port)<http://ciberteologia.paulinas.org.br/ciberteologia/index.php/teologia/congresso-anual-da-soter/>

(eng)<http://ciberteologia.paulinas.org.br/ciberteologiaen/index.php/open-theology/22nd-annual-congress-of-soterreligion-science-and-technology/>

2010 – Religion and World Peace

(port)<http://ciberteologia.paulinas.org.br/ciberteologia/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2010/07/01-SOTER.pdf>

(span)<http://ciberteologia.paulinas.org.br/ciberteologiaes/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2010/07/01-Soter.pdf>

2011 – Religion and Education for Citizenship

To be published soon

Religion and Education for Citizenship

Religion and Education for Citizenship is the central theme of the 24th Annual Congress of SOTER to be held from July 11 to 14, 2011. This theme resurrects the debate on the place of religion in the formation of citizenship. What is sought is an understanding of the influences of religion on education and citizenship as well as an analysis of the relationship between religion, education and citizenship.

The theme is packed with historical developments and extends itself to the confessional downgrades, especially Catholic and Evangelical. This results in diverse initiatives as, for instance, Catholic Action, popular education, base communities and social pastoral activity.

Concretely, various subjects are treated in the congress among which the following can be accentuated: ethical values, human rights, gender perspectives, youth education, the Indian and Afro-Brazilian point of view, Catholic and Protestant contributions, Liberation Theology contributions, discussions about religious education in the schools, debate over Theology and Sciences of Religion as well as theological and religious formation.