

Theological Libraries in Latin America

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Introduction

In 1492, Christianity arrived with the Spaniards to the New World, which would be known as the American continent, where it clashed with the existing religions and, shortly afterward, it was imposed on the newly discovered continent. A religious acculturation process was begun. The ways of the Old World were implanted on the new, such as in mission work, theological training, and libraries. Christianity had already evolved into various forms in Europe, and as colonial European powers began arriving, so did these other forms. Initially, they can be divided into two main categories: Catholicism and, later, Protestantism.

Religion and Books in the Pre-Hispanic Period and the Conquest

Of an important number of civilizations and peoples on the American continent, three stand out: the Maya, the Aztec, and the Inca. The Mayan culture became the most advanced civilization in America. The pre-Columbian cultures also had their religious systems (Conrad and Demarest 1984; Batalla Rosado and Luis de Rojas 2008; Sohen Suarez and George 2011, 123–47). Religion was very relevant in the Mayan world (Rivera Dorado 2006). Its most important known literary text is the Popol Vuh (“Book of the Council,” or “Book of the Community”). It consists of mythical-historical accounts of a pre-Hispanic Mayan group (De la Garza Camino

and Coronado 2002, 29) and explains the existence of the Mayan world (Christenson 2003). Because of their quest for knowledge, the Mayans had an important bibliographical production (codices) that amounted to libraries.

On October 12, 1492, three Spanish ships landed on a Caribbean island. It was not the first incursion from other lands, but this one had the intention of settling permanently in this new world, and it was determined to conquer it and subdue it. Once settled in the Caribbean, the *conquistadores* embarked on expeditionary trips through the mainland. On April 21, 1519, they reached the coast of present-day Mexico and, on November 8 of that year, a meeting between the Spanish leader and the Aztec emperor took place. The *conquistadores* attacked and captured the Aztec capital on August 13, 1521. In 1532, the Incan empire was also brought to an end. It was the last of the great civilizations of the American continent. It was the end of Pre-Hispanic America and the beginning of European-colonized America.

It was important for the church to have religious leaders to spread the Gospel, but also people to look after the interests of the Spanish Crown in its colonies. After the conquest, the Spanish friars arrived in a larger number with the goal of imposing a new religion—the Iberian world's version of Christianity—and, as much as possible, to eradicate the previous ones. The religious orders were dedicated to the task of introducing the Native Americans to Christian culture (Latourette 1970, 105). In this process, education played a relevant role (Deiros 1992, 287). The Church's reality in America was somehow similar to the one in Europe during the Middle Ages, when monasteries and abbeys were the only centers of knowledge. Because of this, priests and monks could exert great influence on the population. The colonial education pursued established goals from its onset (Deiros 1992, 368). There was the need to minister spiritually to Spanish immigrants and their descendants. This was the task of the secular clergy who built temples, organized the ecclesiastical structure according to the Spanish model with parishes and episcopal seats, and set up seminaries for the preparation of priests. The Inquisition helped to keep the Roman Catholic faith of the peninsula free from contamination (Deiros 1992, 274). Where books already existed in the indigenous cultures of Mexico and Central America, "they were seized and destroyed as an inadmissible obstacle to the effective imposition of the invader's ideology" (Hallewell 1995, 38). To Diego de Landa (1524–1579) and other Franciscan friars, the Mayan writings were the result of diabolical practices and, as he (1966, 105) states:

We found a large number of books in these characters and, as they contained nothing in which were not to be seen as superstition and lies of

the devil, we burned them all, which they [the Maya] regretted to an amazing degree, and which caused them much affliction.

On July 12, 1562, in an *auto de fe* (“act of faith”),¹ De Landa, who served as the local Franciscan provincial, along with other things, burned the codices. After the Spaniards, other European colonial powers—Holland, Portugal, England, France—also found their way to America, bringing with them their versions of Christianity.

Outside of some civil universities, education in Latin America during the colonial period was entirely in the hands of the Roman Catholic Church. Religious orders played an important role in its development. The first school in America was established in Santo Domingo in 1505. In Mexico, the Native Americans and mestizos (persons of mixed ancestry) who lived far from the populated centers received almost no schooling. Secondary education did not serve general cultural purposes, nor did it provide the students with the necessary practical knowledge. Its orientation was markedly philosophical and theological. It did not have a popular character and was rather intended for the upper classes. It was driven by the clergy, first by the Dominicans and later especially by the Jesuits, or by civil servants of the colony after the expulsion of the Jesuits (Deiros 1992, 369).

The Beginnings of the Christian Library in America

The Western library came to America together with religion. The *conquistadores*, after taking political control of Mexico and Peru—the two most developed civilizations at that time—proceeded to consolidate their power through proselytizing their sovereign’s new subjects. The book was one of the ways to serve this purpose. In 1533, the Emperor ordered and provided money to finish the printing of twelve thousand booklets that were to be sent to New Spain for the instruction of the natives (Griffin 2015, 255). Initially, literary production was mainly confined to materials written by missionaries for catechetical work. These were commissioned from Spanish printers. The Crombergers of Seville were one of the selected printers. They were particularly interested in America both as an export market for their books and as a place for direct investment in other fields (Hallewell 1995, 38). The Emperor gave John Cromberger a monopoly both on printing in New Spain and on the export of prints there. According to this real provision they were required to send to Mexico the “books of all faculties and doctrines” that were needed in the colony and, in return, nobody but them could export these books or *cartillas* (Griffin 2015, 256). In 1539, the Crombergers sent a printer to Mexico City—the first New World publishing house—and, a quarter of a

century later, another to Lima, Peru (Halewell 1995, 38–9). In the next century, other American cities also had printers. The Crombergers published many of the most frequently circulated titles in the Indies: liturgical editions, books of hours, devotional works, the writings of the Church Fathers in Spanish (Griffin 2015, 268). First, the books arrived in small quantities and then, later, were transformed into libraries. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, commercial fleets transported large quantities of books—hundreds and thousands of volumes—from the Old World to the New. This is how many of the books that circulated in Spain were also found in the Indies, the latter being a smaller market (Dill and Knauer 1993, 37). But in the Spanish Empire, this was not a free market. In colonial times, censorship was strictly enforced. This was practiced both in Europe and on the American continent. In 1559, the Catholic Church published the *Index librorum prohibitorum* (“List of Prohibited Books”), which banned 550 authors and proscribed some individual titles. The Inquisition controlled the enforcement of these norms through the *Index* itself, visits to bookstores and libraries both public and private, border surveillance, visits to ships arriving at their ports, and the obligation of the inhabitants to denounce the illegal possession of these works. The books could also be printed in selected indigenous languages (Griffin 2015, 255).

In many cases, the missionaries who left for America brought with them books, either bought or from their convents (Griffin 2015, 259), that contributed to the libraries formed inside the colonial convents, both as support for the study of the religious and for their pastoral work. The Catholic Church’s missionary orders were most notable for book collecting, particularly the Dominicans and Franciscans, who were part of the very first expeditions. The Church was also responsible for staffing and running the universities in Mexico City, Lima, and Santo Domingo. All were decreed in 1551, the first on the continent (Hallewell, 1995, 39). It was the friars who initiated a very simple form of librarianship in this hemisphere, put into practice from colonial times. The most famous of all were the Jesuits, who began to work in the Americas only ten years after the foundation of their order. They settled in Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina. Over time, the Jesuits became the largest missionary order in Brazil and were pioneers in many works. They arrived in Mexico in 1572, when the Church was already fully constituted (Deiros 1992, 288). The Jesuits became the most influential of the orders. Their members were more inclined to the natural and human sciences (O’Malley, Bailey, Harris, and Kennedy 1999), to history and modern philosophy, than to theology itself (O’Malley 2014). They were committed to cultural conquest and educational activities. As libraries grew, the Jesuits established traditions of librarianship that were more developed in Brazil than in any other European colony (Grover 1993, 267). The expelling of the Jesuits from Brazil in 1759 and

from Spanish America in 1767 resulted in the dispersion of some of the finest libraries then existing in the Western Hemisphere. It was an unmitigated cultural disaster. The Jesuit colleges were taken over by other religious orders that, with time, transformed into Latin American universities (Hallewell 1995, 39).

Christian Evolution in the Old World and Its Impact on the New

After its arrival in America, Christianity continued to evolve in both worlds. In Iberian America, the peninsular version was imposed, but the predominance of the Catholic Church in Western Europe was shaken by the crisis of the 16th century and the rise of the Protestant Reformation. Through migration and trade, Protestantism found its way into the New World. As time went by, it increased its presence in Spanish America, where practitioners' spiritual needs had to be taken care of. This was done by Protestant European churches that sent missionaries to serve their small communities (Míguez Bonino 1997, 3). The evangelization work on this part of the continent had been underway for quite some time. Dr. James Thompson had arrived in Buenos Aires in 1818, although his work was mainly with the British and Foreign Bible Society and it was not directed to the establishment of any church. In 1836, the Rev. J. Dempster, to whom the Methodist work owes its origin, arrived in this same city. Protestant Christian movements were attracted to the idea of missionary work to convert the non-Christian world to their religious views. Missionary societies were established for this purpose. Catholicism in Spanish America remained unchanged and opposed to versions of Christianity other than its own. From the mid-19th century, an important shift took place, and United States Protestantism emerged as the main source of missionary drive in Latin America. From then on, a movement was born to counteract this position. In New York, in 1913, the Committee on Cooperation in Latin America (CCLA) was established. In 1916, the CCLA held the *Congress on Christian Work in Latin America* in the city of Panama. Two other congresses were also held: Montevideo (1925) and Havana (1929), to deal with evangelization in Latin America. These congresses also followed the ecumenical trend for the future to come.

In the American continent, the evangelical church developed its diversity, largely influenced by United States Protestantism. In the course of a considerable period, there was an evolution that contributed to the emergence of several religious thoughts, such as fundamentalism, conservatism, and evangelicalism (Harris 1998), not necessarily understood in the same way outside the US. Pentecostalism would also be an important religious movement. It became a fast-

growing movement within the Protestant Latin American church. Among the evangelicals, the fundamentalist movement arose in the 1920s against modernist or liberal theology in the mainline Protestant churches of the United States, and over time they established their churches (Galindo 1992; Marsden 2006). Through missionary outreach, this thought and others also spread to other regions. In the United States, a movement had been brewing whose influence would transcend that country. The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) was formed in 1942, becoming a relevant evangelical organization (Carpenter 1997). In the following years, NAE and its associated groups would become a powerful and influential force for those who embraced evangelicalism. Between 1962 and 1965, the Second Vatican Council took place. Its ecumenical spirit eased tensions between Catholicism and other Christian churches, and certainly for the Latin American churches. Latin American Protestantism has been greatly influenced by United States Protestantism—fundamentalist and conservative—and ecumenical views, the latter as a legacy of the *Edinburgh Missionary Conference* and CCLA congresses. In 1966, the Billy Graham Association financed the First Latin American Congress of Evangelization called CLADE (*Congreso Latinoamericano de Evangelización*), “Action in Christ for a Continent in Crisis,” November 21–30, 1969, in Bogotá, Colombia (Zaldivar 2006, 93). In 1970 in Cochabamba, Bolivia, the Latin American Theological Fraternity (FTL) was constituted. Other CLADEs, the conservative line of Protestantism (see Prien 1985; Bastian 1990; Deiros 1992), would be held in the years to come, and these were sponsored by the Latin American Theological Fraternity (FTL). In November 1982, the *Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias* (Latin American Council of Churches) was established to promote unity among Christians on the continent. The effervescent movement that took place in the region in the 1960s would become relevant to the church and eventually lead to the emergence of Latin American theology. These influences would permeate theological education in the region.

The evangelization drive that was undertaken mainly from the United States to Latin America required a massive missionary workforce. Several mission societies were established according to denominational interests, which were responsible for raising funds for their missionary endeavors. As work progressed, elementary and secondary schools were established alongside congregations. But also, denominational seminaries were established, usually following closely the educational philosophy and curriculum of conservative evangelical seminaries of the North Atlantic churches that supported these communities (George 2007, 15). But evangelization continued to be a priority. To this end, ways were constantly sought to improve its efficiency. On-site theological training was one of these ways. The theory was revised and improved by practice. Ideally and briefly stated: under missionary guidance—the “true faith”—native workers, mainly young, would

be trained in a Bible school and then sent to the mission fields to do evangelistic work (preaching and church planting), hopefully with a multiplier effect. Eventually, Bible schools would transform into Bible institutes, seminaries, and colleges. Arriving from the North—the United States and Canada—the missionary workforce was English-speaking, a challenge in the mainly Spanish-speaking region and because there was also a Portuguese-speaking territory. Partly because of the cultural influence in their countries of origin and because of the need to do their work, the missionaries acquired books for their personal libraries. Most of them were in English, some in Spanish, and a few in other languages, depending on the missionary's immigrant background. These collections developed around the owners' subject areas of interest. In the beginning, there were no publishing houses for Protestant religious materials in Spanish. Initially, the production of books in this language was done through the existing publishing houses for the Anglo-Saxon world. The American Tract Society (established in 1825) is the continuation of previous initiatives: the New York Tract Society of 1812, the New England Tract Society of 1814, and the Religious Tract Society of London, which began in 1799. These may be the first books to meet academic information needs, which would later become the basis for institutional libraries. For a few more decades the English-speaking staff would still be predominant, and so would the English-language literature for the missionary. Initially, literature was produced in English and, as the need arose, it was translated into Spanish. With time, publishing houses for this type of book would emerge in Latin America, such as La Casa Unida de Publicaciones, S. A., La Aurora Publishing House, and Editorial Caribe. The latter began in Costa Rica in 1949 under the auspices of the Latin American Mission.

As an outcome of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference, the International Missionary Council (IMC) was created in 1921. During the 1957/1958 IMC Assembly in Ghana, an important monetary contribution was reported. Mr. John Rockefeller, Jr. had donated \$2,000,000 for the establishment of a Theological Education Fund (hereafter called the TEF). The earliest date when the operations were to begin was July 1, 1958. This fund aimed at the advancement of theological education in Asia, Africa, and Latin America—regions that were emerging from colonialism. Essentially, its goal was to improve the level of scholarship at the institutions (Ecumenical Theological Education 2008). James F. Hopewell (1929–1984) became first the associate director (1960–1964) and then the director (1964–1970) of the TEF. In this position, he traveled throughout Latin America, Africa, and Asia, visiting theological faculties (Lienemann-Perrin 1981). In the early 1960s, an initiative was conceived that would contribute significantly to the cause of theological libraries. The librarian Raymond Philip Morris (1904–1990) would be instrumental in this matter. In 1958, TEF asked Morris to survey theological

library needs. In 1959, he spent four months in Southeast Asia. During this time, he observed that the libraries he visited often lacked trained personnel and that the North American books on which they depended had little to do with the work of theological education. Morris collaborated with an international team of scholars to compile a classified bibliography of nearly 6000 titles, the *Theological Book List*—a project that would support seminars in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Southeast Pacific. The eligible schools were able to select books from the list to include in their collections (Davis 2003). In Latin America, several libraries benefited from this program.

In the conservative line, and with logistical support from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, CONELA (Latin American Evangelical Confraternity) was founded in 1982. In the line of ecumenism, the Latin American and Caribbean Ecumenical Theological Education Community (CETELA) was created in 1988. The Latin American theological associations include, among others, the following: ASIT (Association of Seminaries and Theological Institutions—in the Southern Cone); ASTE (Association of Evangelical Theological Seminaries—in Brazil); AETAL (Evangelical Association of Theological Education of Latin America—in Brazil); ALIET (Latin American Association of Institutions of Theological Education—in Central America and Mexico). Besides coordinating and developing theological education programs throughout the region, later these associations would also be concerned about theological library improvement.

Missionary staff came from a cultural background with a deep-rooted library culture. During their seminary training back home, mainly the United States, they had been exposed to library life and, most likely, had been able to “take a closer look” at this resource—that books are somehow organized in the shelves, that they can be accessed by information recorded on catalog cards, and also that books can be checked out by a simple system. This was the case in the United States, where librarianship had already reached a developed stage. Latin American library schools would appear almost four decades later, first in Argentina (1922), then in Panama (1941), Brazil (1942), and so on until reaching the rest of the Latin American region.

Julia Pettee (1872–1967), the librarian at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, devised a classification system that would be known as Union Classification (Pettee 1967). It took her several years to put it together, and finally it was published in 1939. At one point, the Pettee System was adopted by a significant number of North American theological libraries. The Latin American theological institutions had small incipient library collections, a few larger than others, reasonably managed. As a surcharge on his/her functions, a missionary could assume the management of the seminary’s library. This staff member would implement faculty agreements on library matters, working alongside (in

those cases where one existed) a library committee. In general, he—or she—would be in charge of policies, acquisitions, schedule, basic services, and, when stipulated, with students as his—or her—assistants.

Eventually, news about the Union Classification system, specifically developed for theological libraries, spread to the region. It was also the choice for a good number of other libraries in different parts of the world, including several in Latin America. On the missionary-librarian desk some suitable texts could be found, such as *Aker's Simple Library Cataloging* (Akers 1977), an edition of the *ALA Rules for Filing Catalog Cards* (ALA 1942), and *A Theological Library Manual* (Newhall 1970). As to Union Classification, it was used for some time. Two valuable features of a tool are its universality and currentness. If there is no entity to update it for its entire user community, then isolated updates will produce uneven results. In Latin America, the libraries opted mostly for the Dewey Decimal Classification system.

The Latin American Approach

In Latin America, the transition from an artisanal to a professional library education began in São Paulo, Brazil in 1929, although there is evidence that it had begun earlier in other regions: in Mexico, first in 1912 and later in 1922; in Rio de Janeiro in 1914. In 1920, the American Library Association launched its Latin American program by adopting a broad policy on library issues with other countries. The Committee for Library Cooperation with Latin America operated as a means of exchange of information, consultation, and assistance between libraries in the United States and Canada, on the one hand, and in Latin American countries, on the other (Gropp 1948). In the libraries of biblical institutes and seminaries, it is a different story. In these, the missionary way still prevails. A library would be fortunate if visited by a professional theological librarian from the North. Each one attends to its own needs and there are no contacts with others or with the already developing Latin American librarianship, and it will be so for some decades to come.

Two resources were developed to support theological research in Latin America: *Bibliografía Teológica Comentada* (1973–1990) was edited and published by the Instituto Superior de Estudios Teológicos² in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and *Bibliografía Bíblica Latino-Americana*, published by the Programa EcuMénica de Pós-Graduagao en Ciências da Religião of São Bernardo do Campo in São Paulo, Brazil—an eight-volume project that sought to collect information on biblical publications between 1988 and 1995. At that time, it was a very time-consuming task, not to mention the required financial resources.



Image 1: Library of the Latin American Biblical University in San José, Costa Rica. © Álvaro Pérez

LIS Education

In Latin America the secular wave of training took place in the 1940s, leading to the subsequent establishment of library schools. The theological schools' associations have been one of the most successful experiments in evangelical collaboration, bringing together a broad spectrum of Latin American evangelical institutions in interesting projects. Once the theological schools became affiliated to their respective association—ASIT, ASTE, AETAL, ALIET—either by region and/or affinity of thought, there were some issues about which to be concerned, such as accreditation, exchange of professors and students, academic resource sharing, and library improvement. Theological librarianship training took place in the 1980s and early 1990s when conditions were met for this stage, such as the increase in the number of theological institutions and the rise in their formation level, which demanded more library support. Some of the staff who worked in these libraries did not have enough training, or had none at all. Library education followed the traditional way, learning by practice from day to day. Therefore, the

schools aimed either for better trained clerics or, if affordable, professional librarians. The Latin American theological associations organized workshops to train library staff. ALIET organized regional theological library workshops: 1983, in San José, Costa Rica; 1990, in Guatemala City, Guatemala; 1991, again in Guatemala City; 1993, in Mexico City, Mexico. In 1997, ALIET, CETELA, and RLIT (*Red Latinoamericana de Información Teológica*, known in English as LATIN) held a similar event in Quito, Ecuador. One more took place also in 2000 in Quito, under the auspices of CETELA and RLIT. These workshops were technically oriented. Something similar was experienced in the Southern Cone, where library concerns were approached by ASIT. An entire issue of *Encuentro y Diálogo* (no. 10, 1994), ASIT's journal, was dedicated to the subject of libraries and their work, with the following contents: "What is the function of the theological library?" "The library: its functions," "The theological library in the perspective of the student," "The library and the curriculum," "Libraries and their needs," "The librarian/teaching team in user/student training," "The journals that aren't and would be so necessary," and "The pastoral library." On the other hand, Latin American theological education continued to evolve. At the end of the millennium, a survey of international theological colleges was conducted. It provided some interesting data for Latin America. With respect to degrees, the theological institutions were offering: certificate, 10.45%; diploma, 15.68%; bachelor's, 38.56%, licentiate, 13.72%; master's, 14.37%; and doctorate, 7.18% (Gilmore 1997).

While the above was taking place, some library staff had managed to get librarianship degrees, and at least three of them had become affiliated to Atla (established in the US in 1946 as the American Theological Library Association). A professional librarian meant a better-managed library, which can offer a greater range of need-based information services. This was an important shift that greatly enhanced the library view, way beyond the technical one. *Aker's Library Cataloging*, Newhall's *Manual*, handwritten and typed notes for doing library work were eventually replaced with professional tools, along with a new library vision. By then, more institutions were hiring professional librarians.

Latin American Theological Library Association (RLIT)

An effort was made to seek better ways to improve library work using a collaborative approach. In the later part of 1993, an attempt was made to contact theological libraries in the Latin American region. After succeeding, a call was made to meet in 1996 in San José, Costa Rica, to discuss the possibilities of establishing a Latin American Theological Library Association (*Red*



Image 2: Attendees at the 2nd Meeting of RLIT in La Paz, Bolivia, 1998. © Álvaro Pérez

Latinoamericana de Información Teológica–RLIT). This new organization met every two years in a different Latin America country (La Paz, Bolivia; Quito, Ecuador; Havana, Cuba; Mexico City; Buenos Aires, Argentina; Asunción, Paraguay). During these theological librarianship congresses numerous subjects were approached, such as: Latin American theological librarianship, Latin American theological development, Latin American theological professional needs, Latin American theological librarianship trends, theology and theological education, the theological library user, theological information services in Latin America, new information technologies, reference works in theological libraries, and practical experiences with library automation.

Besides presentations, also workshops, library visits, and library products exhibits were scheduled. The RLIT congresses were held until 2008, with the last one taking place in Asunción, Paraguay. A newsletter, *Boletín del Bibliotecario Teológico Latinoamericano* [*Latin American Theological Librarian Newsletter*] was edited as a means of information for the theological library community. A theological library manual–*Formación y organización de una biblioteca teológica: Un manual para la capacitación* [Creation and Organization of a Theological Library: A Training Manual] (Pérez and Laureano 2000)–was edited for non-professional librarians. Libraries already had access to existing universal classification systems and to the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*, 2nd edition (AACR2), Spanish translation. Some libraries had an earlier version. An

indexation tool specifically for theological libraries had to be created since there was none. There was a subject headings list and thesaurus for public and college libraries. This is how the “Subject headings list for theology” (Duarte and Rodríguez 1998) came into being.

The *Catálogo colectivo de publicaciones periódicas* [Collective catalogue of periodical publications] was edited by Brazilian theological librarians as a tool that aimed at research work (*Catálogo colectivo* 1999). Also, a “Latin American directory of theological libraries and librarians” (Pérez and Rivoir 2000) was edited. The idea was to have information on available resources in the region, both libraries and librarians. It was expected that RLIT would consolidate and, through collective work, could be able to produce a set of resources—a few of them already underway—to serve the purposes of the network.

Conclusion

As this is written, Latin American theological institutions face several challenges: society’s shift to secularism, lower student enrollment, financial constraints, and those that have facilities of a certain size have problems in maintaining them. There is still a great degree of dependence on overseas funding, but reality has changed. Traditional church-related funding organizations are experiencing reduced financial income, which in turn means less money to be allocated to church-related ministries in some developing regions, where other pressing needs are being taken into account. Within the institutions themselves, and when financial resources are scarce, priorities would also be taken into account; whatever is available will be allocated accordingly, and libraries do not often appear to be among them. Teaching staff and students are priorities—the *raison d’être* of the institution. In Latin America, theological education is mostly related to a ministry, a special call, from which no profit is expected. Because of this, financial assistance must be provided to students. Despite the above—and within the described tight situation—theological schools continue to offer theological training, with the implied limitations. The advent of improved and financially more affordable ICTs has enabled them to set up virtual platforms for their educational programs, incorporating along with required library services. These services aim to meet the needs of the academic programs being offered, and these do not necessarily support research beyond this level. However, some institutions engage in research and publishing activities. In this part of the world, a tight budget means very little money. Collection development—for books, journals, reference works, and other resources, either physical or digital—remains a major pressing need, as new material is constantly published. There is also the need to

reduce the risk of resorting to a bibliography with some degree of obsolescence. Desirably, collection updating should be mainly done in Spanish and Portuguese, the major languages of the region, although there are also some widely used indigenous languages. Some may think that, in the Internet Age, theological information is freely available, making it unnecessary to invest so much in libraries and librarians. While this part may be true, it is a limited solution. Users—who can afford or access information technology—may choose to download information from legal and illegal sites, enabling them to develop digital personal collections. Access to commercial databases such as EBSCO and ProQuest is not a possibility. Open access repositories have been welcomed but are still distant from the sophistication of well-known commercial databases. Although it must be conceded that, over time, they have increased both in number and quality. The theological library landscape has gone through major changes in the last decades. Besides the aforementioned challenges, there are a few others to be concerned about, such as better-staffed libraries (hopefully with trained librarians), improved ICT access and equipment renovation, adequate departmental infrastructure, and better-designed and implemented information services. The old belief that library work is related to technical matters and custodial functions is still to be overcome. Sadly, RLIT faded away with a change of leadership. It can be said that Latin American theological librarianship returned to its isolated ways in a world that has changed. Something must be done in order to collectively approach its current challenges.

Notes

1. A public act organized by the tribunal of the Holy Inquisition in which the condemned abjured their sins, repenting and thus achieving their reconciliation with the Catholic Church. The public performance of the act was to serve as a lesson to all the faithful gathered in the public square or place selected for this purpose.
2. An outstanding institution, with the largest theological library in Latin America, it was closed in 2015. At the time of this writing, the future of its library is unknown.

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