

# LIBERAL THEOLOGY IN QUESTION: ANALYSIS OF ACADEMIC PRODUCTION ON THE WEB OF SCIENCE IN THE PERIOD OF 1945 – 2020

## LIBERAL THEOLOGY IN QUESTION: ANALYSIS OF ACADEMIC PRODUCTION ON THE WEB OF SCIENCE IN THE PERIOD OF 1945 – 2020

Edenis Cesar de Oliveira<sup>1</sup>

### SUMMARY

Beginning at the end of the 18th century, theological liberalism has gained space in academic debates, exerting a strong influence on ecclesiastical practices. Furthermore, it has provided varied developments and different aspects in the field of theology, especially by promoting the insertion of other sources of study in addition to the Holy Scriptures. The present study aims to analyze academic production regarding the theme of Liberal Theology based on documents indexed in the database of *Web of Science* (WoS) notably in the period between 1945 and 2020. With descriptive-exploratory objectives, bibliometric analysis was used as a tool for analyzing academic-scientific production. The analysis carried out on a set of 66 documents shows an increase in the number of publications with greater emphasis from the year 2000 onwards. There was a predominance of publications in book format followed by articles in specialized periodicals/magazines, in addition to a high prominence of the category "Religion" with 54 records of the total volume. The United States is responsible for more than half of the publications researched, with English being the language of 86.36% of publications. Of the 24 registered organizations, 20 are American, a percentage of more than 83%. Regarding institutional links, 80% of the institutions are American, with one located in the Netherlands (Netherlands) and one in England.

**Key words:** Liberal Theology. Theological Liberalism. Theology. Web of Science. Bibliometrics.

### ABSTRACT

Beginning at the end of the 18th century, theological liberalism has gained space in academic debates, exerting a strong influence on ecclesiastical practices. In addition, it has provided various developments and different strands in the field of theology, especially by promoting the insertion of other sources of study beyond the Sacred Scriptures. This study aims to analyze the academic production related to the theme of Liberal Theology from documents indexed on the Web of Science (WoS) database, notably in the period between 1945 and 2020. With descriptive-exploratory objectives, it was used bibliometric analysis as a tool for analyzing academic-scientific production. The analysis carried out on a set of 66 documents shows an increase in the number of publications with greater emphasis from the year 2000 towards. There was a predominance of publications in the form of books followed by articles in specialized periodicals/magazines, in addition to the high prominence of the "Religion" category with 54 records of the total volume. The United States is responsible for more than half of the publications surveyed, with English being the language of 86.36% of the

---

<sup>1</sup>Federal University of São Carlos – UFSCar/CCN-LS  
<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4527-821X>

publications. Of the 24 registered organizations, 20 are American, the percentage of more than 83%. As for the institutional link, 80% of the institutions are American, leaving one located in the Netherlands (Netherlands) and one in England.

**Keywords:** Liberal Theology. Theological Liberalism. Theology. Web of Science. Bibliometrics.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The basic premise of research consists of having a scientific problem that you intend to deal with, conditioning it to the critical-argumentative process that is reasonably supported by a theoretical framework that supports it. However, it is necessary to look at this problem head on and, with honesty and awareness of the limitations, propose the appropriate instruments to begin elucidating the problem.

The popularly known “practical Christianity”, anchored in the false axiom that doctrine divides and practice unites, presents itself as the roots of liberalism, whose ideal is to join with others. These roots evolve and extend towards the “social gospel”, characterized by the focus of the good news within the limits of the social aspect, social works, *praxis* evangelicals, among other underlying concepts.

In the strictly theological field, liberalism presupposes the knowledge of God limited to human knowledge to the detriment of the knowledge of the God who revealed himself (as he is traditionally known) through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Consequently, this idea advocates a culturally conditioned theology, as can be seen from common nomenclatures today such as “North American theology”, “Latin theology”, “Hispanic theology”, “black theology”, “feminist theology”, and so on.

In turn, it is not the framing of a certain terminology that will guide the constituent and founding assumptions of this theological perspective. On the contrary, the inferences underlying these categories will form the basis on which different ramifications will be established, claiming for themselves the exclusivity of their own idiosyncrasies, constituents of a theoretical-methodological framework (heterodoxy), creating a body of support and justification for their practices (heteropraxy).

Other principles supported by theological liberalism with a significant impact on theological conceptions (theoretical and practical) concern the possibility of reaching God through any religion, not being the exclusive prerogative of Christianity, for which God can only be reached through the person of Jesus Christ. In this sense, for the

“Classical” Christianity postulates that every path leads to God is true under the premise that, in this case, the God reached is the Supreme Judge. Another relevant aspect in this aspect is limited to the trinitarian conception, advocating its non-existence, since the Son is not divine, being, therefore, a man full of God, but not God.

For liberals, the authoritative character of the Holy Scriptures is not sustainable, considering that it cannot be said to be the Word of God, limiting itself to a document written by men, full of fictitious stories and, therefore, of a limited degree of reliability. . The corollary of this doctrinal compendium lies in the contextualization (relativization?) of truth, which then experiences a complete liberation from its dogmatic character. Although not exhaustive, these principles are more than enough to enable new perspectives of theological-philosophical analysis with explanations more palatable to postmodern minds.

Liberal theology began in the German Enlightenment movement of the 18th and early 19th centuries, calling for new approaches to the relationships between religion, culture and science. Religious orthodoxies were criticized by philosophy and science, and religion was recognized as a product of culture (HODGSON, 2010). Since then, in a subtle way, it has gained followers, both in academia and in pastoral practice and its various branches.

The main objective of this study is to analyze academic production regarding Liberal Theology based on documents indexed in the database of *Web of Science* (WoS) in the period from 1945 to 2020. The article is structured based on this introduction containing the objective of the research, followed by a literature review relating to the topic in question. Next, the methodological path of the research and the results measured using the analysis tool are presented. Finally, by way of conclusion, some considerations are proposed, highlighting the limitations of the research and a proposed agenda for future studies.

## 2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The designation of this section consists of the outline of a basic theoretical framework that provides support for the theme now proposed for analysis.

## 2.1 LIBERAL THEOLOGY: GENESIS AND PRELIMINARY HISTORY

Liberal theology or theological liberalism as it is also known, began in the German Enlightenment movement of the 18th and early 19th centuries, against the backdrop of new proposals for interpellation between religion, culture and science. Religious orthodoxies were criticized by science, with emphasis on philosophy, with religion recognized as a fruit of culture (HODGSON, 2010). Historical records point to the work *Principle Mathematica*, by Isaac Newton (1642-1727), published in 1687, as a convincing factor regarding the power and imposition of the sieve of reason, notably those related to the sphere of consciousness. The advent of the Enlightenment gave prominence to philosophical thought, which was also considered scientific.

Constanza (2005) records that, in general, the Enlightenment promoted a strong and negative influence on Christianity, with emphasis on the evangelical movement of the 19th century, since, for the most part, the anthropocentric perspective was notoriety; the gospel and the person of Christ were in the background. This assertion naturally culminated in the rationalization of theology, paving the way for the advent, recognition and advancement of various religious and philosophical orientations. More directly, in the field of Christology, the “Schleiermachian” conception is opposed to orthodoxy, by postulating that Jesus' undertaking (suffering, death and resurrection) does not promote implications for the work of salvation, serving at most as an emblematic example of perseverance in the midst of suffering.

In this sense, Christianity must reconcile itself with the modern world. In other words, it must combine with scientific naturalism, with moral rationalism, with political democracy. Christianity must assimilate all the positive value of modernity, which will make it purer, more authentic (COMBLIN, 1985). Morais, Ferreira and Gomes (2010) add that this was a period of intense search for reconciliation between the concepts of the Protestant Church and positive human aspirations, proposing an adjustment between religion, thought and contemporary culture.

The consequences of this influential current are very varied, with hitherto unimaginable repercussions. The Scriptures become the object of historical-critical analysis; In this way, the doctrine of inerrancy and the authoritative character of the Holy Scriptures disappear, overcome by new analytical approaches with broad ramifications, whose flow

it has intensified in the most varied directions, in order to become moldable and adaptable to the so-called progressive interests.

In general, the emphases and methodological aspects of Liberal Theology made up a creative combination promoting a double interaction and mutual influence. The main emphases of this theological current can be considered: the search for rapprochement between theology and sciences, as well as between faith and modern rationality; positive anthropological vision, with strong expectations regarding education as a possibility for human advancement; relativization of Christocentric and ecclesiocentric perspectives with a view to universalist and secular perspectives; openness to issues specific to the relationship between Church and society and the appreciation of the world as a space for the Kingdom of God; appreciation of biblical exegesis and a consequent historical-critical view of the Bible; acceptance of modern cultural values; reinforcement of the dimensions of individuality and subjectivity, reducing religion to the sphere of feelings; predominantly ethical interpretation of Christianity, especially in relation to salvific data (RIBEIRO, 2008).

## 2.2 LIBERAL THEOLOGY: CONTEMPORARY IMPLICATIONS

The ascendancy of this theological current made it possible to submit the study of the Bible to a rational analysis, with human reason gaining prominence to the detriment of faith. The liberal theological movement advocates that the love of God is materialized, ultimately, in the love of others, with the kingdom of God being conceived in a present reality, whose culmination is reached under the aegis of ethics and morals (MORAIS; FERREIRA; GOMES, 2010). As Ribeiro (2008) points out, in this conception, human beings are good and protagonists of their time; the world moves towards a condition of total peace; the universalization of education will create conditions for social evolution, ethical awareness and social justice. Conceptions that are in line with the proposal of Williams (1949), for whom theological liberalism as a movement of modern Protestantism attempted to bring Christian thought to organic unity with the (r)evolutionary vision of the world, social reconstruction movements and the expectations of a improved world. This would be that form of Christian faith in which the progressive prophetic philosophy of history culminates in the expectation of the coming of the kingdom of God on earth.

Therefore, the very definition of liberal theology embodied in historical analysis stresses the emphasis on different aspects, such as, for example, the preferences for the historical Jesus to the detriment of Christ and his divinity, based on faith as an element

essential to the process; or, even, in the belief that Christianity must be reaffirmed in the dictates of postmodern knowledge. In summary, liberal Protestantism was inspired by the Kantian principle, which can be understood in two points: i) the removal of Religion from the speculative sphere; ii) the reduction of Christianity to the limits of Reason.

Machem (2001) is blunt in stating that liberalism portrays faith in human beings, postulating a religion of morality while Christianity expresses faith in the divine being (God). While one stumbles over the “rock of scandal”, the other defends the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. One is an enemy of doctrine, while the other glories in the immutable truths that rest in the very character and authority of God (MACHEM, 2001, p. 182).

The field of education has been widely affected by this aspect. Referring to the use of the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation, Maier (1977) denounces the pre-eminence that this model has been acquiring in a large part of theological schools, becoming considered the method of excellence in theological education taught in universities and institutions liberal theologies. Claiming a hermeneutics of the sacred text devoid of the presupposition of faith, it enables a reading based on sociological, historical, economic explanations, among others.

An apologist for theological liberalism, Hodgson (2010) argues that liberal theology does not concern a restricted and outdated phase of modern theology; on the contrary, according to the author, it constitutes the inherent characteristic of modern theology itself, remaining, in a vibrant way, to the present day. The plurality of sources in liberal theology is affirmed, flanking it with Scripture, tradition, reason, experience and culture. Therefore, the uniqueness of the Holy Scriptures as an infallible and immutable source is denied, since the hermeneutic product is born from the conflict and interaction of these sources. There is an academic effort even with the intention of unmasking the laments about the “lost” authority of the Scriptures (JENSON, 1977). From this, we can deduce a strong emphasis on the basic aspects of a blatantly anthropocentric theology, with characteristics completely aligned with the precepts of postmodern society.

Finally, the author proposes six hallmarks that he considers to be exclusive to a liberal theology for today: 1) a free and open theology; 2) a critically constructive theology; 3) an experiential theology; 4) a visionary, spiritual and holistic theology; 5) a prophetic, culturally transformative theology; and 6) a mediating and correlational theology. With these marks, theology becomes relevant to the contemporary world and provides resources

for the renewal of the church (HODGSON, 2010). Table 1 presents the “theological marks” proposed by Hodgson (2010) with a brief description of each of them.

Table 1: “Theological Marks” and respective descriptions.

	Theological Marks	Brief Description
1	<b>Free and open</b>	Freedom for what? For everything presented in the Bible, in the Christian tradition and in all experience - in personal experience, in nature, in one's own culture and religion, in cultural transitions
two	<b>Critically constructive</b>	[...] new theological constructions, seeking new symbols to replace used and worn-out ones, taking into account new circumstances and <i>new insights</i> never imagined in the past. Although such constructions are a human effort, if they are genuine and honest efforts and if we have faith in the generous liberality of God, we have reason to trust that our constructions are a response to something real that is presenting itself. The truth will emerge through testing these constructs in a community of free and open discourse. Ultimately, we have no alternative. We cannot know the truth directly, and we cannot humanly inhabit the world without undertaking such constructions, however fragile and fallible they may be.
3	<b>Experiential</b>	Starting from the premise that experience is the matrix in which religion occurs, theologians must be open to the totality of experience: empirical, sensitive, emotional, intuitive, intellectual, aesthetic, cultural, revelatory. Revelation occurs through certain root experiences that resonate in history, are mediated by texts and traditions, and interact with the personal experience of the interpreters and their communities.
4	<b>Visionary, spiritual and holistic</b>	It represents the mystical dimension of theology in contrast to its empirical and experiential dimension; implies intellectual and sensitive intuition, the ability to see, intuit or imagine the whole in the parts, the universal in the concrete. This requires an increase in imagination, an ability to discern and interpret figures, to create new concepts from revised symbols.
5	<b>prophetic and culturally transformer</b>	In the last forty years, the prophetic role has been assumed mainly by black, feminist, liberation and ecological theologies. Today liberal theology must also be a theology of liberation.
6	<b>Mediator and correlational</b>	Without mediation, without real engagement in the messy realities of the world, cultural transformation is not a possibility.

It can be said that the “brands” proposed by Hodgson (2010) do not present anything new, limiting themselves to expressing the nomenclatures already commonly used in the field. *mainstream* notably liberal theology that proposes to dialogue with other branches of the human sciences, in a stance that is sharply contrary to the inerrant and authoritative character of the Holy Scriptures. As the author himself asserts, “the marks of liberalism [...] have characterized the work of its most creative theologians, from Schleiermacher and Hegel to Troeltsch and Tillich to the present day (HODGSON, 2010, p. 9). In fact, only the creative blossoming of a fallen nature can create conditions for the developments that this theological current has made possible. The tentacles of theological liberalism have extended across the various branches of knowledge, with profound theoretical and practical implications. Having the academy and seminaries as its cradle, its influence remains firm in ecclesiastical practices, generating a vicious circle, where these

they subsidize the infamous “success stories” widely studied and reinterpreted in the academic field, under the premises of their postulates.

The Christian worldview, established on a Christocentric basis, with the Holy Scriptures as an infallible, inerrant and authoritative rule, must be above any proposal for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary reading, expressions that have been quite in vogue currently, in an attempt to signal the fact that theology is being able to dialogue with the post-modern and multifaceted society, characterized by pluralism and respect for those who are different. Therefore, any stance different from this can be considered a fundamentalist act, in the most pejorative and crude meaning of the expression. Nothing is more deceptive, corrosive and wasteful.

### 3 METHOD

Qualitative in nature, with descriptive-exploratory objectives, the bibliometric method was used to achieve the purpose of this study. The use of bibliometrics was considered with a view to identifying the state of the art of the theme “liberal theology”, as well as its real level of interest in the academic-scientific field (DAIM et al., 2006; THELWALL, 2008; MARTÍNEZ et al. , 2015). Furthermore, considering the real possibility that research interests on the topic cross multiple boundaries of disciplines and sciences, the option to adopt this method was strengthened, as it is highly recommended for the analysis of interdisciplinary studies (VAN RAAN; VAN LEEUWEN , 2002).

According to Broadus (1987), bibliometric techniques have been used mainly to study the growth and distribution of scientific publications on a given topic. Bibliometrics, in short, consists of the study and measurement of publication patterns of all forms of written communication and their authors (POTTER, 1981). Scientific mapping, in turn, enabled more robust monitoring of prevalent research areas, pointing out trends in the technical-scientific scope, in addition to demonstrating the emergence and development of common research groupings, especially in geographic and temporal aspects.

The research was carried out in May 2021, directly in the database of *Web of Science (WoS)* using the descriptor “liberal theology” without insertion of Boolean operators. A *Web of Science* is a multidisciplinary scientific platform developed



by Thomson Reuters – Institute for Science Information (ISI). Which brings together publications with a high impact factor.

#### 4 PRESENTATION OF DATA AND DISCUSSION

66 records were recovered that met the pre-established requirements for the search and subsequent analysis. Of this total, only one article belonged to the modality *open access* (open access). Access to the platform was provided through the Federated Academic Community (CAFe) provided by the National Teaching and Research Network (RNP) of Capes/Ministry of Education. Documents with all languages available in the database were considered. Table 1 presents the total sample and preliminary analytical information of the data sets that will be analyzed in this study.

Table 1: Total sample and analytical information of the analyzed set

Base	Criteria for Eligibility	Type	Languages	Analytical Information		Date Recovery
				Period	No. of Records	
Web of Science - WoS	Contain the descriptor TI= "liberal theology"	All the Documents	All available at the base	1945 – 2020	66	28 May. 2021

The number of sixty-six documents recovered in the three quarters of a century in which the research was undertaken is not considered very significant, with an evident increase in publications from the 2000s onwards. It is possible that many other publications have been carried out, whose magazines and academic journals are not indexed in WoS. In any case, considering the relevance of this base in the academic field, the data collected present important characteristics for the context of analysis, especially when indicating trends in theological studies.

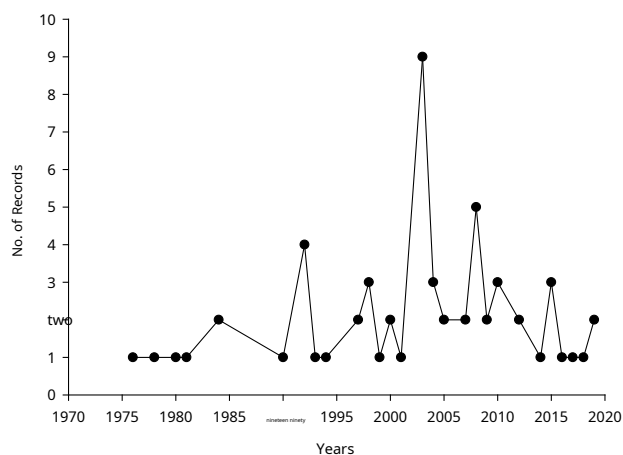
Of the total 28 years that contain records, approximately 47% of the years presented only one publication. Table 2 presents the number of publications per year of the researched period.

Table 2: Number of records per year in the period researched.

Years	Records	Years	Records	Years	Records	Years	Records
1976	1	1993	1	2003	9	2012	two
1978	1	1994	1	2004	3	2014	1
1980	1	1997	two	2005	two	2015	3
1981	1	1998	3	2007	two	2016	1
1984	two	1999	1	2008	5	2017	1

nineteen ninety	1	2000	two	2009	two	2018	1
1992	4	2001	1	2010	3	2019	two

In the graphic illustration, 2003 stands out as the year with the highest number of publications (9) followed by 2008 with five (5) publications. Together, these two years represented more than a fifth (21.21%) of the total publications in the period researched.



The period before the year 2000 is characterized by a greater number of years without publications. The years 1977, 1979, 1982, 1983, 1985 – 1989, 1991, 1995 and 1996, in a total of twelve (12) years, did not present any publications. In the period after the 2000s, only five (5) years (2002, 2006, 2011, 2013 and 2020) failed to present at least one publication.

Regarding the types of documents (Table 3), there is a prevalence of *Book Review* with approximately 60% of the total volume of records in the period. The type *Article* occupies second position with 27.27%, followed by *Letter* with five (5) and *Proceedings Paper* (Annals of academic-scientific events) with two (2) records. It is expected that this last type of publication will present less significant numbers of records, since few events are indexed in the searched database, with books and articles from academic periodicals/magazines being more common.

Table 3: Types of documents and records

Document Type	Records	%
Book Review	39	59.09
Article	18	27.27
Letter	5	7.58
Proceedings Paper	two	3.03
Review	two	3.03
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Regarding the categories (Table 4), there is a considerable difference in relation to second place, the category *Religion* with 54 records verified, which was already expected, considering that the topic under study is classified within the larger scope of this category.

Table 4: Categories and number of records in the period

Categories	Abbreviation	Records
<i>Religion</i>	Re	54
<i>History</i>	Hi	13
<i>Philosophy</i>	Ph	4
<i>Humanities Multidisciplinary</i>	HM	3
<i>Education Scientific Disciplines</i>	ESD	two
<i>Geosciences Multidisciplinary</i>	GM	two
<i>Ethnic Studies</i>	ES	1
<i>History Philosophy of Science</i>	HPoS	1
<i>Information Science Library Science</i>	ISLS	1
<i>Literature British Isles</i>	LBI	1
<i>Medieval Renaissance Studies</i>	MRS	1
<i>Sociology</i>	Only	1

Although the second category represents less than a quarter of the first, its result should not be diminished in value, as, in addition to representing approximately 230% more in relation to the *Philosophy*, this category (*History*) brings together publications related to the topic, focusing on the historical context, as the name suggests.

As for funding agencies, only three were identified, both with the same percentage of participation in total publications throughout the researched period. The first funding agency is the Graduate Research Partnership Program at the University of Minnesota, a state located in the mid-west region of the United States, on the border with Canada. The next funding agency is the Louisville Institute, a religious institution founded by the pharmaceutical Lilly family (Eli Lilly & Company) located in the US state of Kentucky, with headquarters at the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary (KY-USA). Table 5 systematizes the information with the funding agencies found in the database search.

Table 5: Funding agencies and number of records

Financing Agencies	Records	% of 66
Graduate Research Partnership Program at the University of Minnesota	1	1,515
Louisville Institute	1	1,515
Society for the Scientific Study of Religion	1	1,515

The final funding agency is the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR), an interdisciplinary academic association that stimulates, promotes and communicates research

social scientific studies about religious institutions and experiences. The SSSR was founded at Harvard University in 1949 as the Committee for the Social Scientific Study of Religion. From 1951 to 1956, the organization was called the Committee for the Scientific Study of Religion. The change to its current name was made in late 1956. The SSSR seeks to promote interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration among other scholars in the fields of sociology, religious studies, psychology, political science, economics, international studies, gender studies, and many others fields.

In the item “Source Titles”, twenty-six (26) titles were found in total (Table 6), with approximately 14% of publications. Text in *Web site* of the periodical states that, for more than a century, the *Exhibitor Times*, published monthly, has excelled in combining interest in all pastoral, practical and theoretical subjects, with the most recent international biblical and theological studies.

Table 6: Sources and number of publication records

Source Titles	Records	% of 66
Exhibitor Times	9	13,636
Journal of Religion	5	7,576
Church History	4	6,061
Journal of Theological Studies	4	6,061
Journal of Ecclesiastical History	3	4,545
Journal of The American Academy of Religion	3	4,545
Etudes Theologiques Et Religieuses	two	3,030
Heythrop Journal A Quarterly Review of Philosophy and Theology	two	3,030
Historische Zeitschrift	two	3,030
Journal of Geological Education	two	3,030
Theological Studies	two	3,030
TIs The Times Literary Supplement	two	3,030
Ashgate Science and Religion Series	1	1,515
Communio Viatorum	1	1,515
Dialog A Journal of Theology	1	1,515
English Literary Renaissance	1	1,515
God and The Scientist Exploring the Work of John Polkinghorne	1	1,515
Heythrop Journal	1	1,515
Holocaust and Genocide Studies	1	1,515
Horizons	1	1,515
International Journal of Systematic Theology	1	1,515
Interpretation A Journal of Bible and Theology	1	1,515
Journal for The History of Modern Theology Zeitschrift Fur Neuere Theologieggeschichte	1	1,515
Journal for The Scientific Study of Religion	1	1,515
Journal of African History	1	1,515

Occupying second place in the ranking is *Journal of Religion* with five (5) publications in total, corresponding to 7.57% of the published volume. Published quarterly (4 volumes per year), the *Journal of Religion*, connected to *The University of Chicago Press Journal*, from the University of Chicago, located in the American state of Illinois, promotes research

critical, hermeneutic, historical and constructive religion. The magazine publishes articles on theology, religious ethics and philosophy of religion, as well as articles that address the role of religion in culture and society from a historical, sociological, psychological, linguistic or artistic point of view. It also publishes highly specialized research in limited areas of inquiry that are meaningful to a broader audience. Not surprisingly, the United States leads the ranking of origin of publications with more than half of the total volume of records, as shown in Table 7. Second place is occupied by England with almost a sixth (1/6) of the volume of USA Even with a third (1/3) of the records of second place, Scotland, in third place, still stands out due to its differentiated quantity (50% above the others on the list).

Table 7: Countries/regions of origin of publications

Countries/Regions	Records	% of 66
United States	34	51,515
England	6	9,091
Scotland	two	3,030
Canada	1	1,515
Czech Republic	1	1,515
Germany	1	1,515
Italy	1	1,515
Russia	1	1,515
Slovakia	1	1,515

Regarding the language of publications, there is a predominance of the English language with a percentage above 86% of the total records, followed by German with 6.06% of the total, a very significant difference in relation to the first language. French, Russian and Spanish also appear, occupying third, fourth and fifth place, respectively. Table 8 presents this information clearly.

Table 8: Predominant languages in publications

Languages	Records	% of 66
English	57	86,363
German	4	6,060
French	3	4,545
russian	1	1,515
Spanish	1	1,515

Regarding the organizations affiliated with the authors of the publications identified in the period, there is a predominance of American institutions. Of the twenty-four (24) registered organizations, twenty (20) are American, a percentage of more than 83%. Table 9 presents all the organizations identified in the research with the countries and their respective numbers of registrations.

Table 9: Organizations, countries and number of registrations

Organizations	Country	Records	% of 66
Coll William Mary	USA	3	4,545
Boston College	USA	two	3,030
Columbia Univ.	USA	two	3,030
Seattle Univ.	USA	two	3,030
Vanderbilt Univ.	USA	two	3,030
Acadia Univ.	Canada	1	1,515
Atlanta Fulton Pub Lib	USA	1	1,515
Boyle Lectures	England	1	1,515
Calif State Univ Fullerton	USA	1	1,515
Carleton Coll	USA	1	1,515
Colgate Univ	USA	1	1,515
Ctr Coll Danville	USA	1	1,515
Dartmouth College	USA	1	1,515
Davidson Coll	USA	1	1,515
Delaware Human Forum	USA	1	1,515
Harvard University	USA	1	1,515
Inst Create Res	USA	1	1,515
Janos Selye Univ	Slovakia	1	1,515
Louisville Presbyterian Theol Seminary	USA	1	1,515
North Amer Paul Tillich Soc	USA	1	1,515
Quaker Study Ctr	USA	1	1,515
Ripon Coll	USA	1	1,515
Russian State Univ Humanities	Russia	1	1,515
Rutgers State Univ	USA	1	1,515
St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral Edinburgh	Scotland	1	1,515

The names of the Organizations, including the abbreviations, were kept in accordance with the original source, that is, exactly as it was arranged in the database of the Organization. *WoS*. In addition to the United States, organizations located in Canada, England, Slovakia, Russia and Scotland appear, each having only one (1) registration.

Finally, the first ten (10) authors with the highest volume of publications in the period researched were determined. Table 10 shows this data systematized by author, institutional link and number of records.

Table 10: Authors, institutional affiliation and number of records (publications)

Ranking	Authors	Institutional bond	Records	% of 66
1	Camroux M	University of Oxford	4	6,060
two	Livingston J.C.	East Tennessee State University	3	4,545
3	Chapman M.D.	University of Oxford	two	3,030
4	Spencer HA	SeattleUniversity	two	3,030
5	Adriansse HJ	Leiden University	1	1,515
6	Bowden H.W.	Rutgers State Univ New Brunswick	1	1,515
7	Burant A	University of Chicago	1	1,515
8	Dorrien G	Columbia University	1	1,515
9	Cho JM	William Paterson Univ New Jersey	1	1,515
10	Crossley JP	University of Sheffield	1	1,515

The ten (10) authors with the highest number of publications are responsible for 25.75% of the total volume of publications (66) analyzed in the period. The authors' institutions of affiliation

are predominantly American (80%), with a remaining link to an institution located in the Netherlands (*Leiden University*) and an author linked to an institution in England (*University of Sheffield*).

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study aimed to analyze academic production relating to the theme of Liberal Theology based on documents indexed in the database of *Web of Science (WoS)* in the period from 1945 to 2020. The research with sixty-six (66) records recovered shows an increase in the number of publications, especially from the year 2000 onwards, in addition to shorter intervals of years without presenting any publications.

Predominantly, publications are in books followed by articles in specialized periodicals/magazines, in addition to the prominence of the “Religion” category with 54 records of the total volume. The United States is responsible for more than half of the publications researched, with English being the language of 86.36% of publications. Of the twenty-four registered organizations, twenty are American, a percentage of more than 83%. Regarding institutional links, eighty percent of the institutions are American, with one located in the Netherlands (Holland) and one in England.

Evidently, the research has limitations, especially with regard to the limitation of the indexing database of records researched. Despite the fact that it is a recognizedly robust foundation in the academic field, it is not the only one. Another limiting aspect refers to the choice of keyword to trigger the search on the platform.

As an agenda suggestion, it is recommended to adopt other indexing bases and add variations of the keyword, with the addition of Boolean descriptors in order to increase the capture of more documents.

It is expected that the theme presented in this essay based on bibliometric analysis can serve in the field of exploratory research as a basis for new studies that contribute to the critical-reflective thinking of theological studies with direct implications for ecclesiastical practices. To God be all the glory!

## REFERENCES

- BROADUS, RN Toward a definition of “bibliometrics”. **Scientometrics**, vol. 12, no. 5-6, p. 373-379, 1987.
- COMBLIN, J. **Liberation theology, neoconservative theology and liberal theology**. Petrópolis-RJ: Vozes, 1985.
- CONSTANZA, JRS The historical roots of theological liberalism. **Fides Reformata**, vol. 10, no. 1, p. 799-99, 2005.
- DAIM, YOU; RUEDA, G.; MARTIN, H.; GERDSRI, P. Forecasting emerging technologies: Use of bibliometrics and patent analysis. **Technological Forecasting and Social Change**, vol. 73, no. 8, p. 981-1012, 2006.
- HODGSON, PC Liberal Theology. **The Expository Times**, vol. 122, no. 1, p. 4-10, 2010.
- JENSON, RW On the Problem(s) of Scriptural Authority. **Union Seminary Review**, vol. 31, no. 3, p. 237-250, 1977.
- MACHEM, J.G. **Christianity and Liberalism**. São Paulo: Puritanos, 2001.
- MAIER, G. **The end of the historical-critical method**. St. Louis: Concordia, 1977.
- MARTÍNEZ, MA; COBO, MJ; HERRERA, M.; HERRERA-VIEDMA, E. Analyzing the Scientific Evolution of Social Work Using Science Mapping. **Research on Social Work Practice**, vol. 25, no. 2, p. 257-277, 2015.
- MORAIS, JET; FERREIRA, LC; GOMES, RF Word of God, in neo-orthodoxy, according to Karl Barth. **Theological Culture Magazine**, vol. 18, no. 70, 2010.
- POTTER, W.G. **Introduction**. *Library Trends*, vol. 30, p. 5-7, 1981.
- RIBEIRO, CO Think about the future, reinforce hope! Eschatology, kingdom of God and history. **Walking Magazine**, vol. 13, no. 22, 2008.
- THELWALL, M. Bibliometrics to webometrics. **Journal of Information Science**, vol. 34, no. 4, p. 605-621, 2008.
- VAN RAAN, AFJ; VAN LEEUWEN, Th. N. Assessment of the scientific basis of interdisciplinary, applied research. Application of bibliometric methods in nutrition and food research. **Research Policy**, vol. 31, p. 611-632, 2002.
- WILLIAMS, D.D. **God's Grace and Man's Hope**. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949.