Latin American Perspectives on Religion

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A Surprising Closeness in Latin American Academia: Luther and Certain Neurosciences

<https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2018-0051>

Received August 25, 2018; accepted November 19, 2018

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to show a surprising coincidence between Lutheran Protestantism and physicalist neurosciences regarding the negation of free will and how this issue can begin to be studied in Latin American academia. The current advance of Protestantism in Latin America, accompanied by a decline in Catholicism, is simultaneous with a growing presence of the physicalist neurosciences. It can be seen that the development of Protestantism and neurosciences coincide historically in Latin America, unlike what happened in other parts of the world, where Protestantism has a much more extensive history. This allows us to suppose that the discussion on free will will be installed as a matter of research and discussion in the Latin American academia, which had not happened until now. In this work we also seek to identify what could be the common element that unites the Lutheran conception and the arguments of the physicalist neurosciences about the negation of free will. We will show that this common element is the aversion to metaphysics as an explanatory dimension of free will. The strong opposition to metaphysics is probably the most important common element between Lutheran Protestantism and the physicalistic neurosciences. This will allow us to show that the proximity between the two is not such an extravagant idea.

Keywords: free will, Lutheran Protestantism, Metaphysics, physicalism, nominalism

1 Introduction

There is no doubt that the Latin American religious tradition is predominantly Catholic. However, not only according to the data from the censuses, but also according to studies carried out, for example, by the Pew Research Center¹, Protestantism has made remarkable progress in this part of the world. When I refer to Protestantism, I am aware that there are many churches born after the Lutheran Reformation. In spite of this, I believe that it is possible to identify some essential common features in this diversity of Protestant communities, at least in relation to those issues that lead them to oppose the Church of Rome.

The causes of this fact are very varied and complex. We cannot attribute the progress of Protestantism to a single cause, since the simple experience of living in a Latin American country, makes us aware that a certain decline in adherence to Catholicism is not only explained by the loss of prestige of the Church of Rome among the faithful. Certainly, it is undeniable that some facts have been harmful for the credibility of the Roman Church. There are countries, like Chile, where a large part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy has been seriously involved in cases of sexual abuse or at least cover-ups and deceitful information. However, there are other countries where the Church has not been most affected by these events, and where its presence

¹ Pew Research Center, *7 key takeaways about religion in Latin America*.

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in pastoral tasks has been more significant than possible breaches of the essentials of its moral teachings. In spite of that, the number of Catholics does not increase in the same proportion as that of Protestants.

For the time being, this fact has not given rise to in-depth theological discussions, as can be seen in the developed countries where Protestantism has a longer history. Problems such as those of free will, for example, are not yet the subject of the most important theological discussions in Latin American academia. However, another relevant fact, in principle not related to the expansion of the Protestant creed, begins to provoke discussions around free will. I refer to the impact of the growing importance of neurosciences in the Latin American academia, especially those with a physicalist bias which introduce the theme of free will in our academia. Do these developments coincide in some way with the expansion of evangelical churches in Latin America? On the other hand, is it possible to speak of a relationship between physicalist neurosciences and evangelical religiosity? In principle, this hypothesis seems somewhat extravagant. However, I would like to suggest that the advance of the Protestant faith in this part of the world and the increasingly sustained progress of a certain kind of neurosciences, will end up making it evident that both share the same negative concept of free will. In what follows, I will try to show from a Latin American academic perspective, why, in my opinion, it is possible to approximate the Lutheran conception of free will and that of the physicalist neurosciences, both settling more or less simultaneously in our culture and influencing it more and more.

I am aware that evangelical religiosity in Latin America is not uniform. There are numerous evangelical churches, and it is not my purpose to go into the details of each of them. What I suggest is that the expansion of Protestantism has revived academic interest in Luther's thought. Simultaneously, there has been a remarkable development of the physicalist neurosciences. One of the most important issues in Lutheran thinking is the issue of free will, and at the same time, a variant of neuroscience, namely, the physicalist, also addresses this problem. As is well known, both deny that man has free will.

Before continuing, I wish to be clear enough: my work does not consist in an analysis of the development of Protestantism in Latin America, but the way in which that development has aroused a renewed interest in Luther in Latin American academia.

As I said before, I intend to address the possible connections between two approaches to the problem of free will: one anthropological-theological and the other what we might call scientific-philosophical, whose common conclusion is the non-existence of such free will. I will not attempt to establish any causal or historical connection between such approaches. Instead, I would just like to draw attention to a few common points which lie beyond their respective jurisdictions and which might explain their common denial of freedom.

The first of these approaches to the problem of freedom, the anthropological-theological one, is spelled out in Martin Luther's *De servo arbitrio*, published in 1525 as a violent response to the *De libero arbitrio* by Erasmus of Rotterdam, which appeared in 1524 after a series of insistent requests and pressure from popes and notable Catholics. The *De libero arbitrio* was, in part, Erasmus' response to a violent writing by Luther, an "assertio" (affirmation) about free will, which was in fact an attack on Leo X's Bull "*Exsurge Domine*"².

The other, scientific-philosophical approach, will concentrate on some writings of contemporary neuroscientists who have dealt with the philosophy of mind, emphasising recent discoveries of cerebral topography and physiology which, according to them, could reduce the whole scope of human action - supposedly free - to a matter of stimulus-response, thus making it very difficult, among other things, to justify normative orders of all kinds. Although these seem to be two disjointed epistemic universes, the conclusive similarity of the non-existence of freedom is striking. From a theological standpoint, Luther (and many after him) openly maintains that freedom is only a name, since after the Adamic fall human nature had been irretrievably corrupted without any possibility of restoration; thus, all natural volitional acts can only be sinful and deformed³. From the philosophy of the physicalist mind, it is also denied that human acts can be free. I find it interesting then to analyse the possible relationship between an aspect of Lutheran anthropology based on a certain theological conception, and the physicalist philosophy of mind

² See the Bull in Denzinger, "*Enchiridion*", 363-367 (1451-1492).

³ Knaake and Alii, *Dr. Martin Luthers Werke*, 600-787.

which, through an apparently different path, reaches the same conclusion as Luther: the denial of human freedom. Just as it might be excessive to claim causal connections, neither does it seem to me that there is a complete decoupling of the two ways of denying free will. Just as a hypothesis, I will mention what might be the common element shared by the Lutheran conception of freedom and the physicalist versions of neurosciences. If the identification of this common element between Lutheranism and neuroscience appears reasonable enough, then both perspectives on human freedom would not be so far apart.

2 Method

The following briefly outlines my method of inquiry.

First, I will refer to some important Lutheran passages. I will take some from *On the Freedom of a Christian*, published in 1520, when he was already aware of the Bull *Exsurge Domine*, by Leo X, dated June 15, 1520, in which his doctrine was criticised. In October 1520 Luther met with an envoy of the Pope, Karl von Miltitz. As a result of that meeting, Luther decided three things: the first was to write a letter to Leo X as full of considerations for his person as he was of insults to the institution; the second, which he announced in that letter, was to write a short treatise, *On the Freedom of a Christian*, and to offer it to His Holiness; and the third, implemented on December 10, 1520, was to publicly burn the Bull *Exsurge Domine*. This last gesture was not to the liking of the Pope, and on January 3, 1521, he decided to excommunicate Luther.

Secondly, I will refer to arguments of philosophers or physicalist neuroscientists, which can be generally summarised in Dick Swaab's, the Dutch neurobiologist, best-selling book, *We Are Our Brains: A Neurobiography of the Brain, from the Womb to Alzheimer's*, first published in Dutch in 2010 and translated into English in 2014. If clarity is the philosopher's courtesy, as Ortega y Gasset used to say, we must say that Dr. Swaab is exceptionally courteous. His extensive book is very readable and is almost an encyclopaedia of physicalist neurosciences. At the beginning of chapter 15 he offers an attractive way of focusing on it, since it is here that he quotes Luther. Chapter 18 is entitled "Free will: a pleasant illusion", and Luther's quote is a statement considering the Diet of Worms in 1521. Luther said: "Here I am. There's nothing else I can do". This is too little to attribute to Luther a radical denial of free will, but it is still interesting to me that a physicalist neuroscientist, in the chapter of his most important book where he speaks of freedom, should quote Luther.

Finally, in conclusion, I will attempt to identify the possible common factor between Lutheran anthropology and physicalist neuroscience that, in my opinion, had to lead to a challenge to free will.

3 Luther and free will

Indeed, Luther does not question human spirituality; a supposed physical-material origin of all mental processes, especially volitional ones, is a matter completely out of place in his idea of man. The mere assumption would constitute a significant error of methodological anachronism. For Luther, freedom does not exist because the driving force of our choices can be split into a couple of alternatives that exclude free will: either we act according to our own will, and because of the total corruption of our nature as a result of the original sin, we will never be free, for the will only habitually chooses itself against God; or, in choosing the good, we do not choose ourselves, for in reality it is God who chooses, who operates within us by means of His grace. The good that we do does not originate from a free decision of our will due to the inevitable propensity to evil that afflicts it *post lapsum*, so it is useless to strive on the path of meritorious virtue. In a letter dated August 1, 1521, he wrote to Melancthon, "*Esto peccator et pecca fortiter* (be a sinner and strongly sin), but trust and rejoice more strongly in Christ, who is conqueror over sin, death and the world. While we are down here it will be necessary to sin; this life is not the dwelling place of righteousness, but we hope, as Peter says, for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. It is enough that by the riches of glory we have known the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world; from him sin will not separate us, even though we fornicate and kill thousands and thousands of times every day". In *De servo arbitrio*, we already find, in a more systematic way, this radical denial of freedom, not in absolute

terms, given the use of this term “freedom”. It is written, “let us at least teach how to use it in good faith in such a way that man is granted free will only of the thing that is inferior to him, not of the thing that is superior to him, that is, that he knows that in his faculties and possessions he has the right to use, to do, to omit according to his will (*pro libero arbitrio*) (...). For the rest, with regard to God, or in things concerning salvation or condemnation, he has no free will, but is captive, subdued and enslaved either to the will of God or to the will of Satan”. And furthermore: “In fact, it is impossible to know what free will is if we do not first know what is in the power of the human will, what is in the power of God and whether or not His foreknowledge has a characteristic of need”. Either: “I admit in fact that Wyclif’s thesis (‘everything happens out of necessity’) has been wrongly condemned by the Council of Constance, or rather by the conspiracy and sedition of Constance”.

For Luther, our choices are by no means meritorious. Freedom is, after all, a mere *name*. The latter is particularly relevant if we recall Luther’s open adherence to nominalism (“*Ego sum occamicae factionis*”). While it is true that his affinity for this school of thought is essentially expressed for reasons linked to “omnipotentia Dei absoluta” Luther sees no obstacle to extending the consequences of this adherence to the problem of freedom, which he calls a mere name. In fact, Leo X, in *Exsurge, Domine*, quotes from Luther’s reprehensible error: 36: “After sin, free will is a reality in name only (*res de solo titulo*), and when he does what is in his power, he sins mortally”⁴. This was affirmed by Luther in the Heidelberg controversy on 25th April 1518. There, Luther also said: “Free will, after sin, has the power to do good only passively but always has the power to do evil actively.”

The Lutheran insistence in *sola fides* seems, in principle, incompatible with as many laws, commandments, deeds, attitudes and ceremonies as are prescribed in Scripture, we read in *On the Freedom of a Christian*. In reality, he says, such precepts show us and prescribe various good deeds, but they do not give us any help. It tells us what needs to be done but does not give us the strength to do it. In these lines, Luther seems to be aware that it is a contradiction to make free will a *flatus vocis* and at the same time to admit the validity of normative orders. In reality, the purpose of these normative orders is to show man his powerlessness for good and to force him to learn to distrust himself. No deed is worth what faith is worth, for no good deeds adhere to the word of God as faith does. Faith is enough for the Christian, he says, and he does not need any deed to be justified. That is to say, strictly speaking, he is detached from all precepts and laws, and if he is detached, he is undoubtedly free. This is Christian freedom: faith alone (*sola fides*). Luther hastened to declare, somewhat suspiciously, that “it is not meant to mean that we should encourage our laziness or open the door to evil deeds, but that good deeds are not necessary to achieve justification and salvation”. Deeds are dead things, incapable of honouring and praising God, he continues. All this makes for the salvation of inner man, for there is another aspect, that of the outer man, associated with the flesh and with a rebellious will, he says, that aspires to serve the world. For all these reasons, Luther does not fail to assess the accuracy of the following two sentences, which he considers to be a reflection of the non-existent influence of freedom. The first sentence says: “Good and righteous deeds do not make a man good and righteous, but it is the good and righteous man who does good and righteous deeds”. And the second: “Evil deeds never make a man evil, it is the wicked man who does evil deeds”⁵.

Erasmus of Rotterdam was the true inspirer of *De servo arbitrio* with his booklet on free will published in 1524. We know that Erasmus, in turn, responded to *De servo arbitrio* with his *Diatriba adversus servum arbitrium M. Luteri* as early as 1526, in which the essential question is: how to save the justice and goodness of God if he condemns man for sin that he cannot avoid? Raising a new response from Luther in which he radicalizes his position, he affirms that the highest degree of faith consists in believing that God is merciful even though he saves so few and condemns, necessarily, so many. God’s designs are inscrutable, and if they were not, faith would have no meaning, and so Luther also interrupts a harmonious articulation between faith and reason. Salvation then is a matter of free divine decision in which human actions have no place or merit.

At this point, it is important to point out the background or framework of convictions, let us call them

⁴ Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, 367 (1486).

⁵ See Kuri Camacho, “De servo arbitrio”, *passim*.

philosophical, that support the Lutheran position. The same author has been sufficiently clear on this point about self-proclaiming himself a supporter of the occamist faction, that is, nominalist. If nominalism were reduced to a methodological prescription, in the sense of seeking semantic agreements that facilitate an informed dialogue, one could not agree more on this Lutheran occamism. However, Luther's nominalism is an anti-Aristotelian, anti-Thomistic, anti-Scholastic militancy. This nominalism is intimately associated, in its final analysis, with an open rejection of metaphysics. Can a theologian be hostile towards metaphysics? This is a serious contradiction in terms, and this is highlighted by one of the greatest scholars of Lutheranism, Henri Denifle, in his monumental work on Luther and Lutheranism⁶. It is not only a matter of nominalism restricted to the subject of absolute *omnipotentia Dei*, as was said above, but, directly, and I quote Denifle: "As an extreme occamist, Luther did not only have a false notion of the supernatural, but he had also completely broken with it"⁷. "The occamian theology, Denifle continues, makes us see the whole work of salvation as purely external to man. In this work everything becomes pure mechanism....and it is in this theology that Luther is formed"⁸.

In any case, Luther hates Thomas Aquinas, and through him, Aristotle. This is the Babylonian captivity of the Church, says Luther in one of his writings. However, Luther's knowledge of Thomas Aquinas was mediated by authors with semi-pelagic tendencies who had been adopted by the German Thomistic school. Added to this is the fact that all of Luther's early opponents were Dominicans, making it very difficult for him to be fascinated by the thought of Aquinas. In another famous text from 1520, entitled "To the Christian nobility of the German nation, on the reform of the Christian State", Luther sets out a programme of university reform. There he writes: "I have to say this and let anyone who wants to be angry be angry, but all that the Papacy institutes and organizes is for the sole purpose of increasing sin and error... In the universities, neither Sacred Scripture nor the Christian faith is taught, and there the blind and pagan teacher of Aristotle reigns alone, even above Christ. I would then advise that Aristotle's books such as *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, the *Treatise on the Soul* and *Ethics*, which up to now have been considered the best, be purely and simply suppressed, as well as all others that seek to address natural things. ... I can say without issue that a potter knows more about natural things than is contained in those books. My heart is filled with sadness when I think that in his malice and pride, this accursed heathen has managed to seduce and deceive so many excellent Christians with his false words; but that is the way God has used him to punish us for our sins".

We cannot dwell on the Lutheran appropriation of Aristotle, but the way in which he usually refers to the Stagirite illustrates his ideas about him. Aristotle is the "destroyer of pious doctrine", a "rotten philosopher", a "sophist", an "evil scoundrel", "a fable", "a lazy donkey full of money and leisure"⁹.

4 Neuroscience and free will

In the case of physicalist philosophy of mind, consciously or not, there is an epistemic leap whose legitimacy needs to be reviewed. In fact, based on the identification and study of more and more exhaustive brain zones that are activated in all the so-called mental acts, it has been concluded that in reality human acts are conditioned by the functioning of the neuronal areas that would truly be responsible for what we do. This leads to a dead end from the very moment that it is assumed that there is no such thing as free decisions, so that the existence of laws, advice, appeals, orders and, in general, of any normative order would not have a valid justification since human praxis can be reduced to a predictable stimulus-response scheme. Antonio Damasio's recent book, *Self comes to Mind*, is a clear example of this denial of freedom. The brain itself creates a "sense of freedom". The claims of physicalist neuroscience extend to areas that are already

⁶ Denifle, *Luther*.

⁷ "(...) occamiste extrême, Luther n'avait pas seulement une fausse notion du surnaturel, il avait complètement rompu avec lui." Denifle, *Luther*, Vol. III, 207.

⁸ "<La théologie d'Occam> nous fait apparaître l'oeuvre entière du salut comme purement extérieure à l'homme. Dans cette oeuvre tout devient pur mécanisme (...). Or c'est dans cette théologie que Luther a été formé". Denifle, *Luther*, Vol. III, 200-201.

⁹ See Bütgen, *Luther*, 56.

far removed from primary research focusing on brain anatomy and physiology. Thus, for example, we have works on “neuroethics”¹⁰, “neuropolitics”¹¹; we have also works dealing on metaphysical subject in “neuro-mood”¹², etc. There is no area of human culture that cannot be subjected to a neurological approach. The latter, whose legitimacy does not pose any major difficulties, is transformed into an exorbitant claim when there is, incidentally, quite elementary confusion between a *cause* and a *condition*. It cannot be denied that the brain is a *condition* for the execution of human acts and, in general, for the construction of a culture (the traditional vocabulary speaks of an “organ”, which refers to an “instrument”: *aliquid qui est ad finem*); but from there to affirm that the brain is the cause of these, constitutes an affirmation whose argumentative solidity is very weak, especially because freedom is excluded without any further explanation. Even though there is no act where the brain is not involved, it cannot simply be considered as the cause of such human acts¹³.

Physicalist neuroscientists have been very emphatic in stating that some philosophically rooted concepts are too soft to be taken seriously. Francis Crick is a clear example of this with his book *The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul*. In it, he proposes a scientific search of the human soul that deposes religious explanations once and for all. The superficiality of Crick’s references to this subject and his total ignorance of the history of the concept of “soul” is striking. Throughout the book, Crick argues that the soul does not exist. Why? The first chapter begins with these words: “What is the soul? The soul is a living being without a body, with reason and free will (Catholic Catechism)”. In a footnote, Crick explains that this was what his wife Odile heard, when she was a child, from an old Irish lady who taught her catechism.

Dick Swaab maintains that all cultures recognize the existence of a soul, and that there is now a discipline whose object is the study of the soul, that is, psychology. However, Swaab continues, the psychologist does not study the soul, but only behaviour and the mind. There is no “psychon”, but there is a “neuron”. And when the last breath is exhaled, the soul does not surrender, but the brain is turned off. The most surprising thing is the following statement. Swaab says: “I have not heard a single argument so far in response to my observation that the ‘mind’ would be the result of the functioning of the hundreds of billions of neurones we have, and that the ‘soul’ is a misconception. The universal use of the concept of the soul is based solely on the terror of death that human beings have, on the desire to see their deceased loved ones again, and on the erroneous and arrogant idea that we are so important that some of us must remain after death.”¹⁴

Chapter XVIII of his book, entitled “Free Will: A Pleasant Illusion”, which begins with Luther’s quote mentioned above, revolves around the most radical and closed denial of free will. “There is no agreement among philosophers as to what free will is. When the matter is discussed, three cases are often cited. First of all, an act is free only if it could also not be done (there must be alternatives). Secondly, the act must be executed intentionally. A third characteristic of free will would be that the act really is born of ourselves. But all this, of course, is just an impression”.

In short, we can summarize the problem in the following terms, as Arnaldo Benini does “How is it possible to reconcile the fact that we feel freedom at the moment of choice and physicalism (...)? Natural sciences with their physicalist methodology, even having provided an enormous amount of knowledge about the functioning of the brain as an organ of the mind and self-awareness, cannot exceed the limit of self-referentiality of the self-studying brain... Free will, as an aspect of mental causality, is a fact that escapes the mind that investigates it”¹⁵.

¹⁰ Gazzaniga, *Ethical Brain*. Evers, *Neuroética*.

¹¹ Iacoboni, *Mirroring People*.

¹² Changeux, Jean Pierre. *Du vrai, du beau, du bien*.

¹³ Martínez-Barrera, “Reduccionismo”, *passim*.

¹⁴ Swaab, *We Are Our Brains*, Ch. XVII.1.

¹⁵ Benini, *Che cosa sono io*, 72-73 (my translation).

5 Identifying the common element between Lutheran anthropology and physicalist neurosciences: the hatred of metaphysics

We have faced two very different universes, very distant in time, with anthropological conceptions that is very difficult to compare one with another. However, they show a central coincidence: the denial of free will. It is therefore reasonable to suppose some common assumptions which, despite the above-mentioned distances, will operate as a unifying point. My hypothesis is that this nexus exists, and it is the adoption of an anti-metaphysical postulate, explicit in the case of Luther and more hidden in the case of the physicalist neurosciences. The latter offers fierce resistance to any kind of scientific explanation that goes beyond empirically measurable data. It is not my intention to suggest that physicalist neurosciences are the inevitable effect of an anti-metaphysical Lutheran cause. Such a causal connection would require gigantic argumentative boldness. However, I believe that the remarkable similarities between Lutheran anthropology and physicalist neurosciences in their respective positions on metaphysics cannot be overlooked. This proximity is favored in the Latin American academia by the almost historical simultaneity of the development of physicalist neurosciences and the advance of Protestantism. In the case of neurosciences, such anti-metaphysical nominalism can be seen, tentatively, in their visceral rejection of the use of scholastic concepts such as “soul”, “spirit” and others, as can be observed, for example, in the work of scientists like Francis Crick.

This nominalism is the doctrine implicitly adopted by physicalist philosophies of the mind as the only possibility of philosophical expansion. In fact, its aggressive rejection of an explanatory possibility of a metaphysical nature with respect to the human mind, which is no longer conceived as an attribute of the spiritual soul, is therefore understandable from an epistemic angle beyond the physical, to subscribe to a hypothesis outside to the neurosciences themselves. Certainly, when these neurosciences affirm the non-existence of freedom based on their original confusion between the cause and condition of mental acts, they carry out an argumentative acrobatic that puts them in philosophical terrain where they move with a striking imperfection.

If it is just and beautiful that philosophy, according to Aristotle, should be called the science of truth (*Met.* 993b 20), it is necessary to investigate philosophically the profound meaning of the affirmation “the truth will set you free”. Rejection of metaphysics is also a rejection of truth. It is not surprising, then, that the denial of metaphysics, both by Luther and by the physicalist neurosciences, is the prelude to the denial of free will.

One of the main concerns of Popes John Paul II¹⁶ and Benedict XVI has been the harmonious articulation between faith and reason, even though this is already the subject of a very long tradition that goes back to the Church Fathers. However, this problem takes on relevance at a time when the development of technoscience poses certain challenges to the Church’s common doctrinal treasure that are often presented as a denial of a doctrine generally qualified as obsolete. Some historical, sociological and even philosophical analyses seek to present the Catholic faith as a doctrinal consolidation operated in a certain historical time as a response to problems that no longer exist, for which dialogue with culture would be flawed by rigidity, thus allowing me the expression, cadaverous. Nevertheless, the Pauline expression “faith without deeds is a dead faith” means precisely that the very nourishment of faith is in its diachronic dialogue with culture. Faith cannot take place without the prior work of reason, and reason cannot be fulfilled without its openness to the transcendent. In this paper I’ve tried to point out the coincidences and unity of inspiration in two ways of thinking, which, although very separate in time, seek to undermine the foundations of a dialogue between faith and culture. The Lutheran conception of faith is far removed from trust in reason, since the inscrutability of God’s designs is absolute. In the case of physicalist neurosciences, all the weight is placed on reason, and faith is an issue that, when the time comes, can also be the subject of neurological analysis as a product of the brain in its instinct of biological conservation of man. Both ways of conceiving faith and the scope of reason close off all possibility of fruitful dialogue between the two, confining them

¹⁶ John Paul II, *Comentarios*, passim.

to incommunicable ground and thus denaturing the essence of both. A faith without the previous work of reason is a violent, passionate faith, like that of Luther. A reason indifferent to the call of transcendence, as is the case in the physicalist philosophies of the mind and physicalist neurosciences, tinged with a strong anti-metaphysical prejudice, is a reason that ultimately betrays its very vocation. Hence the importance of listening carefully to the exhortation of His Holiness Benedict XVI in his Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* (no 8), to “intensify reflection on the faith”.

Since in Latin America we have experienced almost simultaneously the arrival of the physicalist neurosciences and the vigorous development of Protestantism, we see that the problem of free will begins to settle with force in the local academia. It is good time to restart a discussion that seems to have lost its strength in other regions of the world.¹⁷

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¹⁷ I am very grateful for the comments of the anonymous reviewers, which I have considered very especially.