Latin American Perspectives on Religion Editorial

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Introduction to Topical Issue “Latin American Perspectives on Religion”

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The aim of this topical issue is to present theological and philosophical reflections on religiosity in Latin America. The influence of churches and religions on the daily lives of the people and the great variety of religious and spiritual manifestations of Latin America cannot be denied. In Latin America, in addition to the Christian majority, we find religions of African origin, religions of Native Americans, Judaism, Islam, Spiritualism among others.

This diversity cannot be taken as only a variety of dispersed groups that never dialogue. In many cases, we find extremely syncretic religious expressions that involve elements of various religions in order to create a new and rich expression of faith. Given this diversity, it is almost impossible to make a complete map of religiosity in Latin America. So what this topical issue proposes is to advance some theological and philosophical discussions, in order to present a little of this Latin American religious variety and the challenges it brings. In addition, we propose to discuss some thoughts and philosophies about religion proper to Latin America.

We understand this topical issue on religiosity in Latin America to be important both to get a little more knowledge of Latin American religions and to know a little more about the academic discussions about religiosity that are taking place in this part of the American continent. In this sense, the articles presented in this issue are not merely descriptions of Latin American religiosity, but discussions from within them or from Latin American thinkers who have religion as the major theme in their discussions.

In the first article, *Pluralism With Syncretism: a Perspective from Latin American Religious Diversity*, Marciano Adilio Spica presents a type of pluralistic philosophical theory that addresses the specific characteristics of Latin American religious diversity. He understands syncretism as something natural to all religions. He explores this idea from a Latin American perspective; discussing how religious diversity necessarily invokes the concept of syncretism and how this concept can be understood within the debate about diversity.

From a political philosophy perspective Silvana Rabinovici's article entitled *Resistance and the Sacred: An Approach to the Various Meanings of the “Right to the Sacred” in Mexico Today*, works on the Mexican indigenous issue and the role of religiosity in it. She analyses the interpretation of “the sacred” by examining native world views of indigenous peoples in the American continent and by the colonial political theory of the State. Rabinovici contests the idea that the sacred has only one meaning. She argues that “sacred” concept is heteronomous and that the attempt to reduce it to a merely legal explanation is guilty of reductionism. She shows how the sacred is used by the state in different ways with different interests and how the appropriation of this term by the natives is used to appeal to a sort of “right to the sacred” against a colonial politics of the State. For Rabinovici, to understand the multiple meanings of “sacred” is extremely important in the field of politics because it forces an understanding of the antagonisms arising from different uses of the term in the real life where political disputes take place.

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Keeping within the sphere of political philosophy and religion, Luis Gustavo Koch Butelli and Clint Le Bruyns, in *Theology in Public Space and Social Movements: Notes from Alain Badiou's Concept of Event*, discuss the role of religion in the Brazilian public sphere through social movements. Using Alain Badiou's the category of the "event" they argue that today's social movements are the place where the religious find God to appear in reality. This is possible because social movements are capable of causing very important events. With an epiphanic character these events divide history into before and after. Therefore, if there is a religious political activism in the sphere of social movements it is possible to perform emancipatory politics that can help to liberate populations from poverty and domination.

In *Henrique Vaz, Darwin and Cassirer: Being Human and Transcendence*, Agnaldo Portugal presents the Anthropology of Henrique Lima Vaz, a Brazilian thinker, in comparison with two great representatives of Western thought: Cassirer and Darwin. Portugal argues that the Anthropology of Vaz solves important anthropological gap of both the latter and therefore is a more complete approach to understanding the human being. Vaz's approach does not focus only at the biological sphere of human being like Darwin's nor only on cultural aspects of humanity like Cassirer. Vaz understands the human being as both biological and cultural but in addition, human being is a being towards transcendence. Portugal maintains this, claiming that Vaz would give centrality to religion in the definition of what is the human being. Portugal's article becomes important both for philosophical anthropology and religion and for divulging the ideas of an important Latin American thinker.

In *Phenomenology and Hermeneutics in Brazilian Religious Studies* Eduardo Gross defends the phenomenological and hermeneutic methods as important instruments for the study of the religions in Brazil. After giving a brief history of religious studies in Brazil highlighting the major currents that influence it, Gross shows how phenomenology and hermeneutics are rarely considered good methods for religion studies. Gross believes this is due to the many cases in which poor clarity in the use of these methods is exhibited in religious studies in Brazil. After clarifying the concepts of *hermeneutics* and *phenomenology*, Gross argues that they may be important research attitudes in the Science of Religions in Brazil.

In the last paper entitled *A Surprising Closeness in Latin American Academia: Luther and Certain Neurosciences* Jorge Martinez Barrera defends a possible coincidence between Lutheran Protestantism and physicalist neurosciences in relation to the negation of Free Will. For him, such a coincidence is due to the fact that both Lutheran Protestantism and physicalists have a strong aversion to metaphysics as an explanation of Free Will. In addition, Barrera argues that the problem of Free Will may begin to have great importance in Latin American academia since Protestantism is growing in this region and coincidentally the presence of the neurosciences as well. Faced with this, he predicts that the question of Free Will will be very important in Latin American studies in the future.

In sum, the articles in this issue exhibit a plurality of approaches but together they reflect only a glimpse of the abundance of religions and studies of religions in Latin America. To that end, this topical issue wants to encourage readers to look to such abundance and thus to foster new studies and new approaches.