

NOTES ON THE DISPUTE BETWEEN CATHOLICISM AND PROTESTANTISM

Abstract

This article studies Protestantism and it's confronts with Catholicism. To accomplish that, we take two complementary ways, on one hand a theoretical study that enquires about the origins of Lutheranism and its possible links with individualism and the new conceptions of the community, and on the other hand a reflection upon Latin America in the last decades as a concrete scene in which protestant communities have gained an enormous and unprecedented ground. The first part of this paper is dedicated to the study of Lutheran stances from their most ancient roots in the XIV century. As a result, the question towards the concept of community shows its importance, faced to certain kind of individualism that arises from Protestant doctrine. The second part considers the enormous importance that the appearance of new ways of Protestantism has had in the last decades in Latin American's culture, making reference, precisely, to what extent is a community in Protestantism possible and which are its specific characteristics. Finally, through a brief review of some nodal points, some inputs or core ideas of the Lutheran doctrine can be put in a comparative level with actual movements in clear growth.

Keywords: Luther, Protestantism, Evangelism, Catholicism, Latin America, Politics

Introduction

The tensions and links between theological and philosophical-political thought constituted one of the core foundations at the dawn of Modernity. It is simple to observe that Luther's thoughts were consistently on the side of theology, since he always was a clear defender of faith over reason. Nevertheless, if this perspective is exclusively accepted, we run the risk of losing much of the political richness that, at the dawning of Modernity, the figure of this German friar had. As,

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in his plea in favour of the theological, he confronted the biggest political power that existed in that moment: the Roman Catholic Church. The struggle between Protestantism and Catholicism was never exclusively doctrinal, for Luther aimed his critiques to aspects of the Vatican's dogma as well as to a number of social and economic practices that he thought opposed to the bases of Christianity. With the expansion of Protestantism, the Catholic Church developed different strategies with the ambition of maintaining its political and spiritual centrality. In this way, beset with the modernization and secularization process of the Western world, holding the *Concilium Tridentinum*², as well as some measures taken by the Inquisition³ and, above all, the evangelization of the Americas can be seen as survival tactics of the Church. The last of them acquires great relevance today in the light of the enormous growth that the contemporary forms of Protestantism have had in Latin America, sub continent that has become the biggest support (at least in population terms) of the Vatican. Due to this, it is important today, to conduct a study that binds together the medieval origins of Luther's thought with the present territorial dispute that *Evangelism*⁴ is playing against Catholicism. And this is not only happening in the spiritual field, but also (and very strongly) in the political and economic spheres.

This article is part of a series of works (centred around the category "money")⁵ that take as a starting point the hypothesis that states that, even though they can be analytically separated, politics, economy and sacredness are always found mutually implied. In this case one of the pillars of Western Modernity, Martin Luther's Protestant Reformation, will be analysed. From there, we will take two complementary ways, on one hand a theoretical study that will enquire about the origins of Lutheranism and its possible links with individualism and the new conceptions of the community, and on the other hand a short reflection upon Latin America in the last decades as a concrete scene in which protestant communities have gained an enormous and unprecedented ground.

In this way the first (and longer) portion of this paper will be dedicated to the theoretical (but also historical) study of Lutheran stances from their most ancient roots in the XIV century. What will be observed is that even in a thought that has intended to categorically separate spiritual from material, both spheres find a common ground, at least in what concerns to the way of administering and governing men's life. Because, if Lutheran doctrine has held the idea of pre-

2 O'Malley, John, "Trent, Sacred Images and Catholics' Senses of the Sensuous", in Hall, Marcia & Cooper, Tracy E. (eds.) *The Sensuous in the Counter-Reformation Church*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013. The complete texts of the Council of Trent were read from <http://thecounciloftrent.com/> (accessed 12/09/2014).

3 On July 21, 1542 the Pope Paul III declared the Inquisition (*sanctum officium*) against Protestants.

4 "Regardless of denominational affiliations, Latin American Protestants most often refer to themselves as *evangélico*; hence 'evangelical' is often used as an umbrella term". Stoll, David, "Introduction", in Gerard-Burnett, Virginia & Stoll, David, *Rethinking Protestantism in Latin America*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1993, p. 3.

5 The first of those writings is Borisonik, Hernán, *Dinero sagrado. Política, economía y sacralidad en Aristóteles*, Miño y Dávila Editores, Madrid / Buenos Aires, 2013.

determination and the conviction that salvation is not related to deeds, Luther (introducing himself as a purely theological agent) not only was concerned with economic matters but developed ethical norms for these issues. Besides, it will be important to reinterpret the sacredness of princes and the link with divinity it presents, from this perspective, the task of governing materiality. An open question towards the end of this reflection will be aimed to the concept of community and to think in its possibilities, faced to certain kind of individualism that arises from Protestant doctrine.

The second part of this work purposes to take under consideration the enormous importance that the appearance of new ways of Protestantism has had in the last decades in Latin American's culture, making reference, precisely, to what extent is a community in Protestantism possible and which are its specific characteristics. Together with that, it is useful to single out that if Modernity has boosted thanks to the emergence of Protestantism it clearly also owes to the conquest of the American continent. The *Lutheranization* of northern Europe has been simultaneous to the *Catholicization* of Central and South America. And even though this region has, since then, been characterized by representing one of the most important supports for Roman Catholicism, the presence of new forms of Christianity has become more evident nowadays. This is the reason why, after the theoretical development, this work will present some aspects bound to the huge growth of new religions in Latin America whose origins have some degree of linking to Lutheranism: the *Evangelist* movements. Through a brief review of some nodal points of those Churches, some inputs or core ideas of the Lutheran doctrine can be put in a comparative level with actual movements in clear growth.

Modernity and Reformation: a contextualization

The Early Modern period⁶ entailed an important secularization process, that is to say, it was characterized by a shift from religion to the juridical sphere that was signalled by the centralization of political power and which gave rise to national States. Two of the most important features of this transformation have been the positivization of norms and the appearance of individual juridical subjects, bearers of rights and obligations. Both characteristics have been strengthened by the legacy of the Protestant Reformation started by Martin Luther in 1517. Precisely, due to the lack of revolutionary precedents and the absence of a consolidated German State, this Reformation and the Peasants' Wars of 1524 and 1525, ended up reinforcing the condensation and concentration of political power in the hands of secular authorities⁷, intensifying the tendency towards the distinction

6 We will establish years 1500 and 1789 as approximate dates to define this period. Cfr., for example, Goldstone, Jack, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1991.

7 Engels, Friedrich, *The Peasant War in Germany*, in *Marx and Engels Collected Works 10*. International Publishers, New York, (1850) 1978.

between private morals and public law, placing the first ones in the individual sphere and the latter ones as an imposition on society as a whole.

If we analyse the economic aspect, we can observe how towards the XV and XVI century the modes of the Middle Ages – that were mainly oriented to subsistence and to the mere satisfaction of needs – were gradually replaced by an expansive economy whose objective was to obtain the highest profit, propelling the appearance of monopolies and high interest rate loans. This movement that ended by nurturing the political development of the bourgeoisie was in its origin strongly supported by some traditional sectors (as the owners of broad territories or the leadership of the Catholic Church). For Luther, this represented a setback for all the community and for this reason he voiced a strong critique against usury from a religious point of view that had, as a consequence, a strong political streak. In the lowest extreme of German society some Reformation ideals were interpreted and radicalized by pastors who guided enormous groups of peasants to confront their own governing princes. In this sense, it is very interesting to think about the strong link that still presented crime and sin, rendering their limits in some cases, indeterminable.⁸

The Protestant Reformation emerged in a horizon where “politics” and “religion” were discourses mutually permeated and overlapped, being very difficult (beyond the Lutheran intention) to find a clear and categorical boundary between both spheres. In fact, one of the most distinctive characteristics of the political-economic organization that had existed during the Middle Ages, was the overlapping of different logics that conceived, with certain independence, authority, land and government.

While the decentralized and strongly fragmented geography of feudal system tended to the dispersion of power, the Church and the Empire were concentration and unity forces whose authorities were centralized but didn't imply any subjection to land. These logics conformed overlapping jurisdictions that employed (in a non exclusive manner) ways of dominance and of awarding rights and duties upon different social strata. This underhanded way was the cause of not a few conflicts mainly towards XV and XVI centuries in which the presumed universality of the Church began to clash with greater potency with the territorialized forces of thriving powers that wanted to regionally unify the *de facto* sovereignties of the different lords and princes.

On the other hand, there was a complex taxation framework in which feudal tributes co- existed with imperial and ecclesiastic taxes so that domestic economy based on subsistence was run through by commercial and financial networks that held a relative unity of the entire European continent. In a few words, in terms of politics as well as economy, jurisdictional sovereignty wasn't read in

8 Midelfort, Eric, *A History of Madness in Sixteenth Century Germany*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1999. Prodi, Paolo, *Una storia della giustizia. Dal pluralismo di fori al moderno dualismo tra coscienza e diritto*. Il Mulino, Bologna, 2000.

strictly territorial or geographical terms. This is the reason why it is important to bring out the intense and profound relationship that the religious, political and economic spheres, as they were named by Modernity, had in its earlier phase. There, we can find one of the main strengths of the legacy of Luther, transitional figure that condensed many of the tensions that still go together with western political thought.

Some aspects of Lutheran doctrine

To start analyzing the protestant thought, it is worth going over the three major hermeneutical medieval lines regarding faith and reason. In the first place, of course, Augustine of Hippo, whose position could be summarized in the statement “believe to comprehend”. For him, faith is a necessary condition for any rational activity and, for this reason, it also has the last word in any dispute that could arise between them. Being that which precedes and enables its existence, an opposition of reason against faith cannot have any sense. In second place we have to mention Thomas Aquinas, whose doctrine – also very shortly- would be “understanding as a way to God”, in other words, that faith can be rationally demonstrated. Here, both parts are connected more harmonious or friendly, that is why the link between them is more beneficial than in Augustine’s case. In this way, for Thomas, reason is an instrument of faith, to approach it and explain it to mankind. In third place, Lutheran hermeneutic states a clear opposition between these two categories; the only way to reach divinity is through soul and fidelity. Rational understanding of God doesn’t exist, and aiming for it would not only be wrong but also sinful, sheer human conceit. We can find a strong loathing of metaphysic and philosophical speculations in Luther, under the idea that reason cannot be used to “understand” God, except for exclusive intra – human issues.

Luther based his ideas fundamentally in the medieval nominalism. The figure that has still to be brought out to understand this position is that of British William of Ockham. Breaking with metaphysical tradition, Ockham (a Franciscan monk) had stated his radical empiricism enhancing the experience of immediate, against universals or abstract ideas. Ockham proclaimed a strong and decisive affirmation of the singular: each element of reality is an isolated, unique and individual creation. Every concept, subject, etc. only exist in the mind of men⁹. For nominalism, the individual is unquestionable; it is immediate evidence. Ockham expected to open an epistemology and a science that were based in singulars and not in ideas. In other words he didn’t believe in an essential order but rather that as men organize entities in their minds, this accounts for every classification. Typification and categories are only human impositions.

This “science of Individual” was a reaction against the way of understanding

9 Guillelmi de Ockham, *Summa Totius Logicae*, 1323, chapters 14-17. http://www.logicmuseum.com/wiki/Authors/Summa_Logicae/Book_1/Chapter_14, (accessed 12/09/14),

divine omnipotence: God can do anything that doesn't imply contradiction with Himself. This idea was based in some very novel principles: the existing world is wanted by God not in a systematic way but in a volitive one, that which exists isn't necessary, it responds to the contingency of the will of God and does it permanently (each moment is new, there is no continuity neither of logic or the existing world) order is contingent and depends on the absolute power of God. In that way from a God of ideas, with Ockham, it became a God of acts, of whims, will and power. God, then, doesn't express Himself in a language that reason can understand but rather constantly creates the world under his free will. There is no order in nature more than that wanted by God. There is no causality, at least as a law, which can link entities. And, at the same time, it is not possible to link them in a hierarchical order or logic; so it is impossible to rationally explain God's existence, an affirmation that is reserved to the realm of faith. God is independent of the world, hence the rules of the world and God's rules are not the same; ergo science can become independent from theology (we can immediately think in Hobbes or Machiavelli) because it will never be useful for the understanding of the Divine but, at the most for a simpler sorting of human matters. In any case what nominalism supposes is that after Jesus arrival, God left an established order in the world (to which He subjects Himself) but that can be broken whenever He wants so (that is why miracles exist).

Due to his rejection to any tie between faith and reason, Ockham was object of strong intrigues by scholasticism, to such a degree that in 1324 he was summoned by Pope John XXII to Avignon where he was subject to an investigation upon the suspected heretical character of his ideas. Some time later, Ockham would signal that the Pope was heretic and that he would escape from Avignon to Bavaria with the help of the Franciscan order. This cost him his excommunication and at the same time put him in touch with novel ideas around the vindication of poverty faced to a papacy with political power and economic aspirations. In this way, between 1339 and 1340 he would write his *Breviloquium de principatu tyrannico super divina et humana, specialiter autem super imperium et subjetos imperio a quibusdam vocatis summis pontificibus usurpato* that advocates for the separation between religion and political power, claiming that the papacy should be centered in the protection of the spiritual life of the faithful instead of sheltering the occasional interests of the emperor.

An important renewed sign of critical thought in the core of medieval culture appeared with Ockham, capable of casting doubts upon societies' most naturalized and accepted truths. The importance of individuals and language is also made visible, given that existence doesn't acquire sense in History but in a discourse that is said by God at every instant.

Luther was brought up in an Augustinian convent in Erfurt, which was an important representative of nominalism in Germany. His doctrine, that is indebted to Ockhamism, puts free will only in the absolute power of God; leaving men as

slaves of His divine grace¹⁰, In other words, Truth is only recognizable through faith and there are no works of the flesh that can save the soul. God is the only autonomous actor and can govern this world directly, yet chooses not to do so, but to send angels and men (princes, prophets and Luther himself) to accomplish this task. This became very important in the climate of a time where the imminent end of days and doomsday were expected.¹¹ For Luther then, on one hand, there is faith and the private sphere (conscience, real justice) and on the other hand, laws, science, reason, the external world, State and legal matters.

The end of the Middle Ages represented a moment of utmost political and economic power for the Catholic Church. And facing the new demands that such a position required, one of the adopted solutions was the “campaign” to sell indulgences, through which the Vatican financed the construction of the Sistine Chapel, charging (in cash and in advance) a canon for sins and subsequent exit from the Purgatory of the already dead ones (and even for those that were still alive and wanted to ensure their place in Paradise). This gave substantial financial power to the Church. As explained by Humberto Mendingelli, “the first capitalists belonged to the Church or have been guided by it, as in the case of the bankers of the papal Curia or sometimes of the Popes themselves, who gave in to capitalist fever, as was the case of Leo X (...) who in view of their origin and above all to the power and strength of their faith couldn’t conceive that their behavior could have been reproachable in any sense”.¹²

What Luther expected to avoid was for the Church to continue being a tax collection agency. According to his doctrine, the good Christian had to live working for charity but not by paying taxes but by giving to their fellows, their neighbors, and the members of their community. He thought problematic that the Church would charge canons as if it were a worldly institution. The conflict for the sale of indulgences cost Luther his excommunication and even put his life at risk. Luther held his determination to reform Christendom and in this way initiated the so-called Protestant Reformation.

Lutheran doctrine was based in salvation only through faith and consequently the denial that any act that could be performed could make any contribution in this sense. Of course, this kind of approach contributed to a great deal of uncertainties upon the fate of souls and consequently to an enormous transcendental anguish before divine omnipotence: there is no way to bear certainties regarding salvation, except for the divine grace that Luther places in faith as an internal feeling (related to the soul not to the flesh). He who truly and sincerely feels the presence of Christ in his soul (he who really believes and commits him-

10 In this sense, it is very famous the debate between Luther and Erasmus. Cfr. Erasmus of Rotterdam, *De libero arbitrio diatribe sive collatio* (1524), Luther, Martin *De servo arbitrio* (1525).

11 Modalisi, Ole “Luther über die Letzten Dinge” in: *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers von 1526 bis 1546*, Helmar Junghans, Göttingen, 1983, p. 335.

12 Mandelli, Humberto, *Historia económica y social*, Nueva Técnica, Buenos Aires, 1980, p. 79.

self to faith) is the only one who can trust in his deliverance. But no external act can replace that certainty.

In this context of strong mutations, the Catholic Church had been turned into a center of immense political and economic power, a fact that transformed it in the target of strong attacks, as it hadn't confined to its *original* function of being spiritual guide of the Christian community. Facing this, Luther started a battle that ended having several fronts. First, against ostentation and the politic-ity of the Vatican. Second, against the usury of the new barely emerging financial system. At the same time, the cause of Reformation was supported by popular sectors with deeper social and political ends than the ones Luther could have imagined. Nevertheless, far from supporting them, he strongly confronted them making them a third target for his accusations.

Luther's supreme interest was the question of soul salvation. But against the Catholic position¹³, he stated that there is no tie whatsoever between overt actions and salvation. Under his perspective, the soul doesn't belong to this world and cannot be ruled by human norms or secular law, but it has a direct and individual relationship with God. This is evidenced when observing his 95 *thesis* of 1517: Luther condemned the idea that the Pope had the capability of forgiving the sins of souls that were in the Purgatory. Since, besides doubting the existence of this place, being souls unaffected to materiality, they couldn't become an object of human forgiveness but only of divine pardon. For Luther, the only one with the power to judge consciences is God which induced to disdain ecclesiastical punishments and at the same time to sacralize princes' positive right upon bodies. Besides, Luther saw with endless indignation the fact that money was collected for this indulgency. On one side because it made usurers have the illusion of an eternal life in God, giving them, in fact, advantages over poor people, and on the other side because it turned the Church into an absolution fair. In *thesis* 27 he states: "They preach only human doctrines who say that as soon as the money clinks into the money chest, the soul flies out of purgatory". And in *thesis* 28 he is even more categorical: "It is certain that when money clinks in the money chest, greed and avarice can be increased; but when the church intercedes, the result is in the hands of God alone"¹⁴. Given that forgiveness is only a product of divine grace, worldly laws (even the sacramental ones, if they are not written in the Bible) have no use but to satisfy, with human arrogance, the avidity to obtain salvation through deeds.

The *two kingdoms* doctrine¹⁵ clearly shows Luther's intention to separate the worldly sphere (*weltlich*) from the spiritual one (*geistlich*). Luther shattered the division between laymen and ordained stating another jurisdictional pair as its legitimate substitute. Luther's doctrine was a new reinterpretation of the biblical pas-

13 Cfr., for example, Session V (June 17, 1546) of the Council of Trent, *op. cit.*

14 An English version of the 95 *Theses* can be found in <http://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html> (accessed 12/09/2014).

15 In German, *die Zwei-Reiche-Lehre*. Luther, Martin, *Von weltliche Obrigkeit, wieweit man ihr Gehorsam schuldig sei* (On Secular Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed), 1523.

sage "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22, 15-21) in which two domains and two lords are established; for the temporary, secular power and for the spiritual, God. With this movement, Luther tried to restrict the Pope's power, to depoliticize Christianity and to support the sovereignty of princes concerning the material world. As a consequence, the relation between men and God suffers democratization and is made horizontal, but is absolutely vertical in relation to social ties. Lutheran doctrine defends free- thinking and individual freedom faced to the divine word. But it demands, as the other side of the coin, for external behavior to immovably abide to the laws dictated by the prince. Regarding the material world, Luther is not interested so much in justice as in legality. In other words, what is paramount is positive law (being this the Bible or the princes' decisions) and not the justness that this could lead to from a human point of view.

Within the worldly sphere there is also a fracture, since princes appear in Lutheran discourse as called to command, being men with a different character to *ordinary people* or *plebs*. In this way worldliness must be organized by divine will, respecting the differences between governors and subjects, whose functions are not, in the beginning, interchangeable (as it happens in the case of priests)¹⁶.

Private individuals cannot claim certain faculties inherent to princes, given the divine will of the governing of the world. Regarding this, Luther clearly wrote in his work of 1525 (*Against the Heavenly Prophets...*) that "Karlstadt cannot deny that the princes of Saxony are in possession of the supreme worldly authority by order of God and that the people (*Menschen*) are subjected to them."¹⁷

Real Christians, a negligible minority, are thought by Luther as those who live serving and praising God, imploring for His salvation. All the rest of society lives politically as a punishment for sins and must exteriorly abide to secular laws. Here, it can be observed how the Augustinian conception of humans as *fallen nature* has been retaken by Luther, who held the notion of political authority as sheer imposition and of civil law as an artifice, only fair in its form (it is fair because it comes from the sovereign), but never in its contents (since even when it agrees with divine laws, as it has been positivized by humans it becomes imperfect)¹⁸.

As part of his attempt to depoliticize religion, Luther ended up energetically reinforcing secular powers as the only ones in charge of administering force on

16 In his *Von weltlicher Obrigkeit, wieweit man ihr Gehorsam schuldig sei*, Luther expressed: "What are priests and bishops, then? Answer: Their government is not authority or power, but it is a service and a function. They are not more eminent not better than other Christians. Hence they should not impose any law or command to others without their permission and will. Their regime is not other thing that preaching the word of God, lead the Christians with it and defeat heresy. As I have said, Christians can only be governed with the word of God" (p.18).

17 Luther, Martin, *Wider die hymelischen Propheten, von den Bildern und Sacrament*, p. 4.

18 "A Christian's freedom is not related whatsoever with the external order of society. While it seems as a rejection of law, of laws and jurists (*Juristen böse Christen*, jurists are all bad Christians, that according to the popular saying usually quoted by Luther himself) in name of conscience, really, the contrast between both realms makes of human positive law, with its power of external coercion, the only tool to impose a worldly order in the realm of sin". Prodi, Paolo *Una storia della giustizia...*, op. cit., p. 216.

Earth. The *two kingdoms* doctrine proposed a divine rank for princes, to whom it gave an absolute power through divine will. This strengthened enormously the affirmation of an identity, if not national, regional; politically as well as linguistically supported by Luther's work.

His doctrine supported the division between spiritual and material, putting in the princes' hands all the political power and leaving the matters of faith in a direct relationship between the believer and God, not taking into account the mediation of the Church. With this, he strived to get rid of religious hierarchies and to limit the ties between priests and economic actions.

The Reformation began by Luther has been one of the main nucleus of Modernity. Beyond the clarity or intentions that its initiator could have had, his quarrel with Rome laid the foundations for new conceptions about social ties, the territorial affirmations of States and freedom in terms of individualism, consciousness and faith.

The problem of community

Reformation arrived to judge, based on an idealized Christian past, actions of a changing and corrupted present. In a time with so many movements and modifications, holding this great conservatism gave it a revolutionary tinge. Hatred to moral laxity, spiritual individualism and economic anti-individualism combined in Luther giving place to a request for order and control of secular authorities.

For Luther, a rebirth of the idea of Christian community was due: on one hand as a religious community (believers' congregation) and, on the other as a social community based on charity. In both of them, each should occupy a certain function that is not related to an essence but to a need. In fact, in a society of true Christians there would be no need for hierarchies. But as there are few Christians in the world, and due to the fact that humankind is sheer fallen nature, God put men on earth who are called to govern and put societies in order, defending the good ones and punishing the bad ones. Secular government, in this context, is needed and wanted by God. Concentrated in it are the hierarchies that have been *falsely* put by the Church in spirituality and usurers have put in the economic differences built on the foundations of injustice. The world has to be governed by God (indirectly in the material aspect through princes and directly in the spiritual aspect, in an individual manner, and by the Holy Spirit).

Hence, Lutheran "individualism" is not an early expression of the business owner with no social conscience, but a call to the divine encounter and a request to put less attention to the material. Lutheran community is composed by individuals that lead their lives fulfilling those functions that God has imposed on them, among which being creative is the first one. In this aspect, it does not differentiate from other religions: Luther dreams of a world governed from the revealed texts (in a moral as well as in an economic, social and educational aspect) and

conceives politics as sheer repression of wrong deeds (from a biblical perspective). Nevertheless, it is necessary to add the proviso: Luther understands charity and love to fellowmen as consequences of all men being creatures of God (meaning, there is not love to others because they are fellow citizens, brothers or equal in rights, but only due to the fact that they are the product of divine will). This idea is of capital importance in Luther's thought. Community is not understood as a natural aspect among humans (as in Thomas Aquinas' thought, derived from Aristotelism) but the love and charity that people owe each other comes from fear and worshipping of God, and consequently to the existing world as divine work. In this way, Protestantism has tended since its origins to multiplicity and not to a sole community. The diverse interpretations and readings that, according to Luther, each Christian can do of the holy message had as a consequence the proliferation of different positions and communities (*Protestant* in general, but with differences, sometimes very deep among them)¹⁹, unified under the rejection to certain modes of the Catholic Church, among other things those which concern political power. This is the deepest sense of the famous "Lutheran individualism" and not the economic selfishness that will characterize a more *advanced* Modernity. But at the same time, absolute equality among men in the spiritual realm and the complete secularization of earthly life were such revolutionary aspects that, in effect, they would be the basis for all the riots and manifestations during the two (or three) subsequent centuries.

Rejection to works as a way of salvation had come hand in hand with the legitimation of totalitarian governments. Luther came to say that it was impossible to rule the world without blood and that the civil sword must be the one in charge of making it flow.²⁰ All of this strongly strengthened the new *Deus mortalis*, fearful only of God that would be worshipped by theologians and theorists of early Modernity.

The Latin American case

Nearly five centuries have gone by since the moment in which Luther nailed his 95 *Theses* and mobilized all Christianity. Although he actually adopted dogmatic attitudes, his doctrine represented a great contribution for an interpretative freedom of the Scriptures. Perhaps, because of that and differently from the Roman Church, there never was an absolute agreement upon the protestant position and, on the contrary, many Reformationists "sects" quickly appeared. Geography of Christendom has changed (and continues doing so) very deeply. Precisely, being individualism at the core of Lutheran doctrine, the identification among different *Evangelisms* is much less automatic than among the orders of the Catholic Church. But each one of the Evangelic or Protestant communities

¹⁹ In this sense, as we have already seen, the term *evangélico* is the one that has comprised very different branches.

²⁰ Luther, Martin, *Von Kaufhanding und Wucher*, 1524 (On Commerce and Usury).

acknowledge Luther as a spiritual father and a legitimate forefather of their ideas.

Nowadays, more than 5% of the world population is supposed to belong to some branch of Protestantism, with much higher percentages in northern Europe, the south of Africa, Oceania and the Americas. Its growth in Latin America is due to different causes and has been interpreted in many different ways. For example, while some authors state that the increase of protestant members in the decades of 1960 and 1970 eased the transitions towards democratization²¹, others affirm that these fortified clientelistic and anti- democratic relations²². In any case the Protestant presence in this sub –continent is nearly as old (although not as massive) as the Catholic one, that being, both religions are equally “imported” from Europe.

Few years after the Reformation had started in Germany, there already were traces of a first wave of immigration belonging to this religion in Latin America, although as opposed to Catholicism, in this case “the Protestants” arrived before their institutions. In fact, in 1529 there already were Protestant settlers that arrived to Venezuela looking for gold, which alerted some Catholic authorities and propelled the establishing of the Inquisition in the “New World”.

Additionally the anthropologist Levi-Strauss tells in his *Tristes Tropiques* that already in 1555 there were Protestant communities in Brazil²³, formed since their persecution in Europe.

The region that had received the higher Protestant influx during XVI and XVII centuries was the Caribbean, due to its constant exchange with Englishmen, Dutchmen and Frenchmen. But beyond differences, what all of these colonies had in common was the dissemination of the Bible in local languages, echoing the ideas driven by Luther from Germany²⁴.

The second wave of protestant growth in Latin America occurred in XIX and XX centuries, even though it still continues nowadays. In this case, besides the enormous influence that the United States have had, *native* branches had appeared and there has been a process (in rapid growth) of conversions of Catholics. In fact, according to some scholars most of the active churchgoers in Brazil, Chile and other countries of the region are evangelists today, and in all, Latin American Protestants (in their diverse denominations) are already more than 10% of the population with probabilities of a noticeable increase in the next decades²⁵. This is the reason why, in our days, most of these organizations are lead by Latin Americans.

21 Martin, David, *Tongues on Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1990; Miliband, Ralph, *The State in Capitalist Society*, Basic Books, New York, 1969.

22 Stoll, David, *Is Latin America turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1990; Le Bot, Yvon “Churches, Sects and Communities: Social Cohesion Recovered?”, *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1999, pp. 165-174.

23 Lèvi-Strauss, Claude, *Tristes Tropiques*, translated by John Russel, Criterion Books, New York, (1995), 1961, pp. 85-86.

24 Léonard, Emile, *A History of Protestantism*, Two volumes, Thomas Nelson, London, 1965.

25 Stoll, David, “Introduction”, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.

One of the causes claimed for this situation is the ideal of self-discipline that Evangelical churches impose, becoming an attractive alternative for the lower classes. Social and economic globalization of the past years has come hand in hand with the withdrawal of much of public help, but also of ecclesiastical one. This had a cultural impact and brought along a thought linked to individualism, a fact that made Lutheran principles more propitious, because Catholic universal dogmas do not manage to encourage the desire for self-improvement and personal transformation as forcefully as Protestantism. With a conception based on individual existence and free interpretation of the Divine, Evangelism managed to introduce itself as a more dynamic and less conservative religion than its Roman predecessor²⁶. If the Catholic Church has always shown itself very adverse to western secularization²⁷, Protestantism has been able to introduce itself as a less intransigent and more “adequate” alternative to modern times, seeing the Vatican as an actor that expects a spiritual monopoly.

The growth of Evangelism in Latin America can also be reflected in the entry of religious actors in the institutional political life. While members of the Catholic Church have always (indirectly) acted under influence, since the 1990's we attend to the election of political representatives that are conceived as religious actors²⁸.

Latin American Protestantism is the result of an enormous and very complex network of missions, migrations and re-readings. All the denominations use their own codes and formalities, but they find in *Evangelism* a concept that expects to overcome internal differences.

A plausible hypothesis that this article tries to support, is that the way in which the growth of these movements have occurred in Latin America responds to doctrinal aspects of Lutheranism that necessarily tend to the multiplication of readings and communities, because they base their ideals in an intimate, individual relationship between the believer and God.

Closing Words

As it could be seen through these lines, the Protestant Reformation of XVI century was immersed in a context in which crime and sin hadn't *still* become autonomous and isolated identities. But the Lutheran work was a fundamental step towards the positivation of law. When trying to completely separate the spiritual from the material sphere; Luther gave the temporal princes a total omnipotence

26 Willems, Emilio, *Followers of the New Faith*, Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville, 1967.

27 Some examples from Pope Francis can be found at https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.pdf (pp. 44-62) and <http://buzz.money/cnn/com/2014/04/19/pope-francis-free-market/> (both accessed 12/12/2014). For this subject, see also Martin, David & Stanford, Tim, “After Catholicism: The New Protestants and the Rise of Capitalism in Latin America”, *National Review*, Sep, 29, 1989, pp. 30-35.

28 For more details in this matter, see “Evangelicals and Politics in Latin America”, *Transformation*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1992. http://www.ocms.ac.uk/transformation/results_issue.php?mm_lss=9&mm_Qua=3 (accessed 12/12/2014).

over bodies and overt actions, giving cause for the appearance of a *forum internum* spiritually regulated by God. In this way, just like languages, churches began to *vernacularize*, ceasing to have actual power at the moment of implementing penalties. In this way, States won a fundamental battle related to the monopoly of the use of legitimate force.

The Reformation began by Luther has been one of the nucleus of Modernity. Beyond the clarity or the intentions that its initiator could have had, his quarrel with Rome has laid the foundations for new conceptions on social ties, the territorial affirmation of the States and freedom in terms of conscience and faith.

The nominalist inheritance and the rejection of the existence of the Purgatory made Luther occupy an antagonistic position to the Vatican. The result of this dispute brought, among other consequences, the construction of the *two kingdoms* doctrine, as well as a novel way of moral and metaphysical individualization. Since Luther, the relationship between the believer and God becomes personal, based on the multiple interpretations of the Gospel. Additionally, Protestantism proposed a new conception of community, no longer sustained in a social level but in the love that every Christian should profess towards the divine work.

The conquest of Central and South America imposed European values to the "New World". However not only the "certainties" were inherited but also the disputes. In this way, the confrontation (doctrinal, but at the same time political) between Catholicism and Protestantism also had a great chapter in these lands. Chapter that is still open.

Are there any points in common between that religious quarrel of XVI century and the present day one? A great difference is that today the relations are much more peaceful than they were, and there even are meetings between the heads of both religious identities. Nevertheless, the enormous advance of Evangelism in Latin America had consequences in the remarks and the actions of the Vatican. There are those who even consider that the election of a South American and charismatic Pope "of action", responds to this phenomena.

The huge social, cultural and economic differences that capitalism brought along (especially in its neoliberal version), added to the immense individualism that marks contemporary societies have made room for an idea of community based on "tolerance", respect and coexistence that are benefited by the Lutheran message. Perhaps because of this, so many centuries after the *95 Theses* the protestant program continues worrying the Catholic Church. Maybe it is adequate to ask, facing the latter, if there are interests that underlie religious disputes and, if answered affirmatively, to enquire which are their origins and their consequences is of capital importance to understand the map of spirituality of a region where it is still necessary to say much more.

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НАПОМЕНЕ У ВЕЗИ РАСПРАВЕ ИЗМЕЂУ КАТОЛИЧАНСТВА И ПРОТЕСТАНТИЗМА

Сажетак

Овај чланак се бави протестантизмом и његовим сукобима са католицизмом. Да би успели у својој замисли користићемо се са два комплементарна пута, са једне стране теоријском студијом која се бави пореклом лутеранизма и његовим могућим везама са индивидуализмом и новим концептом заједнице, а са друге стране рефлексijом на Латинску Америку у последњим деценијама као месту у којем су протестантске заједнице придобиле велику подршку. Први део овог чланка је посвећен лутеранским ставовима још од њихових најранијих почетака из 19. века. Као резултат, указаћемо на важност питања концепта заједнице која се сукобљава са одређеним видом индивидуализма који се базира на протестантској доктрини. Други део чланка ће се бавити великом важношћу нових протестантских покрета у последњим деценијама у латиноамеричкој култури, доводећи их у вези са питањем да ли су протестантске заједнице могуће и које су њихове посебне особине. И на крају, кратким приказом неких главних тачака или идеја лутеранске доктрине, оне се могу користити и за компарацију са неким актуелним покретима који су у јасном расту.

Кључне речи: Лутер, протестантизам, евангелизам, католицизам, Латинска Америка, политика

Примљен: 30.12.2014.

Прихваћен: 14.03.2015.