

Luther in the Ibero-American World

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Our seminar explored certain Spanish reforming movements that were repressed after Luther's excommunication, the use of Luther as arch-heretic in counter-Reformation art of Mexico and Peru, and contemporary *resourcement* of Luther's marginality for minority theologies. We suggest mysticism as a promising research topic that could avoid worn polemics and focus on historical thought and practice.

I Poorly received

Ibero-America received Luther as a heretic and knew him only enough to inoculate a pure Catholic body from a foreign disease. The diagnosis of healthy (Catholic-Iberian) and infected (Lutheran-foreign) bodies gained racial overtones, as in Menéndez Pelayo, *Historia de los heterodoxos españoles*, 1978 [1880], vol. 1, p.47: »La lengua española no se forma decir herejes.« The association of Spanish blood with orthodoxy was strong in Ibero-America. Clerics and bishops still now tend to be *ladino*; indigenous populations tend toward Protestantism.

Ibero-America's theology was forged in counter-Reformation. Only after Vatican II was Luther widely studied. Anticlerical 19th century governments hoped Protestant immigrants would bolster their nations' technical expertise and democratic spirit. Today, Luther sits well amongst Ibero-America's intellectual elite as a hero of conscience, a courageous voice against hegemony.

It is easy to forget the many reforms of religious life that flourished in Spain before Luther, only to be rejected as »Lutheran« heresy. Franciscan regent and cardinal Ximénez de Cisneros patronized a new humanist university at Alcalá de Henares, like Wittenberg specialized in languages and philology. It produced the Complutensian Polyglot Bible, six columns of Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Syriac, Aramaic and Coptic. It dwarfed Erasmus's 1516 edition in erudition, but was beyond anybody but Spain's *converso* minority. Five hundred of the initial six hundred exemplars went down with their ship on the voyage to Rome, and it was largely forgot-

ten. But just as his reforms gained ground, Luther came along; the Inquisition vigorously stamped out Erasmus and associated humanism.

Illuminism popularized types of monastic contemplation, but apart from the cloister these roused suspicions. These »mystics« contacted God directly through the Holy Spirit with private prayer and bible study. Luther was a mystic of similar ideas who promoted the mystical *Theologica Germanica* and approved Bernard of Clairvaux. As with humanism, after Luther was excommunicated, the Inquisition raised its vigilance. Books were much more closely regulated, foreign travel and trade much more suspicious.

Spain's reformers took to the road, visiting Basel, Strasbourg, Mainz, Geneva, and even Wittenberg. Francisco de Enzinas went from Alcalá to Wittenberg to perfect his Greek under Melanchthon then presented his translation of the New Testament to Emperor Charles in Antwerp, 1539. Other exiles worked to bring the Reformation back to Spain. From Geneva, Juan Pérez de Pineda translated and smuggled hot books. Safe in Italy, Juan Valdés limited the sacraments to three, emphasized the Bible, and rejected priestly celibacy;

passages of his *Alfabeto Cristiano* may have been taken from Luther's *Large Catechism*.

The 1540s and 1550s saw conventicles grow around star preachers; in Seville, Constantino Ponce de la Fuente argued for justification by faith and three sacraments (as Luther). Perhaps he got these ideas from Melanchthon, or Erasmus. His work was burned with him (in effigy) in Valladolid's 1558–1559 *auto de fé* as »Lutheran,« but was used unawares in the New World under the name of bishop Zumárraga, and later inspired the Jesuits (!) in Brazil and Goa.

II Images of Luther

Alicia Mayer expanded on her work, *Lutero en el Paraíso* (2005) that Luther found a role in the New World as whipping boy. Images of the arch-heretic appear throughout Mexico and Peru. In Mexico City's cathedral, Cristóbal de Villalpando paints Luther straight behind the apse, writhing in pain as the chariot of orthodoxy rolls over him; a similar scene hangs with the Carmelites in Celaya: Luther is found among a float of heretics and schismatics – also Calvin, Sabellius, and Faustus – being rowed away from the boat of orthodoxy by devils. In

the church of Guanajuato Miguel Cabrera paints Luther as a Turk with demonic fangs, pierced by the pricks of own writing quills (alongside Calvin, Pelagius, and Arius). The Virgin of Guadalupe protected Mexico against Luther: Andrés López depicts lightning shooting from a host that floats above the chalice born by the virgin, bouncing off a copy of the Gospels only to strike Luther dead with lightning.

III Luther, Outsider

Vitor Westhelle presented the *resourcement* of Luther by Latin American theologians, beginning by emphasizing Wittenberg for the backwater it was. Questionable doctrines were critiqued, and a new piety for common people was formed not in a great city but from the very margins of the world. Lutherans of Latin America are (and ought to be) driven by their marginality to receive the Reforma-

tion in this broad setting, and take more account of Luther's own social teaching against usury, poor relief, and his reformulation of good works as directed toward the neighbor.

As an example of this, *Justin Eller* presented the Lutheran church in Bolivia which is to 98% indigenous and very poor. They are inspired to resist constant pressure to abandon their traditional culture by receiving Luther's adaptation of local traditions, notably music, for catechesis and worship.

The subject of Luther in Ibero-America is large and elusive. Future research could profitably be directed at the spiritual roots of the Reformation in certain strains of late-medieval piety present also in Iberia, in better comprehending Luther's reception as heretic in Latin American letters and arts, and creative application of the contextual theology of the Reformation.