

COMMENT

Luther in Portuguese, in Brazil

by RICARDO W. RIETH

The introduction of Martin Luther's literary legacy in Brazil started with the immigration of German Protestants in 1824 and the subsequent establishment of their religious communities, schools, and synods. For over a century, German was the main language for the Reformer's writings as well as for worship, other church activities, and schools. His hymns, prayers, and the Small Catechism were the most widespread texts. From the 1940s, a harsh nationalization program against ethnic minorities, the so-called "Estado Novo" (New State), accelerated the transition from German to Portuguese among Protestants related to the Lutheran Reformation. Liturgical, religious, and pedagogical texts were the first to be translated into the Brazilian state's official language. Interestingly, members of other denominations, like the Methodists and Roman Catholics, published Portuguese translations of Luther's writings before Lutherans started doing it in a systematic way.¹

A list of writings translated and published separately in Portuguese until the 1970s includes: The 95 Theses, The Large Catechism, The Smalcald Articles, the Treatise on Christian Freedom, On Secular Authority, On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church, and The Magnificat Translated and Explained. Two collections with excerpts from the Reformer's works were also published. Celebrations related to the anniversaries of the Augsburg Confession, the Book of Concord, and Luther's birthday in 1983 induced the publishing houses of the Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil (Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil; affiliated with the Lutheran World Federation, hereafter IECLB) and the Igreja Evangélica Luterana do Brasil (Evangelical Lutheran Church

of Brazil; affiliated with the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, hereafter IELB) to promote collaborative translation and editorial projects. Organized originally by families and congregations from European background, these two church bodies kept their distance for many decades. The ongoing question of Lutheran identity in a multicultural and multireligious context brought both churches to search for historical and theological differences, and also to be convinced about their similarities. In this context, translating the literary legacy of the Lutheran Reformation, especially Luther's works, was an objective and practical way to work out their own and common Lutheran identity.²

Since 1966, the "Comissão Interluterana de Literatura" (Inter-Lutheran Publishing Commission; hereafter CIL),³ comprised of representatives of IECLB and IELB, has sponsored the publication of *Martinho Lutero: Obras Seleccionadas*, the major resource presented here. In addition to a yearly prayer book, entitled "Castelo Forte" (A Mighty Fortress), this Commission has been in charge of "Luther's Selected Works," delegating its implementation to the Comissão Editorial de Obras Seleccionadas de Martinho Lutero (The Editorial Commission of Martin Luther's Selected Works; hereafter CEOL). From the beginning, the publishing houses of IECLB and IELB, respectively, Editora Sinodal (São Leopoldo) and Editora Concórdia (Porto Alegre), have been indispensable in this process. They were joined later by the publishing house of the Universidade Luterana do Brasil (the Lutheran University of Brazil in Canoas). The church bodies are responsible for financial support, applying their own resources and raising funds from sister churches and foundations in North America and Europe. A substantial part of the editorial work depends on volunteer labor, for example, the reviewing and editing of historical introductions and footnotes.

Martinho Lutero: Obras Seleccionadas has a general editor, who oversees all the publishing stages of each volume. Luís Marcos Sander was the first to hold this position and was succeeded by Ilson Kayser, Darci Drehmer, and then Yedo Brandenburg, the current general editor. The general editor works closely with the aforementioned Editorial Commission, populated by specialists in Reformation history and Luther's theology. They define the thematic concept for

each volume, select the writings, check the translations, write historical introductions to each text and assist the editor in the preparation of explanatory notes. Currently, the Editorial Commission members are Claus Schwambach, Clóvis Jair Prunzel, Mário Francisco Tessmann, Paulo Wille Buss, Wilhelm Wachholz and Ricardo Willy Rieth, president. Former members were Joachim Fischer, Donaldo Schüler, Martim Warth, Nestor Beck, Mário Rehfeldt, Martin Dreher, Albérico Baeske, Osmar Witt, Silfredo Dalferth and Paulo Nerbas.

A landmark toward the overall project was a single volume of Luther's writings on the occasion of his 500th birthday anniversary in 1983. Entitled *Pelo Evangelho de Cristo: Obras Seleccionadas de Momentos Decisivos da Reforma* (Through the Gospel of Christ: Selected Works from Decisive Moments of the Reformation), translated by Walter O. Schlupp and introduced by Nestor Beck, this volume acted as a forerunner, anticipating the future volumes especially regarding the editorial plans for leaders, scholars, and technical teams. In the foreword, Leopoldo Heimann mentioned the lack of Luther's writings on hand in Portuguese and anticipated the publication of "ten to twelve volumes of selected works."⁴

Obras Seleccionadas' first volume was published in 1987, bringing together a set of writings from the years 1517–1519 under the subtitle: "The beginnings." In the general introduction, Joachim Fischer, who was the Editorial Commission's first president, described the challenging project as follows:

Luther's literary production is vast: sermons and biblical interpretations (professor of the interpretation of Holy Scripture was his profession!); scholarly, polemical and pastoral theological essays; the Bible's translation into German, the language of his people; reports on various issues, letters, and more. The complete edition of his works comprises more than 100 volumes. But only a very small number of his writings has been translated into Portuguese. A listing of these translations (to year 1982) does not take even two pages. In Portuguese-speaking countries it was practically impossible to develop knowledge of the rich and deep thought of this evangelist of Jesus Christ.

The scope of the collection and its thematic structure were also described by Fischer in the same introduction:

CIL and CEOL, however, were aware from the beginning that just one volume is not enough for a comprehensive deepening in Luther's thought. The decision then was to prepare an edition in several volumes. The project prepared by CEOL provides in the coming years for the publication of 16 volumes. The first two volumes contain Luther's writings from years prior to 1520 (vol. 1) and the year 1520 (vol. 2) in chronological order. It will thus be presented how Luther became the reformer of the Christian church. The remaining volumes will be thematic, covering works of scholarly theology, writings related to Christian congregations and worship, polemical texts, works on Christian ethics (family, economy, state, education, etc.), interpretation of Holy Scripture, as well as sermons, letters, and table talks.⁵

CIL has published on its website a very useful "Multilingual Index of Luther's Works" (German, Latin, English, Spanish, Portuguese) compiled by Walter Altmann.⁶

Volumes Already Published:

Volume 1 (1987): The beginnings, writings from 1517 to 1519 (2nd ed. 2004).

Volume 2 (1988): The Reformation program, writings of the year 1520.

Volume 3 (1991): Debates and controversies I.

Volume 4 (1993): Debates and controversies II.

Volume 5 (1995): Ethics: foundations, prayer, sexuality, education, economy.

Volume 6 (1996): Ethics: political ethics, government, peasants' war, Turks, social peace.

Volume 7 (2000): Congregational life: community, ministry, worship, sacraments, visitation, catechisms, hymns.

Volume 8 (2003): Biblical Interpretation: principles.

Volume 9 (2005): New Testament Interpretation: Gospel of Matthew 5–7, First Corinthians 15, First Timothy.

Volume 10 (2008): New Testament Interpretation: Galatians [1535], Titus.

Volume 11 (2010): New Testament Interpretation: John 14–16, First John.

Volume 12 (2014): Old Testament Interpretation: Genesis.

Volumes To Be Published:

Volume 13: Old Testament Interpretation: Deuteronomy; Isaiah 9, 40–45, and 53; Ezekiel 38–39; Jonah; Habakkuk; Zechariah.

Volume 14: Letters.

Volume 15: Sermons.

Volume 16: Table Talks; General index.

Since 2013, CIL adopted a new strategy for expanding the readership of this edition of Luther's selected works by publishing also in digital or e-book format. Volumes 2, 5, and 8 are already available in that way.⁷ The broad platform established by this extensive work of translation and editing has also facilitated other kinds of publications for the Portuguese readership. One example is the "Holy Bible with Luther's Reflections," published in 2015 by the Brazilian Bible Society with support of CIL. This edition contains about 900 quotations selected from Luther's writings already translated and published in *Obras Seleccionadas*. It is directed more toward the historical and exegetical understanding of biblical texts, for pastoral and practical guidance.⁸

What have been the main criteria for the selection of Luther's writings in this project? In general, the task was facilitated through analyses of editions in other languages, projects that have in their structure a scope roughly equivalent to the basic concept of the Brazilian edition. An obvious criterion has been the writings related to key moments in Luther's life and literary career, especially those related to the beginnings of the Reformation movement. The forthcoming volumes of letters, table talk, and sermons follow that priority. Another priority has been for documents related to disputes which forced the Reformer to define his theological, political, and cultural concepts. It was also taken into account that Luther, as a theologian, focused his intellectual activity and literary output mainly on biblical interpretation. That is the reason why six volumes have been reserved for his exegetical commentaries. Fortunately, it was possible to include in full the later commentary on Galatians. On the other hand, in the case of the lectures on Romans (1515–1516) and Genesis (1535–1545), the only possibility was to select excerpts, chosen after

very intense discussion. To help in this selection, the editorial commission also asked for guidance from experts in other theological disciplines, such as Old and New Testament, Systematic and Pastoral Theology, to find the most relevant texts from the point of view of biblical interpretation and denominational streams represented in Portuguese-speaking contexts. For another criterion, it was noted that ever since its origins, Brazilian Lutheranism is deeply rooted in local communities. This led the editorial commission to select writings focusing on worship and liturgy, ministry, and Christian education, for an entire volume. Finally, factors that have marked the theological and ecclesiastical context in Latin America during the last thirty years (for example, the intense debate on liberation and neopentecostalism, and the special interest from other academic fields in the social, political, economical, cultural, and educational impacts of the Reformation as a religious movement) prompted a representative collection of writings on ethical issues in two volumes.

NOTES

1. Joachim Fischer, "Quem é Lutero no Brasil?," in *Reflexões em torno de Lutero*, vol. 2, ed. Martin N. Dreher (São Leopoldo: Sinodal, 1984), p. 66f.
2. René E. Gertz, "Die Lutheraner in der Gesellschaft und Kultur Brasiliens," in *Luther zwischen den Kulturen*, ed. Hans Medick and Peer Schmidt (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), pp. 164–66.
3. Homepage: www.lutero.com.br
4. Martinho Lutero, *Pelo Evangelho de Cristo: obras selecionadas de momentos decisivos da Reforma* (Porto Alegre; São Leopoldo: Concórdia; Sinodal, 1984), p. 7. Edição coordenada pela Comissão Interluterana de Literatura, formada pela Igreja Evangélica Luterana do Brasil e Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil.
5. Martinho Lutero, *Obras selecionadas*, vol. 1: Os primórdios—escritos de 1517–1519, 2nd ed. Comissão Interluterana de Literatura (Porto Alegre; São Leopoldo: Concórdia; Sinodal, 2004), p. 9.
6. See http://www.lutero.com.br/novo/documentos/chave_multilingue.pdf.
7. See <http://www.livrariacultura.com.br/busca?N=102281&Ntt=lutero+obras>.
8. *Bíblia Sagrada com reflexões de Lutero* (Barueri: Sociedade Bíblica do Brasil, 2012). See <http://www.sbb.com.br/biblia-sagrada-com-reflexoes-de-lutero.html>.

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