

COMMENT

Luther in Spanish

by NELSON RIVERA

Translations of Luther into Spanish go back to the sixteenth century. Ever since, some of Luther's polemical writings have seen continuous if limited distribution in the Spanish world.¹ Sadly, for the longest time, works about Luther by Spanish-speaking authors were dependent on secondary sources, where they could only find references and fragments from Luther's original writings; access to German and Latin texts was not always easy or even possible.²

However, in connection with Luther's 400th birthday celebrations in 1883, the initial publication of the Weimar Edition of Luther's works in Germany, and the subsequent "Luther Renaissance," we find some parallel developments in Spanish history. Luther biographies as well as translations of his writings were in some demand at the time. One early development was the foundation of the *Librería Nacional y Extranjera* in 1873 by the Lutheran pastor and missionary Federico Fliedner. Fliedner (1845–1901) was the author of a well-known and rather popular (and still available) biography of Luther.³ Probably the most translated of Luther's works was the *Small Catechism*, usually born out of the missionary efforts, including those in Puerto Rico and other Spanish Caribbean nations.⁴ Other works of significant interest have been Luther's commentaries on Romans and Galatians, *The Freedom of a Christian*, and *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. Perhaps with the exception of the last item, for the most part the aim in providing these translations has been missionary and educational rather than polemical.

The largest work of translation of Luther into Spanish, *Obras de Martín Lutero*, was initially a joint effort between two theological

schools in Argentina: the Facultad Luterana de Teología and the Facultad Evangélica de Teología de Buenos Aires.⁵ For this multi-volume project, begun in 1958, the schools arranged the publishing support of Editorial Paidós (Argentina) and Publicaciones El Escudo (New York).⁶ Representatives of American Lutheran churches, together with scholars and translators, were recruited from several schools, including the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico, and Princeton Theological Seminary. Reformation scholars from Europe, especially Germany and Spain, also contributed to this effort. As could be expected, this translation project was based on the original texts in the Weimar Ausgabe. For some documents, such as Luther's Catechisms and the Smalcald Articles, the critical edition of the *Book of Concord* was also used. (The Spanish translation of individual Lutheran confessions was available only in a piecemeal process over time; the complete publication of the *Libro de Concordia* was finally accomplished by 1989 with the support of several sponsors.⁷) The aim of *Obras* was primarily to provide access to a number of Luther's writings that were not available in Spanish at the time, in addition to new and improved translations of works previously translated. Other stated goals included offering a venue for theological dialogue among the churches in Spanish-speaking countries.⁸

Prior to the publication of *Obras* there were some other notable efforts, such as an anthology of Luther's works sponsored by the Iglesia Evangélica Española for the celebration of the 450 years of the Reformation in 1967.⁹ As was explicitly stated in the first edition, theirs was an attempt to navigate the line between undue praise and flat rejection of Luther's theology, especially its exegetical character. Those translators and editors intended to set the record straight and offer a sound contextual interpretation of Luther's writings and theology.¹⁰

After *Obras*, among the new translations of particular works some collections deserve mention. One significant contribution is that of Joaquín Abellán.¹¹ In the context of Luther's 500th birthday, his selection emphasized political theory (for example, the "two kingdoms" doctrine¹² and the possibilities of "just war" thinking) amid tensions within Western societies on political and cultural matters

and the question of the links of the Western world to surrounding civilizations. Many consider the best modern translation of Luther's works (selection of twenty-one writings) to be the project of Teófanos Egido, then professor of theology at the Universidad de Valladolid in Spain.¹³ His goal was to provide a reliable introduction to Luther's thought through key writings for university students of religion and theology. One attractive feature is the inclusion of *Charlas de sobremesa* (Table Talks), *La misa alemana* (German Mass) and *Método sencillo de oración* (A Simple Way to Pray). As Egido wrote, he had in mind primarily his own students, but also Spanish-speaking Evangelicals and ecumenically-minded Roman Catholics. More than other known anthologies, in this one we are given a glimpse into the difficulty of translating German and Latin expressions, especially those of a secular nature. Moreover, some of Luther's flavored idiomatic statements are, as Egido put it, unfriendly to the Spanish language.¹⁴

All that said, *Obras de Martín Lutero* (in ten volumes) remains to date the most extensive, albeit limited, collection of Luther's writings in Spanish, a meager forty-five pieces from Luther's works. See the appendix for the full list, giving the reader an overview of what is available and a sense of where the focus mostly lies. Selections of Luther's writings directly taken from *Obras* also deserve mention, particularly the volume put together predominantly by Latino Lutherans in the United States, *Lutero al habla*.¹⁵ This volume, sponsored by a number of organizations with vested interest in the theological training of Lutherans and other Latino Evangelicals, and with new introductions to the selected works, has been a very welcome addition to the development of Luther studies in this American context.

Overall, translations of Luther, and scholarly works on Luther, have not met the need. Numbers are not impressive in either case. The only area that has been fairly well-covered is biographies of Luther.¹⁶ Given the fact that publications of and on Luther are so spread out over time, the task of perceiving patterns of interest is difficult. As mentioned above, a serious effort for translating Luther into Spanish had to wait until the 1970s in Latin America, Spain, and the United States. A related story, and one that has to be told on its own, is the availability of Luther translations and academic work in Portuguese.¹⁷ In general, there is much basic work to be

done, including translations of Luther's works not yet available in Spanish, plus updates on bibliographical resources and more scholarly consideration of the impact and reception of Luther's theology in the Spanish-speaking world.

Appendix

- I. *Obras de Martín Lutero*. Traducción de Carlos Witthaus, Manuel Vallejo Díaz y Eric Sexauer. 10 tomos. Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1967–1976; El Escudo—La Aurora, 1977–1985.

Tomo I (1967)

1. Disputación acerca de la determinación del valor de las indulgencias (Las 95 tesis) (Ninety-five Theses, or, Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences)
2. La indulgencia y la gracia (Sermon on Indulgences and Grace)
3. La disputación de Heidelberg (Heidelberg Disputation)
4. Disputación y defensa de Fray Martín Lutero contra las acusaciones del Doctor Juan Eck (Disputation and Defense of Brother Martin Luther against the Accusations of Doctor John Eck)
5. La disputación de Leipzig—informe de Lutero a Jorge Spalatin (The Leipzig Debate)
6. A la nobleza cristiana de la nación alemana acerca del mejoramiento del estado cristiano (To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation)
7. La libertad cristiana (The Freedom of a Christian)
8. La cautividad babilónica de la Iglesia (The Babylonian Captivity of the Church)
9. Lutero en la Dieta de Worms (Luther at the Diet of Worms)
10. A toda la clerecía reunida en Augsburgo para la dieta del año 1530 (Exhortation to All Clergy Assembled at Augsburg)
11. Prefacio al primer tomo de los escritos latinos (Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings)

Tomo II (1974)

1. Las buenas obras (Treatise on Good Works)
2. Comercio y usura (Trade and Usury)

3. La autoridad secular (Temporal Authority: To What Extend It Should be Obeyed)
4. ¿Es posible ser soldado y cristiano? (Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved)
5. Alegato contra los turcos (Argument against the Turks)
6. Exhortación a la paz, en relación con los doce artículos de los campesinos de Suabia (Admonition to Peace, a Reply to the Twelve Articles of the Peasants in Swabia)
7. Contra las hordas ladronas y asesinas de los campesinos (Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants)
8. Carta abierta respecto del riguroso panfleto contra los campesinos (An Open Letter on the Harsh Book against the Peasants)

Tomo III (1974)

1. Sermón acerca del estado matrimonial (The State of Marriage)
2. Cuestiones concernientes al matrimonio (On Marriage Matters)
3. Juicio sobre los votos monásticos (Judgment of Luther on Monastic Vows)

Tomo IV (1976)

1. La voluntad determinada (Bondage of the Will)

Tomo V (1971)

1. Catecismo menor (Small Catechism)
2. Catecismo mayor (Large Catechism)
3. Los artículos de Esmalcalda (Smalcald Articles)
4. Sermón acerca del dignísimo sacramento del santo y verdadero cuerpo de Cristo y las cofradías (The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods)
5. Sermón acerca del santo y dignísimo sacramento del bautismo (The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism)
6. Contra los profetas celestiales acerca de las imágenes y los sacramentos (Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments)
7. Confesión acerca de la Santa Cena de Cristo (Confession Concerning Christ's Supper)

Tomo VI (1979)

1. El arte de traducir: carta abierta (On Translating: An Open Letter)
2. Lo que se debe buscar en los Evangelios (A Brief Instruction on What to Look For and Expect in the Gospels)
3. Prefacios a los libros de la Biblia (Prefaces to the Books of the Bible)
4. Los Salmos consolatorios (The Four Psalms of Comfort)
5. Los Salmos penitenciales (The Seven Penitential Psalms)
6. El sublime confitemini (The Sublime Confitemini)
7. El magnificat (Commentary on the Magnificat)

Tomo VII (1977)

1. La necesidad de mantener y crear escuelas cristianas: exhortación a las autoridades municipales de Alemania (To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools)
2. Sermón para que se manden a los hijos a la escuela (Sermon on Keeping Children in School)
3. Derechos de una comunidad cristiana (That the Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching)
4. Administración de una caja comunitaria (Ordinance of a Common Chest)
5. Los concilios y la Iglesia (On the Councils and the Church)

Tomo VIII (1982)

1. Comentario de la Carta a los Gálatas (Lectures on Galatians)

Tomo IX (1983)

1. Sermones (Sermons)

Tomo X (1985)

1. Comentario de la Carta a los Romanos (Romans)

NOTES

1. There is evidence that between 1558 and 1560, a number of “Lutheran books” were distributed among the “luteranos” of Castilla (mostly Valladolid); of Luther’s works, the one clearly identifiable is *The Freedom of a Christian*. See Teófanos Egido, “Los ‘luteranos’ de Castilla;” Martín Lutero: quinto centenario de su nacimiento (1483–1983), *Renovación Ecueménica*, año 15 núm. 80 (Septiembre–Diciembre 1983), p. 18.

2. Ricardo Viejo Feliú, *Lutero en España y en la América Española* (Santander: Librería S.T.; Asturias: Librería Stella, 1956), pp. xxii–xxiii.

3. Most recently reissued as *Martín Lutero: su vida y su obra* (3rd edition; Barcelona: Editorial CLIE, 2011). It was originally titled *Martín Lutero: emancipador de la conciencia* and published in 1878; multiple reprints have followed. Federico (Fritz) Fliedner was a German pastor, naturalized in Spain, and son of Lutheran theologian Theodor Fliedner (1800–1864).

4. Some early translations served the purposes of the missionary activities conducted under the support of American Lutheran churches. *The Small Catechism* was translated by Gustav Swensson and published in 1900, revised in 1934. Swensson was the first Lutheran missionary in Puerto Rico, arriving on the island in late 1898. See also the translation by Alfredo Ostrom published in 1908, revised in 1936. Multiple versions were published during the twentieth century; a few are still being reproduced, for instance by Augsburg Fortress and Concordia Publishing House. Recent attempts at a critical edition and new translation have not yet gained traction.

5. Until last year known as Instituto Superior Evangélico de Estudios Teológicos [ISEDET] after a merger.

6. *Obras de Martín Lutero*, translated by Carlos Witthaus, Manuel Vallejo Díaz and Eric Sexauer, 10 vols. (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1967–1976; El Escudo—La Aurora, 1977–1985).

7. Andrés A. Meléndez, editor, *Libro de Concordia: las confesiones de la Iglesia Evangélica Luterana* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989).

8. *Obras*, tomo I, pp. xii–xiii.

9. *Martín Lutero: antología*, edited by D. Giral-Miracle, J. Grau Balcells, and M. Gutiérrez Marín (Barcelona: Producciones Editoriales del Norte, 1968); see pp. 5–6. A second edition by Ediciones Pleroma was published in 1983 in the context of Luther’s 500-year birthday celebration.

10. *Martín Lutero antología*, 2nd edition, prólogo, pp. vii–xii.

11. *Martín Lutero: escritos políticos*, traducción y estudio preliminar de Joaquín Abellán (Madrid: Editorial Tecnos, 1986; second edition and reprint, 2001).

12. Interest in “two kingdoms” as to Luther’s theory and praxis before civil authorities was rather widespread in the context of Luther’s 500th birthday celebration among Spanish scholars; see Rosa Pérez Estévez, “La recepción de Lutero,” *Renovación Ecueménica* (see note 1 above), p. 9.

13. *Lutero. obras*, translator and editor Teófanos Egido (2nd edition: Salamanca. Ediciones Sígueme, 2001); see pp. 9–10. I have used this anthology for my own courses on Luther in Spanish for seminarians.

14. *Lutero: obras*, p. 9.

15. Giacomo Cassese and Eliseo Pérez, editors, *Lutero al habla: antología* (Coyoacán, México: Publicaciones El Faro, 2005); eight different organizations, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America sponsored this publication. The writings collected in

this volume come from volumes I & II of *Obras de Martín Lutero*. A companion volume on Luther and his significance for Latino communities followed: *Martín Lutero descalzo: meditaciones sobre la identidad luterana desde el contexto latinoamericano*, edited by José D. Rodríguez and Carmen M. Rodríguez (Santo Domingo: Editora Centenario, 2010).

16. Just to mention one of the most widely-distributed biographies, other than translations from German, English, and other European languages: Ricardo García-Villoslada, *Martín Lutero*, 2 volumes (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1973).

17. For more on this survey and discussion, see *Lutero: ayer y hoy*, edited by Luis Farré (Buenos Aires: Ediciones La Aurora, 1984); see especially the *repertorio bibliográfico*, pp. 315–331.



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