

MARTIN LUTHER IN MEXICO

Although the conquest of Mexico and the Americas was taking place during the same years in which Martin Luther was leading the Reformation, Luther apparently never reflected much on the significance of the conquest, mentioning it only a few times in his vast writings. Nevertheless, Luther was a very important figure in the religious life of Mexico in the centuries following the Reformation—but only in a negative sense. Mexican historian Alicia Mayer, who has written a lengthy book on the subject, shows that Luther was consistently viewed as the “incarnation and prototype of evil.” His ideas, usually misrepresented, were frequently ascribed to those regarded as enemies of the Mexican Church and State in order to condemn them as “Lutherans.” He was often burned in effigy during religious processions and when those condemned by the Inquisition were put to death, the mobs would cry out, “Death to the Lutheran dogs!” Paintings depicting Luther being crushed by the church, burning in hell, or drowning at sea (see below) were common.



While many here today still view Luther primarily in negative terms, among many others he has come to be seen as one to be admired for standing up to corrupt and oppressive church authorities and the theologies and ideologies that justified that oppression. When his biography and writings are read in this light, as we do at the Lutheran Seminary here, they become very powerful and liberating. I often tell my students that I see my goal as a Seminary professor in terms of helping to raise up more “heretics” like Luther: people of conviction who have the theological tools and knowledge necessary to stand up to the injustices and oppression that continue to exist today, not only in the world but often in the church as well, in order to proclaim in words and deeds a liberating and transforming gospel.

CINCO DE MAYO CELEBRATION

Most people in the U.S. have become acquainted with the “Cinco de Mayo” celebrations that now take place in many U.S. cities. While this is not one of the primary holidays commemorated in Mexico, for many it is a day to celebrate Mexican identity.

The celebration dates to May 5, 1862, when the Mexican army successfully defeated the French invaders in Puebla, a couple of hours east of Mexico City. While the French later established control over Mexico for several years, the Battle of Puebla marked the first time that the country was able to defeat a foreign army. This was significant because, even after its independence in 1810, Mexico had remained subject to the dictates of foreign powers, who continued to exploit the country and its people in many different ways.



Here in Mexico, many reenactments of the Battle take place on May 5, along with activities celebrating Mexican culture. It is a day to recall how a people was finally able to overcome its aggressors and establish its own identity.



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E-mail: david.brondos@elca.org