

SOME HIGHLIGHTS OF THE LUTHER JUBILEE IN EUROPE

1. A QUINCENTENNIAL CELEBRATION IN UPPSALA, SWEDEN, AND A GLIMPSE OF SWEDISH CHURCH HISTORY

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The Luther Anniversary in Uppsala, Sweden

On the 500th anniversary of his birthday—November 10, 1983—, Martin Luther drew a full house at a special celebration at the University of Uppsala, Sweden. From an easel, his portrait (signed Lucas Cranach the Elder) looked out over a packed auditorium of church dignitaries (foremost among them the Swedish Archbishop Bertil Werkström), scholars and students from the University, and the general public.

Three jubilee lectures dealt with “Luther and Different Luther Images”; “Luther on Law and Justice”; and “The Swedish Church as a Cultural Factor.” Actually, the celebration stretched from October until December, with a special series of lectures on Luther, held at the Theological Faculty of Uppsala University. The topics presented were: “The Psychological Aspect of Justification by Faith”; “Only with Idols and Images: Luther’s Attempt to Understand the Book of Revelation”; “Luther and Olaus Petri Regarding the ‘Mission Call’”; “Tradition and Renewal in Luther’s Liturgical Work”; “Reformation and Nationalism: The Specific Nature of the Swedish Reformation”; “Luther’s Catechisms and Modern Catechetical Work”; “Luther’s Exegesis of the Psalms”; “Luther’s Image in Modern Catholic Theology”; and “Jews and Muslims in Luther’s World.”

The birthday-anniversary celebration began with the opening of a special Luther exhibition in the University library. Among the

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eye-catching treasures were Leo X's excommunication bull of 1521, the edict of the German Emperor Charles V against Luther from the Diet of Worms that same year, and Luther's answer of June 15, 1520, to the threat of excommunication. A central feature of the exhibition was an array of important works by Luther himself: editions of his Bible translation (among them an original copy of the 1526 edition of the OT); the Large and Small Catechisms (1529); the original edition of the Postil (1544); polemical writings against Erasmus; etc. An interesting rarity, brought to Sweden as a war trophy from Denmark, was a copy of the 1541 Bible, with autographs and Bible quotations by Luther, Melancthon, and others. The exhibition also displayed important Swedish religious documents.

One may play with the thought that with today's copyright laws Luther could have become quite wealthy as a writer. But such a calculation was far from the Reformer's mind. For him, writing was a point of honor and duty, for which he did not want to receive payment.

Luther understood the importance of the printed word, and he knew how to utilize the newborn art of printing. He produced, in modern printed pages, about a hundred volumes with a total of some 60,000 pages. But the overwhelming number of books *about* him, his life and work, can hardly be registered even with the help of a modern computer!

(In passing, it may be noted that the first book ever printed in Sweden appeared on December 20, 1483, from the Stockholm workshop of German printer Johann Snell. It was a collection of moralizing fables and tales, *Dyalogus creaturarum*. Martin Luther was but six weeks old then.)

The anniversary day at Uppsala concluded with a festive worship service in the Cathedral, the Archbishop stressing in his sermon that the Reformation is not finished, but must go on. All the hymns that were sung stemmed from the pen of Martin Luther, one page of the program showing Luther's own handwriting and prominent musical notes to "A Mighty Fortress." It had indeed been a day of "spiritual fireworks," as the Uppsala Theological Faculty had promised the week before.

Inasmuch as Sweden became the prototype of the professional Lutheran national state, a few glimpses of Swedish church history and the Reformation in Sweden (in its consequences typical also for the rest of Scandinavia) may be more useful and of greater interest

to the reader than further description of the Uppsala celebration of 1983. But even this history itself frequently centered on Uppsala, as we shall see.

The Swedish Reformation

A thousand years ago, long before Stockholm was founded, the Swedes had their capital, with its great heathen temple, at Uppsala. It was the last bastion of paganism, offering resistance until the beginning of the twelfth century. Since the Middle Ages, the Swedes have been Christian; and since the Reformation, they have been Protestant. Uppsala remained the religious heart of the nation, being the Swedish archbishopric since 1164.

The Swedish Reformation was at its outset a political maneuver, rather than the natural consequence of a new religious conviction. After centuries of internal and external crises and political storms, of struggle for power by the Roman Catholic Church and aristocracy, the young Swedish captain Gustavus Vasa led a rebellion against the Danish king, who also ruled Norway and had been made king over Sweden. The revolt was successful, and Gustavus Vasa was elected Swedish king in 1523. National liberation and independence achieved, the work for national unity and restoration could begin.

Already at an early stage, Gustavus Vasa showed a critical attitude towards the almost-independent and economically strong Catholic Church, which in turn felt indignant about the king's financial and political demands. Furthermore, he favored two spokesmen of the Reformation, Olaus Petri and Laurentius Andreae, and entrusted them with important political posts. Petri, who had studied in Wittenberg from 1516-18, had been impressed by Luther's doctrines. After his return to Sweden, he became secretary to the bishop of Strängnäs, and deacon and teacher at the cathedral school there, where he preached the ideas of the Reformation and won the leader of the chapter, Laurentius Andreae.

The decisive blow was struck in 1527, when the Parliament decided to cut the power of the Church dramatically. This "Church Reduction" resulted in the confiscation of a large portion of the Church's estates and income. (One example was that from 1539 on, two-thirds of the Church tithe had to be given to the Crown.) Stripped of most of her possessions, her hierarchical independence reduced considerably, the Catholic Church turned into a national, Catholicizing state church.

An official connection with the Reformation was not, however, to be proclaimed for quite some time yet, the only claim with direct Protestant implication being that God's word should be preached "purely and clearly." Great caution prevailed concerning the internal conditions of the Church: Pictures were not removed, but declared to be in the spirit of the Reformation; most monasteries were allowed to continue, even if they gradually disappeared because of the reduction and the new teachings; celibacy was yet maintained; etc. Different parties in Parliament resisted the Reformers' suggestions for a new order of worship and liturgy.

Gustavus Vasa was cautious towards Rome, but he sharpened his tone when the Pope demanded the reinstatement of a Catholic archbishop and threatened punishment for failure to do this. The king took no risks. On the ridge above the Cathedral in Uppsala and the archepiscopal residence, he built a citadel. Cannons, placed on a fortification wall, were pointed right at the archbishop's residence—"just in case." (Tourists can admire the cannons to this day.)

In 1531, two days before the king's wedding, Sweden got its first Protestant archbishop, Laurentius Petri, the brother of Olaus. The country had been without an archbishop for ten years. Gustavus Vasa promised that "everyone may remain in the Christian practice he wishes."

For the monarch, the Reformation was very much a matter of practical political concern. It would take decades for the new ideas to take root in the hearts and minds of his subjects. Craftsmen in Stockholm had probably been the first to hear and adopt the Protestant teachings, but it was not until around 1600 that the new doctrines were accepted among the peasants. Even then, there was still no radical break with the form of worship. (The Swedish Church is the least reformed of the Protestant churches. To this day, the priestly robes, the Sunday morning worship—"The High Mass"—, liturgy, etc., remind one very much of the Catholic tradition.)

The establishment of Gustavus Vasa's national monarchy and reformation of the church resulted in an upswing of the Swedish economy, but in a decline of culture and education. The Roman Catholic Church, mother of all higher education, had provided cathedral schools for the preparation of priests and monks; but for a successful ecclesiastical career, extended education abroad was necessary. A half century before Gustavus Vasa's reign, in 1477, a bull of Pope Sixtus IV had granted the establishment of the first

Scandinavian university at Uppsala (then the world's northernmost university), complete with all the usual faculties, a *studium generale*. But as a consequence of the Lutheran Reformation, this university, which had been a stronghold of Catholic faith and teaching, licensed by the Pope, was abandoned (probably in 1531).

Gustavus Vasa realized that he needed competent persons in his administration and diplomatic missions. Many offices formerly occupied by prelates and other highly educated clergy of the Catholic Church, would now have to be filled with men from noble ranks. As early as 1527, the king had sent three young Swedes to Wittenberg with letters of introduction to Luther, and in the 1550s between ten and twenty Swedes periodically studied with Melanchthon, many of them taking degrees. Earlier, Melanchthon had already written a letter to Gustavus Vasa, saying that a university in Sweden would "redound to God's glory and the King's honor."

As another problem for Sweden, Denmark now entered competition by reestablishing the University of Copenhagen on a grand scale, with the University of Wittenberg as its model. The earlier Copenhagen University, which had been founded in 1478, had also been dissolved during the early Reformation. Gustavus Vasa could see the need for higher education in Sweden, but it was not until the reigns of his sons that the situation brightened, through a reestablished University of Uppsala.

By 1526, the Swedish NT (translated probably by Olaus Petri or Laurentius Andreae) had been printed in Stockholm. Now Archbishop Laurentius Petri was commissioned to translate the OT. Both the translation from German and the printing were done in Uppsala. Gustavus Vasa called German printer Jurgen Richolff to carry out the task. Archives tell how this enormous project was financed: The office of the Archdeacon was suspended from 1534-42, the salary being used for the printing. Moreover, each parish in Sweden was called upon to contribute a barrel of barley, the so-called "Bible barrel."

The first complete Swedish Bible, also called "Gustavus Vasa's Bible," appeared in 1541. It was a joint work of the Petri brothers. The Bible, together with the writings of the Reformers, played a vital role in the further development of the Swedish language, just as Luther's contributions did to the German language.

After the death of Gustavus Vasa in 1560, and the deposition of his son Eric XIV, the second son, John III, succeeded to the throne

in 1569. Married to the Catholic Katarina Jagellonica, sister of the Polish king, he sought political connections with some of Europe's Catholic powers. Also, he planned a mediation between the Catholic and Protestant doctrines. He had a new liturgy drawn up, the so-called "Red Book," leaning towards a Catholic form of worship. He initiated negotiations with the Pope, who sent a legate to Sweden. Nevertheless, Sweden's first Protestant Church Law was passed in 1572, with Laurentius Petri being the driving force for its adoption. This law also included the oldest Swedish School Law.

Immediately after John III's death in 1592, a national movement, led by his brother Duke Charles and supported by most of the clergy, was formed, and at New Year 1593, an assembly was summoned to meet at Uppsala. The 306 participants swore to adhere to the Augsburg Confession, and the detested Red Book was abolished. This resolution marked the consolidation of the Swedish Reformation. An official confessional church of Sweden had at last been created. This would be of no value, though, unless confirmed by John III's son, the Catholic Sigismund, king over both Sweden and Poland. Exactly a year later, Sigismund arrived at Uppsala to be crowned in the Cathedral. The coronation was performed only after the king had first signed a document in which he promised to respect the synod's resolution.

In 1611, the famous Gustavus II Adolphus began his reign at the age of seventeen. Under his intelligent and powerful leadership, the nation flourished. Thanks to his magnificent private donations, unparalleled in Swedish history, Uppsala University soared to heights never reached before.

In 1630, Gustavus landed his troops in Germany. Sweden had entered the Thirty Years' War (1618-48), and the king's skillful strategy resulted in overwhelming success on the Protestant side. However, he fell in battle in 1632 (and lay in state in the City Church of Wittenberg). He had had plans to form a permanent Protestant alliance, a "Corpus evangelicorum," under Swedish leadership in Germany. These plans, if carried out, might have had a far-reaching influence on Europe's continued development.

The daughter and successor of Gustavus Adolphus was the brilliant and learned Queen Christina, one of the most remarkable women of her time. After a decade of reign, she abdicated and converted to the Catholic faith. She spent the rest of her life in Italy,

trying first to gain the crown of Naples, and later of Poland, but without success.

It may be regarded a slight irony of fate, that the same place where Catholic Sigismund had celebrated his elevation over a Lutheran country—the Imperial Hall of Uppsala Castle—witnessed, sixty years later, the abdication of the daughter of the warmly Protestant Gustavus Adolphus, because she wanted to return to the religion of her forefathers.

In the Aftermath of the Reformation

The danger of a Catholic Counter Reformation in Sweden resulted in special laws against Catholics. Also, towards the end of the seventeenth century, Pietist ideas reached Sweden. As people flocked to Pietist meetings, the so-called conventicles, and as Pietism even gained a foothold among the clergy, the Conventicle Act of 1726 was issued. This forbade, at the risk of severe penalty, all conventicles, i. e., private religious meetings beyond the circle of family devotions.

Somewhat later, in 1781, the Edict of Toleration gave immigrants holding other Christian confessions the right to practice their religion. (Swedish citizens, however, were not allowed to abandon their adherence to the official Lutheran Church.) In 1782, Jews received certain rights. In 1809, religious liberty was established in principle, but not until 1858 was the Conventicle Act revoked. Two years later, punishment for apostasy from the official religion was abolished, so that congregations other than those of the Swedish Lutheran Church could be formed. Swedish citizens now could leave the Lutheran Church, provided they joined another Christian denomination recognized by the State. It was not, however, until 1951 that the latest step toward full religious liberty was reached, when Swedish citizens acquired the right to fellowship with or dissociate from the Lutheran state church at will. Nonetheless, Sweden does have a well-deserved and long-standing reputation for tolerance in the truly humanistic spirit.

The Swedish Lutheran Church, though, is still indeed a state church (as is also the case in the other Scandinavian countries). The archbishop (*Primus inter pares*) has thirteen bishops at his side. He has no power over them, but is considered foremost among them. In international and ecumenical connections, he is the official representative of the Church.

Some 5% of the Swedish population today belong to free churches. Roman Catholicism is a small minority, but, along with the Orthodox Church and Islam, it is gaining in numbers, due to immigration.

Every Swedish citizen is automatically a member of the state church, unless he or she chooses to withdraw. Relatively few have used this privilege, for it is a social custom (more or less, a matter of course) to belong to the state church, and its adherents rarely have convictions that make them leave it. In fact, many members of the free churches stay nominal members of the state church as well. Moreover, the Swedish Lutheran Church still plays a main role in all civil registration, with all recording of births, weddings, deaths, divorces, moves, etc., being done through the clergy. Attempts have been made to separate church and state in Sweden, but so far without success.

In our century, Sweden has been active in ecumenical efforts. Archbishop Nathan Söderblom, of Uppsala, for instance, was the main organizer of the first international Conference on Life and Work, held in Stockholm in 1925. In 1968, the Fourth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches was held in Uppsala, with some 2000 delegates, participants, and visitors in attendance. And in the "Luther Year" 1983, Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme paid a visit to Pope John Paul II, reestablishing relations with the Holy See that had been cut off 450 years earlier.

The Gothic Cathedral of Uppsala still towers over the city, timeless and majestic, undaunted by change or strife, always the obedient servant of its masters. Only a stone's throw away, in the main building of the University, a speaker so aptly commented on Luther's birthday:

The two ancestral mothers, *alma mater* and *mater ecclesia*, University and Church, have not always been on good terms with each other. They have lived a stormy life, shaken by internal and external attacks, but in spite of this, both have maintained their positions and their lives. The Church, which is the older, gave birth to the University, and has always kept a watchful eye over her daughter.

Now, when both ladies celebrate the anniversary of Martin Luther, it is because the Reformation has been an important step towards freedom of thought and religious liberty, and because it was in the form of the academic disputation that the learned monk and theologian formulated his theses.