

THE KING'S CELEBRATION

The Reformation Bicentenary in Denmark-Norway in 1717

Joar Haga (Stavanger)

The Danish church historian Carsten Bach-Nielsen has interpreted the Reformation bicentenary in Denmark-Norway in 1717 in light of the Old Testament jubilee tradition. He claims that learned Lutheran theologians of the 18th century placed the celebrations of the Reformation within the matrix of festival culture found in Jewish scriptures.¹ Key elements included Jerusalem and the king's responsibility for the cultic activity in the temple. The absolutist king of Denmark utilized trumpets, prayers and praise in order to present himself as part of this lineage of kings chosen by God to secure true faith and worship.

The 1717 commemoration was celebrated during the Great Nordic War “in a belligerent manner”, as one commentator put it.² Frederik IV (1671–1730), the king, had led Denmark into a state of war fatigue, but the Reformation jubilee provided him the opportunity to boost his image. Sweden was the archenemy, in spite of the common Lutheran heritage. One can sense the attempt to attack the Swedes in the conventional polemics against the papacy. Not the Swedish, but the Danish king was the true ruler of the North, which would become, as Luther had prophesized, the last stronghold of God's Word.³ It was of utmost importance, therefore, that the ceremonies were staged flawlessly. When the king appeared, he reflected the cosmic order. No ambiguity arousing any doubts about the king's legitimacy of rule could be tolerated.⁴ Hence, the committee planning the ceremonies for the court and the castle church underlined the importance of *solemnity*.⁵

In the wake of the revolution of 1660, the principles of Danish absolutist rule were laid down in the *Lex Regia* (1665). These had been defended and theologically interpreted by the theologian Hans Wandal (1624–1675) in his six-volume work *Jus regium* (1663–1672). Wandal did not merely uphold the *sovereign* nature of the king's rule, but he also granted it a numinous quality in his exposition of the word *majestas*.

1 Cf. Carsten Bach-Nielsen: *Fra jubelfest til kulturår*. Copenhagen 2015, pp. 79–81.

2 Cf. Carsten Bach-Nielsen: “Hvad blev der af Norge? Norges fravær i de ‘danske’ reformationsfejringer 1617–1817,” in: *Teologisk Tidsskrift* 7, no. 2 (2018), p. 109.

3 “[...] die Lehre des Euangelii nun sey in der ganzen Welt gewesen. Denn erstlich hats angefangen in Oriente; darnach sey es kommen gegen Mittage; zum Dritten, gegen Untergang der Sonnen; aber zu unser Zeit, da ist, als zum Vierten, das göttliche Wort auch gegen Mitternacht kommen.” WA, TR 6, no. 7068, p. 366. The bishop of Zealand, Hans Resen, referred to this quote in his centenary publications from 1617 entitled *Jubilaens Christianus* and *Lutherus Triumphans*.

4 Cf. Bach-Nielsen: *Jubelfest*, pp. 53f.

5 Cf. Thomas Ewen Daltveit Slettebø: *In Memory of Divine Providence. A Study of Centennial Commemoration in Eighteenth-Century Denmark-Norway (1717–1760)*. Bergen 2015. URL: ><https://hdl.handle.net/1956/16847>< (accessed on January 31, 2021), p. 65.

Majesty was the result of God investing His highest powers in the king.⁶ “The jubilee was structured as a powerful tribute to King Frederick IV,” a modern historian later remarked, “invincible in war and the steadfast protector of pure Lutheran teaching.”⁷

From the very outset, the orchestration of the Reformation jubilee in 1717 took a slightly different path than it had one hundred years earlier. The bishop of Zealand, Hans Resen (1561–1638), was not merely the initiator of the commemoration in 1617, but also its architect.⁸ Resen was rector of the University of Copenhagen and chose this institution of higher learning as the main location for the celebration. In 1717, the king played a more central role. Through two edicts from April 12 of that year, the king demanded that plans be drafted for the ceremonies, liturgy and festivities. It has long been assumed that the initiative came from the state.⁹ However, a recent study has revealed that the bishop of Zealand, Christen Worm (1672–1737), had written a petition to the Danish Chancery ten days before the edicts, on April 2.¹⁰ In the petition, the bishop suggested that the celebration (“Jubel Festen”) be conducted as in 1617, beginning on October 31 and lasting a total of eight days. Since a century earlier October 31 had fallen on a Friday, the texts for the sermons were chosen specifically for the occasion. In 1717, however, the first day fell on a Sunday. Hence, they followed the pericopes prescribed by church practice. Apparently, the Privy Council endorsed Worm’s suggestions, recommending that the king appoint two committees for the celebration as a whole and for the specific events in the castle chapel and at the king’s court. Inspired by Leviticus 25 and its description of the jubilee year, the large committee proposed that the king release a few prisoners that had been sentenced for minor offenses and give alms to the poor and sick. The committee also recommended minting medals in gold and silver to commemorate the event, “as [...] in Saxony a hundred years ago.”¹¹

Peter Berg, an engraver who had produced medals commemorating Danish royal birthdays and war events, designed three medals. They secured Denmark a foremost place in the final section of Ernst Salomon Cyprian’s documentation of the festivities surrounding the 200th anniversary of the Reformation in Europe, depicting commemorative coins and medals.¹² All of them present the king’s profile on the obverse side. The reverse sides, however, differ. One medal (Ill. 1) shows an altar with an open book inscribed with the chronogram “SaCra sCrIptVra VerbVM DeI,” indicat-

6 Cf. Joar Haga: “Gerhard (un)Seen from Copenhagen? Danish Absolutism and the Relation between State and Church”, in: Markus Friedrich et al. (eds.): *Politik und Gelehrsamkeit. Der Jenaer Theologe Johann Gerhard (1582–1637) im Kontext seiner Zeit* Konfession. Stuttgart 2017, pp. 126f.

7 Johannes Pedersen: *Pietismens tid 1699–1746, Den danske kirkes historie*. Copenhagen 1951, p. 61.

8 Cf. Bjørn Kornerup: *Biskop Hans Poulsen Resen II*. Copenhagen 1968, pp. 146–171.

9 Cf. Hans Olrik: *Reformationens 200-Års Jubilæum i Danmark 1717. Særtryk Av Kirkehistoriske Samlinger*. Copenhagen 1890. This opinion was recently represented by Bach-Nielsen: *Jubelfest*, pp. 51f.

10 Cf. Slettebø: *Memory*, p. 61, note 179.

11 Cf. Slettebø: *Memory*, p. 64.

12 Ernst Salomon Cyprian: *Hilaria evangelica [...]*. Gotha 1719 (VD18 90010523).

ing the year 1717 through the Roman numerals. Below the altar, the inscription states that the book has been opened to the peoples of the North for two centuries. Interestingly, the circumscription refers to the year 1717 as the second jubilee of the Augsburg Confession, although it was first written in 1530. The second medal's obverse side depicts the king's bust on a pedestal with the Danish inscription "God gave me the jubilee year, God Himself receives the jubilee glory." On the reverse side, God is praised in a rhyme that translates into the phrase "two hundred years since the true faith was freed from the tyranny of the pope." The circumscription states: "In the North, the true, pure Word of God triumphs now. Hence, God's church in the North celebrates now." On October 29, no less than 700 medals were minted.¹³ The third medal was larger (Ill. 2). It presented the king as the propagator and protector of the faith on the front. The back portrays Luther and Bugenhagen as the German and Danish apostle respectively. Between them, there is a seal with the inscription from Apocalypse 14:6 – a verse intimately connected with Luther's legacy¹⁴ – and the admonishing words: "Fear God and give Him glory, for the hour of His judgement is coming, and worship Him". Hovering above, the angel who spoke in the book of the Apocalypse holds a sign in his hands proclaiming the "eternal Gospel". The account of the jubilee authorized by the king had an apocalyptic note, claiming that in spite of the "burning love" to the "true faith" in the cold North, there are also "unfaithful people who have become drunk from the cup of the Babylonian whore."¹⁵



Ill. 1: Commemorative medals of the Danish king (FB Gotha, *Theol* 2° 270/8, *Tabula I*, no. 1–2)

- 13 Cf. Georg Galster: *Danske og norske Medailler og Jetons ca. 1533–ca. 1788*. Copenhagen 1936, pp. 171–196.
- 14 Cf. Harm Cordes: *Hilaria evangelica academica. Das Reformationsjubiläum von 1717 an den deutschen lutherischen Universitäten*. Göttingen 2006, pp. 212f. See also the use of the verse in 1617 in: Kornerup: *Resen II*, p. 154.
- 15 Cf. Peter Naeve: *Beskrivning Over de Solenniteter, med hvilcke/ efter den Stormægtigste Monarchs, Kong Friderich Den Fierdes/ Til Dannemarck og Norge [...] allernaadigste Befallning Det andet Jubilæum, siden Reformationens Begyndelse Udi Otte Dage/ fra den 31 Octobr. til den 7 Novembr. Ao. 1717. inclusive, ere bleven celebreret*. Copenhagen 1717, p. 7. This account was also published in: Cyprian (ed.): *Hilaria Evangelica*, book 1, pp. 2–22.

As for the program of events, the large committee proposed that the jubilee be announced from all the pulpits in the kingdoms on the Sunday before. The church bells were to toll on October 30 from six to seven in the evening, as was common for major feasts of the church, followed by a cannon salute. In addition, musicians in the city of Copenhagen were to blow their trumpets from the city tower. Spiritual music was played every evening until the end of the jubilee.¹⁶ During the eight-day celebration, lectures were held at the university and dinners at the king's court. Interestingly, the professor of theology Hans Bartholin delivered a lecture at the university explicitly stating that he did not want to focus on the events surrounding Luther. Instead, he expounded upon the superiority of Lutheran doctrine in the battle against teachings deviating from it. Bartholin claimed that the Germans had suffered drawbacks due to Pietism, but he assured his listeners that the Danish theology had been spared of all such heterodox influences.¹⁷



Ill. 2: Commemorative medal of the Danish king (Stiftung Schloss Friedenstien Gotha, inv. no. 4.3/1953)

The trilingual account of the festivities described in detail how the king, the members of the court and the nobility of Denmark entered the castle church in Copenhagen on October 31, “the day that was such a fatal blow to the seat of the pope 200 years ago”.¹⁸ 18 of the 54 pages in Danish described the persons and their place in the procession. The Ambrosian hymn “Te deum” was sung and the court composer Bartolomeo Bernardi (ca. 1660–1732) presented a cantata in the castle church, where the libretto was taken from Apocalypse 15. In the third movement, the aria declared tri-

16 Cf. Naeve: *Beskrivning*, p. 11.

17 Cf. Bach-Nielsen: *Jubelfest*, pp. 64f.; Martin Schwarz Lausten: *Luther og Danmark i 500 år*. Copenhagen 2017, p. 115.

18 Cf. Naeve: *Beskrivning*, p. 11.

umphantly: “You have destroyed the power of the proud Babylon, and brought the pure doctrine of your Son out into clear daylight.”¹⁹

The bishop of Zealand, Christen Worm, had chosen the biblical texts for the sermons held November 5, namely Amos 9:11, Joshua 24:14 and 1 Thess 2:13. Worm also wrote the prayers for the whole week. He began the long prayer encompassing 17 pages by thanking and praising God for “freeing us out of our heathen existence, thereafter from the papacy.”²⁰ In the prayer, he underscored that the Danish church should remember this day on which “the light of the Gospel began to shine for us 200 years ago.”²¹ Pastor Hans T. Trojel had composed a jubilee hymn, pointing to the “spiritual cloud of the papacy”²² that darkened the pristine light of Christianity once brought to the North by missionaries. The Bible was put under the bench, Mary was given divine status and idolatry became widespread. Monks deceived the people, sinners had to pay for their forgiveness and souls were threatened by the notion of purgatory. However, God heard the sighs and moans of His people, and sent Luther, who “cleansed the manna from the leavened lump.” Trojel’s rhetoric made it clear that all the kings of Denmark since the Reformation had walked in the clear light of the Gospel, turning the jubilee in 1717 into a celebration of the king.²³

Festivities did not only take place in Copenhagen, but also in the Danish cities of Aalborg, Odensee, Ribe and Viborg.²⁴ The Danish congregation in London celebrated, and there are references to events in the Norwegian cities of Bergen, Trondheim, Ackerhus, and Oslo.²⁵ King Frederik IV also ordered celebrations in areas of the Holy Roman Empire under his control, including the northern parts of Pomerania and Rügen – the military epicenter of the great Nordic war at the time – and at the Universities of Greifswald and Kiel.²⁶

19 “Du hast dem stolzen Babylon/ Zersthöhret seine Macht/ Die reine Lehr von deinem Sohn/ Aus helle Licht gebracht.” Bartolomeo Bernardi: *Das Lied Mosis und des Lammes Aus Apoc. XV. Cap. In einer Cantata Fürgestellet/ Und am Andern Jubel-Fest In Jhro Königl. Mayst. zu Dännemarck/ Norwegen, etc. etc. Schloß-Capelle Präsentirt [...].* S.l. [1717].

20 Christen Worm: *Texter til een almindelig Taksigelses og Bede-dag/ som den 5 Novemb: 1717 skal holdes over alt i Danmark og Norge/ Island og Færøe; Samt Bønner.* Copenhagen 1717, fol. A4r.

21 Worm: *Texter*, fol. A4r-v.

22 Hans Thomaesøn Trojel: *Evangeliske Jubel-Sang/ For det Efter Reformationen Ved Hl. Doct. Morten Luther fuldendte Andet Hundrede Aar/ Til Musiqven til Høymesse i vor Frelsers Kircke i Kiøbenhavn Strax efter Epistelen Paa Jubel-Fæsten d. 5 Novembr. 1717.* Copenhagen 1717, stanza 2.

23 Cf. Lausten: *Luther og Danmark i 500 år*, p. 114.

24 The celebration in Aalborg is especially well documented. Cyprian (ed.): *Hilaria Evangelica*, book 1, pp. 59–65. Cf. Joachim Ott: “Luther mit dem Hammer. Die Entstehung des Bildmotivs 1717 und die Öffnung der Heiligen Pforte von St. Peter in Rom”, in: *Lutherjahrbuch* 84 (2017), pp. 278–355, esp. at pp. 297–317.

25 Steinar Supphellen: “Norsk reformasjonsfeiring. Tilbakeblikk ved inngangen til eit jubileumsår”, in: *Heimen* 53 (2016), p. 329.

26 Cf. Bach-Nielsen: *Jubelfest*, pp. 52f.; Cordes: *Hilaria evangelica academica*, pp. 87–99.