

## STAGING AND PERFORMING THE COMMEMORATION OF THE REFORMATION IN THE DANISH CHURCHES IN 1717

*Martin Wangsgaard Jürgensen (Copenhagen)*

The bicentenary commemoration of the Reformation in 1717 arrived at a time when the Danish Church was troubled by internal conflicts between what basically was a conservative wing, representing the so-called Lutheran Orthodoxy, and an unruly wing commonly identified with Pietism.<sup>1</sup> No clear-cut distinctions can of course be made as the wings mutually influenced each other and thus shared various common notions about the Church, its ceremonies and devotional practices. Nevertheless, theological tensions abounded. Equally important, the jubilee came while Denmark was deeply entangled in what is known as the Great Northern War (1700–1721). The Danish King Frederik IV (1671–1730) suffered great losses in his military engagements. The monarch, the head of the Evangelical Church in Denmark, was thus in 1717 under both internal and external pressure and in dire financial difficulties. All of these factors had repercussions on the celebrations during the autumn of that year.

To understand the Danish festivities of the bicentenary commemoration one needs to look back at those in 1617. They took place at a number of levels ranging from local celebrations headed by parish priests to those headed by King Christian IV (1577–1648) and the bishops. The crown was heavily engaged in regulating the festivities, yet it was the Church and first and foremost the bishop of the diocese of Zealand, Hans Poulsen Resen (1561–1638), who orchestrated the event. Resen drew up a magnificent ceremonial and liturgical program, reconfirming Denmark's allegiance to Luther's Reformation, the inseparable union of the crown and the Church and the strong confessional fronts against both Catholics and Reformed Protestants. More than anything, the festivities in 1617 were a celebration of the Lutheran Church, bolstering, if not constructing, a Lutheran confessional identity for the kingdom.

1 On the commemoration of the Reformation in 1717 see Carsten Bach-Nielsen: *Fra Jubelfest til Kulturår: Danske reformationsfejringene gennem 400 år*. Århus 2015, pp. 49–106; Birgitte Bøggild Johannsen: "Between Act, Image, and Memory Ritual Re-Enactments in Eighteenth-Century Denmark", in: Krista Kodres and Anu Mänd (eds.): *Images and Objects in Ritual Practices in Medieval and Early Modern Northern and Central Europe*. Newcastle upon Tyne 2013, pp. 204–224; Hans Olrik: „Reformationens 200-års jubilæum i Danmark 1717“, in: *Kirkehistoriske Samlinger* 4 (1889–1891), pp. 268–294.



*Ill. 1: City view of Copenhagen, ca. 1730 (FB Gotha, Geogr 2° 991 (43,44), table 6)*

In 1717, the inner circle of the king dusted down and adapted Bishop Resen's agenda for 1617 to the situation at hand so that the church and the university in Copenhagen (Ill. 1) basically re-performed Resen's program. Accordingly, the king declared an eight-day celebration from October 31 to November 7. The festivities took place in all parts of the kingdom with special church services, sermons, public speeches and such secular components as the firing of cannon salutes. While hardly anyone in the country could fail to take note of the special events of that week, Copenhagen and the court of Frederik IV (1671–1730) formed the heart of the celebrations. The king ordered a series of spectacular events both in the Church of Our Lady and at the castle where an enormous feast and a special service in the court chapel were held. All of this was accompanied by lectures and debates at the university in addition to processions through the town incorporating all of the dignitaries of the kingdom.

The festivities in 1717 were undoubtedly very lavish and full of splendor, but it is interesting to note that not much was produced, built or erected that was new besides commemorative medals and published texts spanning a wide range of genres. A number of objects originating in connection with the celebrations in 1617 were permanent. The prestigious Church of the Trinity at Kristianstad in Scania was for instance inaugurated in that year under the auspices of the monarch and high-ranking

church dignitaries. On a lesser scale, a number of pulpits and altarpieces were donated and installed in parish churches in 1617 along with a host of other smaller and larger liturgical objects. After 1617, changing trends in iconography can also be observed, including the increased prominence of images of Martin Luther (1483–1546) and Philip Melancthon (1497–1560) in the churches. In this sense, the festivities in 1717, based largely on the performance of the rituals established a hundred years earlier, were of a much more fleeting nature. This ceremonial reenactment was at least in Copenhagen a magnificent spectacle.

Written records of the celebrations in the churches, not least Ernst Salomon Cyprian's (1673–1745) *Hilaria evangelica*, reveal that the church interiors were draped in all the trappings associated today with the visual abundance of the Baroque. The Church of Our Lady in Copenhagen was decorated for instance with tapestries and brightly colored cloth undoubtedly brought in from Copenhagen Castle for the occasion. In addition, numerous candles were lit, small and large, and mirrors positioned in the churches; solemnly clad choirs performed songs and church bells were tolled for extended periods of time. Major churches throughout the kingdom were thus specially bedecked for the rituals that were to take place. While the buildings themselves were left unchanged, their interiors were temporarily transformed into lavish halls of celebration, echoing the splendors of contemporary court culture. Thus, the ceremonies did not only involve taking in sermons and lectures, but rather they were spectacles for all the senses, demonstrating the triumph of the Reformation and the things that were believed to be promised through faith.

At the end of the week, the draperies and candles were removed and the church interiors returned to their former states. It is possible that some long-term manifestations of the bicentenary anniversary have been lost to time, like the still extant Danish inscription in rhyming couplets added to a pulpit in 1736 commemorating the official Danish Reformation year of 1536:

Tvende hundred Aar I Tiiden  
Er det nu I Danmark, siden  
Wi slap ud fra Munke-Skik  
Og den Sande Lære fik.

Two hundred years of time  
It is now in Denmark, since  
We escaped out of monkish customs  
And we gained the true teachings.

It is possible that similar short texts were for instance painted prominently and permanently on church walls in 1717. However, there is no evidence for this today. Perhaps the ephemeral nature of the festivities did not inspire the same sort of memory construction as the previous or subsequent jubilees. Much seems to indicate that this is the case.

In conclusion, the sources resound with echoes of a magnificent week-long celebration which temporarily transformed the participating churches in 1717 into lavishly decorated halls. In contrast to 1617, however, the celebrations involved less ex-

Martin Wangsgaard Jürgensen

penditure and were much more fleeting, ultimately leaving little or no mark on the churches. This was in part due to the dire economic crisis of the kingdom during the war. The jubilee of 1717 was a reenactment of a past celebration, performed and staged for a brief moment in time, leaving few traces behind.