



COMMEMORATING LUTHER

BY LOIS ZWECK

The journey from the first Reformation centenary in Wittenberg in 1617, with its keynote of anti-Catholic rhetoric reflecting the tensions that a year later exploded into the devastating Thirty Years War, to the recent joint Lutheran-Catholic ecumenical prayer service in Lund, has indeed been '500 years in the making'.

I can still remember the great and solemn Union Day celebration in 1817 when in the market squares of every town in the whole of the Prussian State the union of Luther with Zwingli was depicted on huge banners showing the two shaking hands, together with the words 'This is my body' and 'This signifies my body' ... 'Now thank we all our God' was sung with the sound of trumpets and drum rolls, and almost every child received a printed tract with the picture of Luther and Zwingli, further explaining the purpose of this union. My young spirit was so delighted with this booklet that I retained it through my whole childhood as my most sacred treasure. I burned with the desire to be able to read it and therefore happily attended the Bilsko village school from my fifth year.

Seventy years later in Lobethal, Ferdinand Müller recalled the 300th anniversary celebration of the Reformation that had so impressed his four-year-old self, but had ultimately led to his emigration to South Australia. Finding no peace for his troubled soul in the 'united' State church, the young coachman was overjoyed when he was hired to take a handful of local people

on a three-day journey to a secret destination beyond Pinne, convinced that he would at last meet the mysterious Lutheran pastor rumoured to be in hiding there. With a few simple questions on the verse 'And this is the will of him that sent me, that everyone who sees the Son, and believes in him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day' (John 6, 40 RSV), Pastor Fritzsche gave Ferdinand Mueller the solace and certainty of God's grace he had been seeking for so long. From then on he shared the trials of Fritzsche and his people in Prussia and joined their emigration, and, after training at Fritzsche's little Lobethal 'college', he taught there for 46 years.

Commemorating the centenary of the Reformation – and Reformation Day itself – had begun on 31 October 1617 in various Lutheran states, but for Lutherans in the newer Prussian provinces of Posen and Silesia, 1817 represented the first opportunity to celebrate unhindered by Polish or Austrian Catholic regimes. Pastor Herzlieb recorded that in Prittag parish in Lower Silesia all bells tolled at sunset on 30 October. Early next morning the whole parish assembled on the village green, and processed into the festively decorated church singing Luther's hymn 'Our Father, Thou in heaven above' (LH 421). A second service in the afternoon was followed by the high point of the celebration next morning. After the communion service the school children assembled in a semicircle before the altar to be examined on the history of the Reformation – 'and not a question remained unanswered', and the children all received a booklet on Luther. The final sermon was based on Revelation 3:11 'Hold fast what you have, that no one may seize your crown'.

In view of the 'blessings that divine Providence had conferred upon all peoples through the Reformation of the church', King Friedrich Wilhelm III had in February given orders for the high festival to be celebrated in every 'Evangelical' congregation in the land, whether Lutheran or Reformed, stipulating every detail of the sequence of the services, including its focus on the youth of the church. Six sermon texts were prescribed for the pastor's choice, the order of service and the prayer were set down by the Ministry of the Interior. The church was to be called 'Evangelical' and its members 'Evangelical Christians'. The terms 'Protestant' and 'Lutheran' were to be avoided, as was any hint of casting aspersions on other denominations.

On 27 September the King called for the Union of Lutheran and Reformed churches, and in the Nikolaikirche in Berlin, clergy of the two denominations celebrated and communed together at the Reformation festival, while the two congregations of the Royal Chapel in Potsdam declared their union. Friedrich Wilhelm III then travelled to Wittenberg to attend the ground-breaking ceremony for the new Luther monument and the festive Reformation service in the Castle Church, the first reigning monarch to do so. Wittenberg and other significant Luther sites had been incorporated into Prussia in the new Province of Saxony, taken from the Kingdom of Saxony just two years earlier by the Congress of Vienna in the 1815 re-organisation of Europe after the Napoleonic Wars. Since the ruling house of Saxony, who had initially been such steadfast supporters of Luther, had converted to Catholicism in 1697 in order to be eligible for the Polish throne, the Prussian king's gesture was greeted with enthusiasm by his new subjects, the thoroughly Lutheran Saxons.

1830: the third centenary of the Augsburg Confession

It was a cheerful June evening; a friendly sun beamed in a cloudless sky. A gentle cooling breeze bent the blooming ears of corn and played in the shady leaves of the trees. The peals of the bells rang out solemnly and charmingly far over the village. The congregation gathered wordlessly in devout silence around the church on the graves of their fathers, beseeching the presence and the blessing of the Lord in silent prayer. Now and then one could hear a quiet conversation between friends or the joyous shouts of the children playing on the graves. At last the final peal of the bells died away.

In his farewell letter from London on the eve of his emigration in 1838, Pastor August Kavel recalled to his former Klemzig parishioners who remained at home the thoughts and feelings they had shared on the eve of the commemoration of the Augsburg Confession. The promise 'We will meet again' ran throughout the letter as a refrain, referring to the assembly of all peoples before the throne of Christ for the 'righteous judgement of our holy and merciful God'. That thought led to a recollection of the assembly of electors and princes, cardinals and bishops before Emperor Charles V 300 years ago in Augsburg.

Vivid images were called to mind: Chancellor Brück reading out the sacred confession, Melanchthon who had drafted it with inimitable justice and mildness, and Luther, the hero of the faith, in the castle near Gotha. Our faith felt strengthened and empowered to sing 'A Mighty Fortress'. The sacred truths that three centuries earlier had shattered the kingdom of darkness and brought light and life to thousands, moved and enlivened our souls ... The impression the gravity and the goodness of God made on us that evening was so great that a prayer meeting continued until near midnight ... The silent stars are witnesses of the heavenward glances on the homeward journey, as thanks and joy and the vow to remain faithful ascended to Him who is the true and faithful witness.

Kavel's nostalgic memories of the 1830 celebration were not shared however by many of the 'Old Lutherans' who later emigrated with him; for them the 25th of June 1830 marked the beginning of persecution. Friedrich Wilhelm III was determined to use the Augustana anniversary to put an end to any resistance to the united Evangelical church he had initiated at the Reformation commemoration and the united liturgy book he had introduced over the subsequent decade. Refusal to participate in a joint communion service on that day was not to be tolerated. Professor Scheibel, the theological leader of the resistance to the Union, was dismissed from his Breslau University post and his pastorate of the St Elisabeth congregation when he refused to conduct a joint service for the occasion using the king's liturgy book.

While Kavel remained in the State church until early 1835, clusters of families in the Züllichau district had independently rejected the Union liturgy and begun attending private devotions instead of congregational worship long before 1830 – with impunity – and others had broken their ties with the church on that occasion. The authorities in the Züllichau region were particularly zealous

in imposing fines, confiscations and imprisonment for attending the now illegal 'extra-ecclesial' devotions and for truancy when parents refused to send their children to the church-run schools. Paradoxically, the event which avowed allegiance to the Lutheran Confessions but was intended to seal the Union, ultimately triggered the – numerically small but politically significant – separation leading to the transplanting of the Lutheran Church to Australia.

1880: 300th anniversary of the Book of Concord

Fifty years later the younger generation of the transplanted church were ready to celebrate the Confessions their fathers had held 'in their hands, in their memories and their hearts' with festive services commemorating the Book of Concord, the foundation document of the churches they had established – as it is of the LCA today. The 'Concordia', which had in turn been promulgated in 1580 on the jubilee of the Augsburg Confession, included besides the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small and Large Catechisms a range of statements on doctrinal questions as well as the Formula of Concord, drafted to settle issues that had arisen within the greatly expanded and diverse Lutheran movement in the 50-year interim.

The three Immanuel Synod pastors who were children of the Old Lutherans – Auricht, Rechner and Heinze – were joined by their colleagues from more or less confessional backgrounds (Gossner, Basel and Neuendettelsau mission seminaries) in a celebration at Strait Gate Light Pass, following services at four Barossa centres on the eve of the festival fittingly combined with annual Bible festival. The six festive addresses followed the theme of the Church built on its rock, the foundation 'You are the Christ' (Matt 16, 16), the cornerstone professed in the ancient creeds (Apostles, Nicene and Athanasian), the Augsburg Confession 'rooted like a tree in the Bible', and the Book of Concord. The service concluded with the exhortation to be 'living stones' built up into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2) (*Kirchen-und Missions Zeitung* 1880 p89, 97-99). The collection of £7 was dedicated to Neuendettelsau Seminary.

The ELSA pastorate – four from the Prussian Old Lutheran flock, with a contingent of Hermannsburg graduates – opted for individual services in each parish and for collections in support of the Hahndorf College for the training of teachers, 'since for Lutherans church and school have always belonged together'. The famous passage from Romans 3 was chosen as the keynote: 'For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus'.

In Dutton on the edge of the Barossa Valley, Pastor Ernst Appelt began the richly musical service with a reading of the first 15 articles of the Augsburg Confession, with the congregation standing, and preached on 'the eternal consolation, the abiding and certain hope the Christian finds in the knowledge of God's grace' (*Kirchenbote* 1880 p 152-4). Forty-five years earlier, the discovery of the Book of Concord in the home of Christian friends had started him on the journey by way of the Old Lutheran movement to missionary

training and service in India and then on to ministry in Australia (*Lebenslauf* 1853, LA, Appelt File).

For his young colleague at Rosenthal, Pastor Philipp Oster, the Book of Concord also had strong personal resonance. Fifty years earlier, when the Augsburg Confession was being celebrated in his native Alsace, his father – also Pastor Philipp Oster – had written a booklet outlining article by article the differences in teaching between the Confession and the liberal modern pastors of his day (Lutheran Archives Oster File). Pastor Oster senior resigned from his post as missionary to the Jews for the London Mission Society rather than subscribe to the Thirty Nine Articles of the Anglican confessions, but his vigorous confessional stance ruined any prospect of a post in the French Church of the Augsburg Confession. He accepted a call to Posen in Prussia, and in 1847 died en route to South Australia with his congregation. His son Philipp graduated from Fritzsche's Lobethal College in 1855 and served his entire pastorate at Rosenthal.

There the preparations for the anniversary service of the Book of Concord were typical of the effort devoted to festive services:

The young women of the congregation decorated the interior of our St Martin's Church – the altar and pulpit, windows and walls – lavishly with flowers and ribbons, wreaths and greenery, making it a more charming sight than ever before. At the four corners of the church and at the door the young men had placed tall young pine trees. The teacher, whose wife had also contributed valiantly to the decoration of the interior, painted the inscription CONCORDIA and the dates 1580-1880 in large letters on a long panel which was attached above the first pair of pines ...

After the opening hymn and the antiphon, the collect and the reading of Psalm 100, the assembled congregation sang Luther's hymn of spiritual battle and triumph, *A mighty fortress*.

Then the local pastor stepped before the altar holding an old folio bound in pigskin, with Luther's portrait on the front cover and a Latin inscription *Noscitus ex scriptis meis lux huius forma Lutheri* ('Here in these writings one encounters Luther'), surrounded by illustrations from Bible history representing the birth of Christ, his baptism in the Jordan, his crucifixion and his resurrection. This book was the birthday child whose birth was being celebrated, that is, a rare example of the original edition of the Book of Concord which was produced in 1580 in Dresden and on the 24th of June the same year signed by 50 princes and 35 German cities.

After an introduction with Psalm 111 our pastor read out the text of Romans 3, 22-28, because this text is the bulwark and pillar of the whole blessed Reformation. He greeted those present with emotion, and described the celebration as a jubilee and its purpose as praise and thanks towards our almighty God and heavenly Father, who had done such great deeds for our fathers and had passed down to us too the jewel of pure saving doctrine (*Kirchenbote* 1880 p164f).

That original Book of Concord now forms part of the treasured Rare Book collection of the Löhe Library at Australian Lutheran College.

By contrast with the extensive coverage in the *Kirchenbote* (Church Messenger, ELSA) and the *Kirchen-und Missions Zeitung* (Immanuel Synod), Pastor Herlitz's *Australische Christenbote* (Christian Messenger) for the Victorian / General Synod in the eastern states contented itself with one curt sentence on its commemoration at the Sunday service following the anniversary day – in the context of its 'Colonial' news round-up, which devoted half a column to the capture of the Kelly gang. In traditional Lutheran usage, relegating any festival day to the following Sunday was virtually tantamount to not celebrating it at all: General Synod's pastors were in the main drawn from the Basel Mission Institute which had a deliberately non-confessional policy.

By contrast again, the same event was celebrated in St Louis, Missouri USA, with a popular festival at the fairground where a crowd of 8000 heard two addresses (not sermons) on the significance of the day, following a two-hour long procession of 576 vehicles and 1500 pedestrians through streets decorated with American flags, garlands of flowers and banners with Bible verses. Each congregation with its banners was preceded by its band, the children were transported in 76 open carts, and the highlight was a cavalcade of 300 coaches each bearing four young women dressed in white with blue ribbons and sashes, and myrtle blossoms in their hair. "A more charming sight has never been seen in the history of St Louis" (*Australische Zeitung* Adelaide 21.9.1880 p10).



A 400th anniversary souvenir cloth showing the Luther monument in Worms (Lutheran Archives / Kevin Hamdorf)

1883: 400th anniversary of Luther's birth

Clearly, by the time Luther's 400th birthday had arrived, jubilee celebrations had extended far beyond the province of theologians and churches to the general populace. And by contrast to the emphasis three years earlier on the teachings of Luther as illuminations of biblical truths, a birthday celebration allowed each organisation to highlight the aspect it found most appealing or significant in Luther's life.

In the now-united Germany, Kaiser Wilhelm I in his capacity as King of Prussia called on the 'whole of Evangelical Christendom' throughout his enlarged Prussian lands – just as his father Friedrich Wilhelm III had done in 1817 – to commemorate the anniversary of Luther's birth 'with thanks to God for the blessings He had bestowed on our people in the Reformation'. The sequence of events to be conducted by all churches and schools was much the same as his father had prescribed, but made allowance for local circumstances and custom (church bells or brass band for example). On 10 November a public school assembly in the morning and preparatory services afternoon and evening; the main service on 11 Sunday with the liturgy and thanksgiving prayer left to the relevant provincial church authorities apart from 'Ein feste Burg' as the main hymn. The prayer of thanksgiving was 'not to glorify a man but God': 'May the prayers in which I will be united with all members of my Evangelical Church redound to the abiding blessing of our beloved Evangelical Church', the king concluded (*Christenbote* 1883 p119).

The highlight for Australian Protestants was undoubtedly the 'Luther Demonstration' in the Exhibition Building in Sydney where an audience of 4000 – including a great array of parliamentary and civic dignitaries – heard addresses on Luther's life work and influence from a range of Protestant clergy, interspersed with hymns and musical interludes by the Artillery Band. The first address on 'The Reformation and Liberty' set the tone which remained staunchly anti-papal, attributing virtually all the advances of the Protestant nations of the world over the past 400 years to the movement that was sparked by Luther (*Australian Town and Country Journal*, 17.11. 1883 p17). For one participant the event proved that 'Protestantism is represented in Sydney by refined culture, genuine eloquence, and religious earnestness', but also reiterated 'that it is at once the duty and the right of every man to listen for himself to the voice of God, and to appeal for himself to the infinite mercy which, in the death of Christ, atoned for the sins of mankind' (letter to the *Protestant Standard* 8.12.1883).

Unless the German Consul was a Lutheran, there was not a single Lutheran in evidence, and barely a German (although 'Jesus shall reign' was sung to the tune of 'Die Wacht am Rhein'). There was a Lutheran congregation in Sydney, and their new church had been dedicated in September by Pastor Herlitz from Melbourne, but their pastor, called from Basel, was still on the high seas.

Oddfellows and Orangemen, progress associations and townships, Protestants of every denomination professed their debt to Luther in gatherings across the land. In Gawler, South Australia, each church conducted its

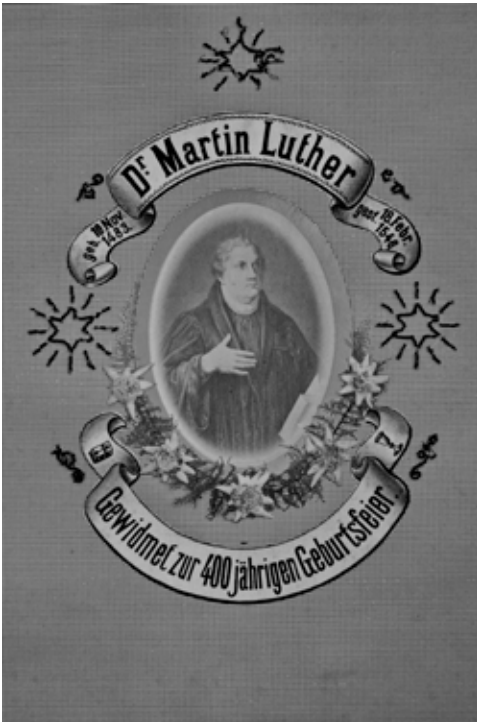
individual commemorative service in the morning, but gathered a thousand Sunday school children together for historical talks, rousing songs and afternoon tea, followed by an evening of addresses for the adults. At the Adelaide German Club, Friedrich Basedow MP presided over chorales by the combined Liedertafel and Male Choir, hymn-singing with organ and brass accompaniment, and an address by Dr Muecke on Luther's life and times (*Adelaide Observer* 17.11.1883 p33).

Throughout the year Pastor Herlitz's *Australische Christenbote* kept Australian Lutherans informed of the celebrations planned by German cities or state churches, and of the new publications that customarily accompany such milestones. And he was the one Lutheran representative on the panel of clergy who addressed a 2000-strong joint Protestant gathering in Melbourne. His address on Luther's significance for the German people (*Christenbote* 1883 p145f) asserted that Luther's appeal to the individual conscience had 'implanted in the souls of the German people the nucleus for the reform of church, state, society, scholarship and schooling': 'a new age began with him'. But the crux of the thanks to God expressed by the celebration was not such secular blessings but 'the truth of the Gospel as Luther saw it and brought

to light once more, as no one else had done since the days of St Paul: Christ alone our salvation and consolation in life and in death, through grace alone' (*Christenbote* p129ff).

Herlitz's congregation celebrated the occasion with festivities (and a Luther portrait) for the children, and a tea meeting at a richly decked table followed by addresses and hymn-singing for the adults. A similar event conducted by Pastor Leyboldt's congregation in Sandhurst (Bendigo) culminated in a dance, which naturally sparked protest in the Lutheran press.

Adelaide's Bethlehem congregation was not averse to festivities in its commemoration which was preceded by a series of lectures by Pastor Homann on 'Luther's Life' on every



1883: A handmade souvenir of the 400th anniversary of Luther's birth (Lutheran Archives / Kevin Hamdorf)

Wednesday over seven weeks. Then 300-400 members converged by train, wagon or buggy on Blackwood for a picnic to enjoy together, in each other's company, in God's beautiful nature, the great event of the Reformation'. In spite of a thunderstorm it 'went off splendidly'.

First, a rich repast was enjoyed within the sheltering walls of the Blackwood Hotel; then, the rain having ceased, sports and games outside in the balmy fresh air were freely indulged in. The Church choir sang some lovely German hymns; ... and Pastor Homann related three pleasing tales of Luther's private family life. After another repast the wagons were loaded again ... For the Saturday evening service the Church had been nicely decorated by some active young ladies: the pulpit and altar were bordered by rich flower-wreaths; and near the altar stood several rows of beautiful ferns and other plants generously lent by Dr. Schomburgk. Pastor Homann preached on Psalms 102, 13-18: Truly the past times proved that the Lord's blessing had been visibly with them, but it was their duty to make the very best use of these blessings ... Luther was the founder of the German national school, and they should use their utmost endeavours to keep up a German-English school in which God's Word would form the foundation of all knowledge, but which was also efficient to teach all those worldly sciences which were required for life in the present day ...

At the solemn service on Sunday the church choir rendered an excellent anthem and Pastor Homann took the Psalm 103:2 text, 'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits', as the basis of an impressive sermon on the blessings of the Reformation (*Adelaide Observer* 17.11.1883 p33).

1917: 400th anniversary of the Reformation

The enormous worldwide resonance of the birthday celebrations prompted ambitious plans for the fourth centenary of the Reformation several decades later. In Germany, planning began already in early 1914 for an event which would for the first time involve Protestants from the USA, Canada and Australia as well as other European countries. Well before then, synods and pastoral conferences in Australia had begun looking forward to special celebrations, only to be thwarted by the outbreak of war in August 1914. As time wore on and peace was nowhere in sight, it became clear that the war with its constraints, grief and hostility would limit their commemoration to within their own church walls. Just as in Germany, energies were channelled instead into publication, with church papers presenting regular devotional readings or other texts from Luther – sometimes simply one pithy sentence – which readers were urged to ponder slowly and thoughtfully. A Luther booklet published by Auricht's Tanunda printery reflected the downcast but determined mood in its introduction:

The celebration of the 4th centenary of the Reformation finds the world visited by the judgements of God that speak through the thunder and lightning of war to all the nations of the earth, shaking their very foundations ... "that those things which cannot be shaken may remain". And verily, the City of God ... shall not be moved, for "God is in the midst of her, God shall help her". Knowing this, the Church of God feareth no evil, and can ever

rejoice, even in times of trouble or anguish, ready to offer up the sacrifices of thanksgiving for the wonderful works of the Lord. Of these, one of the greatest is the Reformation, and one man is the hero of that work: Martin Luther.

For all South Australian synods, 1917 meant above all the united battle against the threat to one of the greatest legacies of the Reformation, Lutheran schools – a battle which was lost on the 1st of July, only to be followed by the nationwide move to forbid all German-language publications.

The secular press continued to report briefly on 'grandiose' anniversary plans in Germany, and then of the cancellation of celebrations – but the name Wittenberg now evoked a notorious prisoner-of-war camp where British, French and Russian captives had been left to die of typhus. But Australian Protestants were not deterred by the war from commemorating Luther's protest against papal indulgences as the beginning of the Reformation. In Tasmania it was above all the Baptists who recalled 'Luther's battle ... for the authority of the Bible against the solecisms of the Pope; for liberty against bondage of mind, soul, and conscience; for spirituality against worldliness: and for the gospel of the grace of God against the enslaving doctrine of human merit and indulgences' (*Daily Telegraph*, Launceston 29.10.1917 p2).

For the Queensland Protestant League and a capacity crowd at the Brisbane Exhibition Building, the circumstances of the war added an anti-Irish tinge to the accustomed 'anti-Popery' tone. But while the 1883 celebration in Sydney had voiced gratitude and solidarity towards the 'noble German people',

Luther was now honoured by one speaker as 'an opponent of militarism, and as the apostle of light and peace against enslavement and brutal aggression', spiritual and moral truths that Germany had turned its back on (*Darling Downs Gazette* 2.11.1917). In its vociferous engagement against such Protestant attacks, the Catholic press did not hesitate to identify Protestantism or even the British monarchy with the enemy, Germany and the Germans.

When the term 'Lutheran' occurs in the general press, it may be associated with a farewell or a memorial service for an AIF volunteer, or donations to the Red



1938: A plaster cast of the Luther Rose adorns the doorways of Christ Church in Murray Bridge, SA. This cast hung in the study of Pastor John Doehler. (Lutheran Archives / Kevin Hamdorf)

Cross or War Relief Fund by a church or school or women's guild, while in South Australia it refers above all to the issue of school closures and the ensuing question of disenfranchisement of all Germans. Only rarely is it connected with the significant Lutheran anniversary. Pastor F O Theile and his Bethania, Queensland, congregation gathered for a centenary service on Reformation Day, and Pastor Fischer announced a special festive service to be held at St George's Lutheran Church Hall, Murtoa, on the subject 'Why should Christendom gratefully commemorate the [four hundredth] anniversary of Luther's Reformation? Because of its glorious fruits—the Christian Bible and England's freedom from the thralldom of Rome' ... 'Strangers are cordially invited' (*Dunmunkle Standard* 26.10.1917 p2).

The little town of Hochkirch (Tarrington) in Victoria's Western District was fortunate in having a German press on hand, so a printed order of service survives to record the thanksgiving liturgy. It was by then customary for such all-day festival services to comprise a German service in the morning and an English afternoon service, so on this occasion too, the morning sermon in German was followed by an English sermon after lunch. The congregation sang *Ein feste Burg* in the morning and repeated it as *A mighty fortress* in the afternoon; the choir sang 'Rejoice in the Lord' but all other hymns and the historical address on the Reformation were in German. Just two months later, all publication in German was prohibited, and that ban remained in place well beyond the end of the war.

Between the wars

The proliferation of Luther anniversaries that began in the 19th century gathered momentum after the disappointment of 1917, as if in compensation. One German city after another celebrated its part in Luther's life, from Erfurt University in 1901 to 'Here I stand' in Worms in 1921, from the burning of the Papal Bull to the translation of the New Testament at the Wartburg, and so on. And in 1929 in Australia, a decade after the war, the 400th anniversary of the publication of Luther's Small Catechism appears in the rural and urban press as the highlight of Lutheran pastoral conferences and conventions, Luther League meetings and Sunday school rallies, confirmation services and church dedications from Maryborough to Port Lincoln. The celebration of the Catechism was especially welcome in view of the strong post-war emphasis on children and youth, and in particular the focus on the Sunday school to compensate for the lost schools. A few Lutheran schools had re-opened, but most Lutheran children were now attending state schools.

Professor Henry Hamann (Concordia Seminary) took advantage of the occasion to mount a vigorous defence of the Catechism concept, often maligned by 'liberal-minded progressive people in the Protestant denominations' as 'stiff and stilted, formal and unnatural, lifeless and mechanical – a sort of mental and spiritual straitjacket'.

Jesus Christ in the New Testament is presented as the great Teacher
... Our catechism anniversary shows that we are still a teaching church.

Pastors, teachers, laymen are convinced that the teaching of spiritual truth is the greatest function of the church; that no other activity can take the place of thorough, conscientious, painstaking, continued teaching of the facts of the redemption ...The church has been nourished spiritually by Divine, Biblical truth as expressed and arranged in Luther's Small Catechism ... His memory and his work let us honour chiefly by garnering the fruits of his labours; and for him and his work let our heartfelt thanks rise to God (*Australian Lutheran* 17.5.1929 p109-111).

In 1934 – at a time of transition from German to English, from Luther's German Bible to the English King James Version – the Redeemer congregation in Toowoomba devoted an entire day to the 400th anniversary of Luther's complete translation of the Bible into German: 'The Bible as the only foundation of the Christian faith, the only source of true comfort' in the morning sermon; 'Our English Bible, God's gift to us through His Reformation' and 'The open Bible' in the afternoon; and 'Inspired Scriptures' in the evening. Both the morning and evening services were broadcast (*Maryborough Chronicle* 8.11.1934 p2).

The Luther League – the national youth organisation established in 1926 – produced a badge for the occasion, showing an open Bible encircled by the dates 1534-1934 and the inscription 'Search the Scriptures'. In Adelaide 1200 Lutherans gathered in the town hall for a service surely intended to attract the 'English' community. An extensive article by Professor Hamann on Luther's authoritative translation and its influence on the English Bible appeared in the *Advertiser* several days prior to the service, and the service order was accompanied by quotes on the Bible drawn from English sources. A separate leaflet outlined the origin and extent of the Lutheran Church, emphasising that it was not a German church but proclaimed the gospel in many languages around the world (*Advertiser* Adelaide 27.4.1934 p25).

But by this time the next looming conflict was already casting its shadow. In Germany the 450th anniversary of Luther's birth on 10 November coincided with new parliamentary elections – following Hitler's elimination of all parties but his own – and a plebiscite on Germany leaving the League of Nations because of the limits it imposed on the growth of the armed forces. The Australian press were already commenting on the 'Nazi Lutherans': clergy who proposed excising the entire Old Testament and all 'obviously superstitious' passages of the New from their new Bible. *Germania*, a Catholic paper, expressed grave concern at 'this new semi-religious, semi-political development which it called a 'Third Faith'. 'The belief in Christ which both Catholics and Protestants have in common is', it declares, 'at stake' (*Advocate* Melbourne 11.1.1934, p8).

At the same time, on the occasion of the 450th anniversary, 300 members of the Pastors' Emergency League expressed their opposition to the 'Nazification' of the Lutheran Church, 'declaring that heathenism had obtruded into the German Church', and 'reaffirmed their belief in the entire Bible as the sole guide of faith' (*Newcastle Sun* 20.11.1933 p1).

In the 12 years that followed, German Protestant circles produced both perpetrators of Nazi crimes and heroes of the resistance, and the legacy of guilt borne by the German people inevitably also raised questions of the possible culpability of Luther himself, through his writings and through his profound influence on the nation over four centuries.

Towards 500

Just one year after the Lutheran Church of Australia celebrated its union on Reformation Day 1966, congregations throughout the land commemorated the 450th anniversary of the Reformation according to a printed service order supplied by the national office. At Brisbane City Hall the sermon was preached by Dr S P Hebart, the principal of the new united Luther Seminary, the church's thank-offering for its union. The new united church paper *The Lutheran* was filled with Luther, most notably 15 articles by the recently retired Dr Henry Hamann on the Augsburg Confession – the foundation confession of the LCA – and 12 by Luther Seminary's Professor P D Pahl on Luther's life.

Post-war prosperity was soon followed by opportunities for closer contact with fellow Lutherans across the globe. For the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession and the 400th of the Book of Concord in 1980, Luther experts from the USA, Japan and Germany were invited to address conferences in Adelaide and Brisbane. Medallions and stamps had long been a highly valued feature of anniversaries around the world, and to coincide with the conference the LCA secured permission for a pictorial postmark depicting Luther and Melancthon, to be combined with a special envelope with an image of Klemzig, South Australia, representing the Lutheran presence in Australia (*The Lutheran* p253).

Whereas the 1917 war-time donations had been put toward debt mitigation (ELSA) and the establishment of a fund for retired pastors and widows, the UELCA jubilee collections in 1933 had been contributed to the Martin Luther Federation in Germany for the support of the new Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Ukrainian people, and in 1980 the thanksgiving offering was devoted to the proposed translation and publication of the Book of Concord in Hindi for the Lutheran churches of India (*The Lutheran* p338-9).

As guests of the German Church, Pastors E Wiebusch and R Mayer attended the celebrations in Augsburg in June and were overwhelmed by the program of services, conference, concerts and exhibitions. Pope John Paul II conveyed a conciliatory message:

There are basic elements of faith on which the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran understanding of faith agree. It is our gratifying experience today that although the building of the bridge was not accomplished at the time [of the Reformation], important pillars of the bridge have withstood the torrents of time. The dialogue with Lutherans, extending over years, has led us to discover anew the breadth and solidity of our common grounding in the Christian faith (*The Lutheran* 1980 p339).

Cardinal Willebrands of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity and Cardinal Ratzinger from Munich (now Pope emeritus Benedict XVI) were present in Augsburg and commented on the 'profound basic consensus' between the two churches.

A few months later Pope John Paul II became the first pope ever to attend Lutheran worship, preaching at an Advent service in Rome.

The imminent 'Luther 500' is of course not the first – and probably not the last – time that momentous milestone has been evoked: 1983 witnessed unprecedented celebrations of the 500th anniversary of Luther's birth both in Australia and in Germany. Since the post-war division of Germany and the whole of Europe, the Luther heartland lay behind the 'Iron Curtain', under the rule of an atheist and undemocratic regime. It is hardly surprising that the Lutherans of East Germany were keen to exploit the opportunity for an expression of solidarity from the Lutheran world beyond the Wall, but for the socialist government to acknowledge the occasion meant revoking its previous repudiation of Luther as a friend of the ruling class and traitor to his people.

The religious reformer was re-badged as a revolutionary hero and above all as the creator – through his Bible translation – of the German language, and prompted by the prospect of political credibility and tourist dollars, the regime not only permitted and supported the church's plans but committed impressive sums to the reconstruction and renovation of Luther sites. The West German cities of Augsburg, Coburg, Nürnberg and Worms mounted a vigorous campaign, but for the team of Australian pastors invited to an international seminar in Neuendettelsau, the highlight was a tour through the homeland of the Reformer. Amazing original documents, first editions, artefacts and paintings told the story of Luther's life in a state-sponsored

exhibition in Berlin, but even more impressive was the enthusiasm of the 15,000 Lutherans – many of them young people – at the *Kirchentag* in Wittenberg. And the faith and devotion of the guides at the church-owned Luther sites, such as the Augustinian Monastery at Erfurt and Luther's home in Eisleben was inspiring (*The Lutheran* 1983 p416, 1984 p46f).



A porcelain souvenir plaque donated to Lutheran Archives by Gilda Luther, a descendant of Martin Luther (Lutheran Archives / Kevin Hamdorf)

In Australia several jubilee celebrations were telecast, and in

Melbourne the church borrowed the Anglican cathedral for a thanksgiving service where an unprecedented array of non-Lutheran clergy too heard Pastor Kleinig's sermon based on Hebrews 13:7-8. 'One could not have heard the address without being moved to give thanks for the free gift of salvation that was Luther's and that is ours today' (*The Lutheran* 1983 p417).

The journey from the first Reformation centenary in Wittenberg in 1617, with its keynote of anti-Catholic rhetoric reflecting the tensions that a year later exploded into the devastating Thirty Years War, to the recent joint Lutheran–Catholic ecumenical prayer service in Lund has in fact been '500 years in the making'. In the words of Dr Martin Junge, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation:

In a world wounded by fragmentation and conflict, Catholics and Lutherans will come together to leave conflict behind and to embrace their common future, which God has prepared for us. In a world often so confused about faith, Catholics and Lutherans will [in jointly commemorating the Reformation] be able to convey some of the depth and beauty of faith deeply rooted in Christ.