

Finland and the 450th Jubilee of Reformation in 1967

by Mikko Ketola

“Nineteen sixty-seven was the watershed year, the year the seams gave way. There was that feeling that trouble was coming, which it did later, with all the riots, street fighting and all of that. There was a tension in the air. It’s like negative and positive ions before a storm, you get that breathlessness that something’s got to break. In fact, all it did was crack.”¹ –
Keith Richards, guitarist of the Rolling Stones.

“The message of the Reformation came through in many ways via the mass media even if the overall impression of the festivities remained somewhat bland.”² –
Martti Parvio, Professor of Practical Theology in Helsinki.

Introduction

Looking back, 1967 seems to have been a year that separated two distinct periods in western cultural and political history. In 1967, The Beatles (with some help from Mick Jagger & co.) sang “All You Need is Love” and The Rolling Stones sang “We Love You”. The next year was different: The Rolling Stones sang about “Sympathy for the Devil” and “Street Fighting Man” and The Beatles sang about “Revolution”. 1967 was a year of hippies and the Summer of Love in San Francisco, although there was also the Six-Day War between Israel and the neighboring Arab states; 1968 was a year of violent street demonstrations in Berlin and Paris, Soviet occupation troops in Prague and political assassinations in the United States. The Vietnam war had been raging since 1965.³

The British church historian Hugh McLeod made a similar observation to that of Keith Richards about the special significance of 1967 as a turning-point in western religious life. He admits that the timetable of change varied from country to country but if he was to choose one year as marking the moment of radical change it would be 1967. It is a boundary marker between the inklings of a coming turbulence in the early and mid-1960s and the turbulence itself in the last couple of years of the decade.⁴

As elsewhere in the western world, discussion about social and political issues was becoming more heated in Finland year by year. A number of factors contributed to this development. The level of political and social consciousness and knowledge was rising

1 Keith Richards: *Life*, London 2015, p. 218.

2 Martti Parvio: *Kirkon elämää* [Church Life], in: Matti Paarma (ed.): *Kirkon kalenteri 1969* [The Church Calender 1969], Helsinki 1968, p. 36.

3 Cf. Norbert Frei: *1968. Jugendrevolte und globaler Protest*, München 2008, provides a good overview of the developments.

4 Cf. Hugh McLeod: *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, Oxford 2010, pp. 258 f.

constantly. International communication was increasing rapidly. The number of organizations and groups whose main aim was to actively promote their members' views on social and political issues was on the rise. Cultural radicalism easily found supporters among young people, combining strong intellectualism, leftist political views, pop culture, liberal views on sexual morality and attacks on institutions that upheld traditional values – such as the churches. Political causes such as opposition to the Vietnam War or the South African apartheid system found many supporters, especially among students. In Finland, the most vociferous representative of this sort of radicalism was the student magazine “Ylioppilaslehti”, published in Helsinki.⁵

Professor Juha Seppo, who has written a biography of the Finnish Archbishop Martti Simojoki, states that behind the restlessness of young Christians in the late 1960s was their deepening consciousness of the gap in the standard of living between the west and the developing countries and the desire to stand with the oppressed against the oppressors. They became disappointed with their churches when they were unable to reform their structures in line with impatient revolutionary expectations and demands.⁶

My hypothesis is that the rapid change of the late 1960s, which manifested itself in all spheres of life, be it political, cultural or religious, also affected the way the Reformation was celebrated in Finland. Finland at that time was probably one of the most Lutheran countries in the world, but a new ecumenical atmosphere was developing there as well, and it was inevitable that this atmosphere as well as the other aforementioned developments would make their mark on the Reformation festivities.

The Status of the Lutheran Church in the 1960s

Finland in 1967 was a country with a population of 4.6 million, two thirds of whom earned their livelihood in agriculture, forestry and industry. A huge majority (93%) of Finns were Lutherans. The Orthodox Church of Finland was the second largest denomination with 68,000 members (1.3% of the population). These two churches held the position of an established church with certain advantages, such as the right to collect the church tax in conjunction with governmental income tax. The Catholic Church in Finland had slightly less than 3,000 members. The percentage of religiously non-affiliated Finns was a little below 5%. Regarding Lutherans, in addition to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) there was also the very small Confessional Lutheran Church of Finland, which had only about 400 members.

The ELCF had eight dioceses with eight male bishops. The ordination of women had been on the agenda of the Church Synod since the late 1950s but progress was slow. It was not until 1988 that the first female pastors were ordained. Martti Simojoki had been archbishop since 1964. Before becoming archbishop, with the seat in Turku/Åbo, he had been Bishop of Helsinki. Simojoki enjoyed the wider public's trust to the degree that, while

5 Jouko Sihvo, Heikki Mäkeläinen et.al.: Suomen evankelis-luterilainen kirkko vuosina 1967–1971 [The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland in 1967–1971], Pieksämäki 1973, pp. 18 f.

6 Cf. Juha Seppo: Arkkipiispan aika [Archbishop's Time]. Martti Simojoki II, Helsinki 2015, p. 164.

Bishop of Helsinki, he had been asked by influential circles in Finnish politics to stand as a rival candidate in the 1962 presidential elections to the incumbent President Urho Kekkonen (president since 1956). Simojoki refused the candidacy, however, and Kekkonen easily won the election.

In the late 1960s, the status of the Lutheran Church in Finnish society was still quite strong and influential. President Urho Kekkonen (1900–1986), who wielded almost absolute power in Finnish politics, was a member of the Church. At the beginning of 1967 he was the main speaker and guest of honor at the biennial church event *Kirkkopäivät* (resembles the German “Kirchentag”) in Vaasa on the west coast of Finland. He made use of the occasion to speak on a sensitive foreign political subject, the acknowledgement of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), something which Finland had not yet done. The speech was titled “Finland’s road in a world of tensions”. Ville Jalovaara, who has analysed Kekkonen’s relations to the Lutheran Church, thinks it possible that Kekkonen considered a church event a natural place to touch on Finland’s East German policy; after all, it was a Reformation jubilee year and the Reformation had started in Wittenberg which now belonged to the GDR.⁷

Although the future still looked quite bright for the church, there were signs that the respect it had so far commanded in Finnish society was slowly starting to fray at the edges. In 1964, the author Hannu Salama published the novel “*Juhannustanssit*” (Midsummer Dance), which brought him a suspended prison sentence for blasphemy the following year. The reason was that Archbishop Martti Simojoki drew the public’s attention to a passage in the book where one of the main characters of the novel makes a sermon-like speech in which he speaks insultingly about the person of Christ and his sexuality as well as about the Bible. This was enough for a group of conservative politicians to initiate the trial which led to Salama’s sentence. President Urho Kekkonen commuted Salama’s sentence in 1968. The whole process received a huge amount of publicity and Archbishop Simojoki was widely criticized for his perceived narrow-mindedness.⁸ This so-called Salama War (literally “Blitzkrieg” in German) gave a serious jolt to the societal prestige of the Lutheran Church.⁹

The Finnish Revivalist Movements

Finnish Lutheran religiosity and church life in the 1960s was – and still is – strongly colored by the existence of several revivalist movements, and for this reason it is helpful to explain their characteristics and nature in a few paragraphs. They all blossomed within rather than outside of the church and went on to have a profound impact on both religious life and society in Finland. Most of them have their historical roots in the period of national

7 Cf. Ville Jalovaara: *Kirkko, Kekkonen ja politiikka 1962–1982* [The Church, Kekkonen and Politics 1962–1982], Helsinki 2011, p. 75.

8 Cf. A.M. van der Hoeven: Hannu Salama, in: Derek Jones (ed.): *Censorship. A World Encyclopedia*, London et.al. 2001, p. 2130.

9 Cf. Aila Lauha: Religion, the Church and the 1960s in Finland, in: *Kyrkohistorisk Årskrift* (2011), p. 165.

awakening in the 19th century or even earlier and were, from their inception on, influenced to differing degrees by German pietism.

The first of these movements is the Awakened (*Heränneet*) movement whose most distinguished leader was the peasant Paavo Ruotsalainen (1777–1852), a man who could read but not write. The Awakened stressed that man must wait for God to show his mercy and laid great emphasis on spiritual experience. The Evangelicals (*Evankeliset*), who broke away from the Awakened in the 1840s, developed into a kind of rival movement. Their early leader was Pastor F.G. Hedberg (1811–1893). They criticized the Awakened for placing too much emphasis on the importance of Law, whereas they themselves taught the certitude of faith on the basis of baptism and the redemption of Christ. Doctrine and creed were more important to them than spiritual experience. The Finnish Evangelical movement should not be confused with Anglo-Saxon Evangelicals with whom they have very little in common.

Laestadianism (*Lestadiolaisuus*) is a very powerful and exclusive movement which even in the 1960s was still mostly limited to the northern half of Finland. Its headquarters are in the city of Oulu. Laestadianism originated in the northern parts of Norway, Sweden and Finland in the middle of the 19th century thanks to the activity of the Lutheran Pastor Lars Levi Laestadius (1800–1861). Today, conservative Laestadianism, the main branch, has around 100,000 adherents in Finland, and its mass meetings bring as many as 70,000 people together each summer. In the course of its history Laestadianism has seen several divisions. At the beginning of the 20th century, the movement divided into three branches, Conservative Laestadianism remaining the largest. Even after this major schism, other groups also left or were forced to leave, the last of them at the beginning of the 1960s. The congregational doctrine has always been at the core of these schisms. Who can be considered a true believer and member of the Kingdom of God?

The Supplicationist (*Rukoilevaisuus*) movement is geographically the most limited and also the smallest of the Finnish revivalist movements. Their stronghold is a part of southwestern Finland. The distinctive features of the movement are kneel-prayer and singing hymns with very old words and music. The most important leader of the Supplicationists was the Rev. Henrik Renqvist (1789–1852), who was very active in publishing and spreading Christian booklets. He was also an early champion of the temperance movement in Finland.

The newest of the revivalist movements is The Finnish Lutheran Mission (the FLM), established in 1967, the year of the Reformation Jubilee. It should not be confused with the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission which is the largest mission organization in Finland, founded in 1859. The FLM united like-minded people from different conservative groups and movements. In Finland, these circles have been called neo-pietistic so as to stress, on the one hand, their roots in the old German pietistic tradition, and on the other hand to refer to the more recent influences of British and American Evangelicalism. The movement was influenced to a great degree by the American Evangelical movement especially with its emphasis on personal piety and evangelization. The FLM has also been called the “Fifth Revivalist Movement” to imply that it belongs to the same league as the four other, more traditional, revivalist movements.

The Finnish Lutheran Mission was to a large extent a protest movement. It protested against liberal tendencies in university theology, especially the use of the historical-critical

method in Bible studies, increasing ecumenical cooperation (they feared that the Catholic Church was plotting to subjugate all the other churches), and the general leftist radicalism of the 1960s which also manifested itself within the Lutheran Church. The movement was conservative, not only theologically but also politically and morally. For many patriotic young people who had had enough of increasingly leftist student politics, it offered an opportunity to join forces with like-minded anti-Soviet and antiliberal believers. In the Finnish case, one manifestation of this kind of ideological collusion was the organized smuggling of Bibles into the Soviet Union, which the FLM achieved through its Slavic mission subdepartment. Although not strictly illegal, it was unwelcome to both the Lutheran Church and the Finnish government because, in their view, it could endanger Finland's political relations with its powerful eastern neighbor.

The Reformation Jubilee Committee is established

The previous Reformation Jubilee in Finland in 1917 had taken place in a politically very tense situation. The First World War had caused turmoil in Europe. In Russia, the Bolsheviks were coming into power. The main Jubilee event took place on 31 October 1917, just a week before the start of the October Revolution, which eventually also led to Finnish Independence on 6 December. However, the Jubilee received lively interest and affected the populace widely.¹⁰

Since 1955, there had been two large-scale church events in Finland. In 1955, Finland had celebrated 800 years of Christianity. In 1963, the Fourth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation had taken place in Helsinki. Also, 1967 was to be not only a Reformation jubilee year but, more importantly for the whole population, the 50th anniversary of Finnish Independence. In fact, only five weeks separated All Saints Day (4 November), when the Reformation festivities were to be held, and Independence Day (6 December). As if this was not enough, November 1967 also marked the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution, and the Finnish media would be sure to report extensively on events connected with it.

The official preparations for the 1967 Jubilee started in October 1965 when Archbishop Simojoki addressed a letter to the Enlarged Bishops' Meeting. This was the highest decision-making body in the church in the periods between Synods and comprised, in addition to those who were members of the Bishops' Meeting, two lay representatives from each diocese and the members of the Ecclesiastical Board, the church authority on administrative and financial matters. The Archbishop referred to the previous Reformation Jubilee in 1917, stating that "its effects were felt not only in theology and church life but also more widely", also in Finland. He proposed that "a small committee" be appointed to prepare the 450th Jubilee of the Reformation in 1967.¹¹

10 Cf. Kauko Pirinen: Lutherin ja uskonpuhdistuksen riemujuhlat Suomessa [The Luther and Reformation Jubilees in Finland], in: Hannu Mustakallio (ed.): Suomen kirkkohistoriallisen seuran vuosikirja [Yearbook of the Finnish Society of Church History], Helsinki 1983, pp. 40 f., 46.

11 The National Archives (NA, Helsinki), The Enlarged Bishops' Meeting's Archive (EBMA), Fa 22, Simojoki to the Enlarged Bishops' Meeting, 21 October 1965.

Aarre Lauha, Bishop of Helsinki, was originally proposed as chairman, but when he refused the position because of his many other duties, Olavi Kares, Bishop of Kuopio, was appointed in his stead. Kares was at the time a leading figure in the revivalist movement of the Awakened. The other members of the organizing committee were church counsellor Mauno Saloheimo, Dr. Mikko Juva (Professor of Church History) and Dean Yngve Bäck.¹²

The Reformation Jubilee Committee's archive has not been preserved (or at least it cannot be found) so we cannot follow its work very closely. Fortunately, some pieces of information pertaining to its activities can be culled from other sources, and the completed plans for the various activities during autumn 1967 are preserved in the archive of the Enlarged Bishops' Meeting.¹³

In September 1966, Bishop Olavi Kares, the chairman of the committee, wrote a letter to the other members and stressed that having the 50th anniversary of Finnish Independence the same autumn overshadowed the Reformation Jubilee. This meant that the Jubilee would have to be celebrated in a relatively modest way.¹⁴

The committee had charged Bishop Kares with formulating the central themes around which the main Jubilee event would be organized. Kares suggested that there be two separate national festivals each with a different character. The first would thematize the core message of the Reformation and its significance for the contemporary period. This could be held in Turku Cathedral. The second could thematize the cultural influences of the Reformation and be held in the Great Hall of the University of Helsinki.

For Bishop Kares, it was important to prove that the Reformation was also relevant for the present. In his view, the emphasis in the Cathedral festival should be on the idea that the Reformation really meant a return to the basics. However, he wanted to avoid looking only to the past; thus, he wanted the speakers to emphasize that reformation was the church's status quo. They should ask which contemporary questions gave the church reason to return to the basics. In this way, topical problems could be entwined with the themes of the Reformation.

Bishop Kares also recommended that Luther's "rich, multi-faceted, angular and charming" personality should not be forgotten. The Lutheran Reformation and Luther were inseparable. Kares regretted that Luther's person had recently been presented to the Finns in a very unflattering light. In saying this he was most probably referring to Erik H. Erikson's book "Young Man Luther. A Study in Psychoanalysis and History" (1958), which had been translated into Finnish just that year. Kares was certain that Luther, with all his defects and merits, would nevertheless appeal to the contemporary man and provide "really colorful material" for the development of the Jubilee events.

Kares was optimistic about the impact of the Jubilee even on the circles that otherwise took a very critical stand toward the church. The reason for his optimism was that he considered the direct and indirect cultural influences of the Reformation to be so evident that even critics of the church could not deny their significance. As examples he mentioned the impact of the Reformation on the development of the Finnish language and on popular education.

12 Cf. *Kirkon vuosikirja* [The Church Yearbook] (1965), Pieksämäki 1966, p. 48.

13 Cf. NA, EBMA, Fa 25, Kares to the Enlarged Bishops' Meeting, 20 April 1967.

14 Cf. NA, Olavi Kares's Archive, 14, Kares to the Committee preparing the 450th Jubilee of the Reformation, 5 September 1966.

Kares also wanted to see Reformation-related programmes on national television and radio. The committee was especially keen on having John Osborne's recent (1961) play "Luther" on the radio.

In its earlier meetings the committee had approved the idea of having local Reformation festivals in individual parishes around the country, perhaps above all in cathedral towns. Kares thought it would be important if even schools could take notice of the Jubilee and arrange something suitable.

Is Luther Still Enough?

That the church, or the churches, were in need of reform became quite a widespread idea in the 1960s. Some of the books which outlined these reforms became very popular. One of these was the English Bishop John A.T. Robinson's "Honest to God" (1963), which became a huge bestseller around the world. Two years later he wrote another influential book, the "New Reformation" (1965). They were both translated into Finnish in 1965, as "Rehellinen Jumalan edessä" and "Uusi uskonpuhdistus". The books found eager readers among liberal and reform-minded Finnish theologians who soon started to write their own books. The first such work was published in 1967 and was titled "Kirkko avoinna korjauksille" (The Church Open for Renovations). It was an article collection by 14 authors, only one of whom was a woman. From the reviewers the book earned both praise and scorn.¹⁵

One of the writers was Professor Mikko Juva who was also a member of the Reformation Jubilee Committee. In a letter to his friend Risto Lehtonen who was the World Student Christian Federation's North American secretary, Juva said that religious reviewers had generally criticized the book, while "worldly" reviewers had accorded positive attention to it.¹⁶

In November 1967, the women's magazine "Kotiliesi" published Juva's article titled "Is Luther Still Enough?". Juva's answer was that "for our generation or even for the Church that bears his name" Luther was not an unquestioned authority, although the main principles he had followed still stood.¹⁷ However, there was much in Luther's writings that was not acceptable today, for instance his views on the Jews and on the Pope. Juva's view was that the 450th Jubilee of Reformation was taking place at a time when it was not certain that even the Lutheran countries were very enthusiastic about their Lutheran heritage. On the other hand, a new ecumenical thinking had gained ground in all churches. It emphasized that which was common to all Christians and regarded the splits among the churches as a wrong which should be righted. In the 16th century, this division was, for historical reasons, inevitable but not right. In Juva's opinion, 20th century Lutherans should, together with the Catholic Church, examine whether it would be possible to "unite the original Gospel found by Luther with the visible unity of all Christians, which Luther never denied".¹⁸

15 Cf. Mikko Ketola: Kirkko avoinna korjauksia varten -teos ja sen vastaanotto vuonna 1967 [The Church Open for Renovations and Its Reception in 1967], in: Antti Laine, Aappo Laitinen (eds.): Yliopisto, kirkko ja yhteiskunta, Helsinki 2011, pp. 332-345.

16 Cf. NA, Mikko Juva's Archive, 8, Juva to Lehtonen, 9 April 1967.

17 Mikko Juva: Riittääkö Luther yhä? [Is Luther Still Enough?], in: Kotiliesi (1967), no. 21, pp. 20 f.

18 Ibidem.

The editorials of the religious newspapers mostly agreed that reformation should be a constant factor in the life of the church. It should be a dynamic movement the way its instigator had been a dynamic man. Honoring the memory of the Reformation did not, however, mean honoring all the old ways of thinking and doing things. Nevertheless a totally new reformation was not necessary.¹⁹

A dissonant voice in this chorus was the “Uusi Tie” (New Way) newspaper, the organ of the Fifth Revivalist Movement. It also supported the idea of a constant reformation but it wanted to make a distinction between piecemeal improvements and real reformation. “Uusi Tie” was not opposed to many kinds of improvements provided they did not disturb or abandon “the leading principles of the Reformation”. Abandoning them would invalidate Luther’s life’s work and the whole Reformation and would open the road to a merger with the Catholic Church, something which they considered a disaster for the true faith.²⁰

President Urho Kekkonen who was invited as guest of honor to the Jubilee events gave a statement to the Kotimaa newspaper, the semi-official organ of the Lutheran Church. Kekkonen seems to have read Erik H. Erikson’s book about young Luther because he said it had shaken his idea of Luther’s triumphant personality. Kekkonen was fascinated by this new image of Luther. To him, the more insecure, more human Luther just seemed to emphasize Luther’s courage in the face of the reforms he was about to set in motion. He thought that many of those who were striving for reforms could feel sympathy toward that kind of Luther. In Kekkonen’s view, reforms in the internal government of the Church were more necessary than changes in the relations between the state and the Church.²¹

Philately, Radio Programmes and Essay Writing

One element of the committee’s action plan was to request from the Finnish Post and Telecommunications Authority (FPTA) the publication of a commemorative stamp. The Jubilee Committee submitted the request to the appropriate authorities on 22 October 1966. As was the custom, the FPTA first asked the Finnish Philately Association for an opinion and then proceeded.²² The stamp, which was designed by Olavi Vepsäläinen and featured a painting of Luther by Lucas Cranach the Elder was published on 4 November 1967 in an edition of three million copies.

Finland was the only Nordic country to publish a stamp in honor of the Reformation Jubilee.²³ This may be surprising, considering the long history and strong nature of Lutheranism in Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Iceland. The fact may, of course, be explained by the stamp publishing policy of each country but there may also have been other factors in play. However, this would require a study in its own right. Of the other European countries only the Federal Republic of Germany, the GDR and Austria honored the Jubilee with a special stamp.

19 Cf. *Församlingsbladet*, 3 November 1967, editorial; *Kotimaa*, 31 October 1967, editorial; Sana, 26 October 1967, editorial.

20 *Uusi Tie*, 15 November 1967, editorial.

21 Cf. Urho Kekkonen: *Valmius avoimeen keskusteluun on kirkossamme lisääntynyt* [Readiness for Open Discussion Has Increased in Our Church], in: *Kotimaa*, 31 October 1967, p. 3.

22 Cf. NA, The Finnish Post and Telecommunications Authority’s Archive, AA 140, 158/332 1966.

23 Cf. This can be verified by inspecting the relevant Michel stamp catalogue for the year 1967.

As the Jubilee Committee had wished, YLE, the Finnish national broadcasting company, also did its part. Starting at the beginning of September 1967 it broadcast a 15-minute Reformation-related talk programme once every two weeks. Five instalments were broadcast before the end of October. On the evening of 30 October the Radio Theater performed – for the first time in Finland – August Strindberg’s play “The Nightingale of Wittenberg” (1903). The next day the listeners enjoyed a report from the Jubilee festivities in Wittenberg where the Finnish Lutheran Church was represented by Bishop Osmo Alaja and church counsellor Mauno Saloheimo who was also a member of the Finnish Jubilee Committee. YLE also broadcast the whole Jubilee service from the Cathedral in Turku and short reports from the Conferment Ceremony and the Jubilee event in Helsinki.

The Committee charged the Church Education Matters Center with the task of promoting the Jubilee among schoolchildren and students. The Center thought it would be particularly valuable to get the students to evaluate the significance of the Reformation independently and from a contemporary viewpoint. In order to achieve this, the Center proposed to the Union of Finnish Teachers that the Finnish teachers assign certain themes as essay subjects, especially in November. For the fourth and fifth grade the Center recommended a list which included the following subjects: If I were Luther; Finland without Agricola; When I read the Bible; What sort of church would I build?; A Pastor’s working day. For high schools (“gymnasium”) the list included: “Here I stand and can do no other. God help me!”; Luther as an archetype of a new kind of man; My opinion of Luther as a person; The need for reformation in our own time.²⁴

Following the plans of the Jubilee Committee, a Reformation-related writing competition was announced in the Christian newspaper “Kotimaa”. Readers were asked to write about “The Reformation I am waiting for”. The newspaper emphasized that writers should remember that the Reformation was not only a thing of the past but also a contemporary issue. “Kotimaa” wanted personal views, reasoned evaluation, and suggestions as to how to find a way forward in “the world of revolutions and changes”. Theological treatises and theoretical disquisitions were not wanted and the length was strictly limited. The five best contributions would receive a pecuniary reward. In addition, among all the contestants there would be a prize draw of 20 copies of “the American negro leader” Martin Luther King’s new book “Tästä eteenpäin – sekasorrosta yhteyteen” (original: “Where do we go from here”).²⁵

The Helsinki Faculty of Theology Organizes a Conferment Ceremony

There were two theology faculties in Finland at this time, of which the Finnish-speaking Helsinki University faculty was the larger and the Swedish-speaking Åbo Akademi faculty the smaller. Helsinki University was heir to the Royal Academy of Turku/Åbo which had been established in 1640. It had moved to Helsinki after Turku burnt down in 1827 and continued under the name of the Imperial Alexander University in Finland until 1919 when

24 Virke (1967), no. 4, p. 3.

25 Kotimaa, 3 November 1967, Kirjoituskilpailu Kotimaan lukijoille [A Writing Competition for Kotimaa’s Readers].

the name was changed to the University of Helsinki. Åbo Akademi University was founded by private donations in 1918. There were eight professors in the Helsinki faculty and five in Åbo. The number of students was much higher in Helsinki than in Åbo.

The Faculty of Theology in Helsinki decided to make its own contribution to the Jubilee by arranging a festive degree conferment ceremony in connection with the Jubilee events. The last and only time that a conferment ceremony had been held in connection with a Reformation jubilee had been in 1818. Since only a short time had elapsed since the previous degree ceremony, which had been held in connection with the Fourth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Helsinki in 1963 and also because the ceremony would be expensive for the University, the Dean of the Faculty, Professor Aimo T. Nikolainen, who was a Bible scholar, proposed that he himself and Vice-Dean, Professor Kauko Pirinen, discuss the matter with the Chancellor of the University.²⁶ The Chancellor approved the plan.

In the spring of 1967 the Faculty of Theology appointed the ceremony committee; this consisted of five professors and four junior teachers. Professor Nikolainen was the chairman of the committee. Dean Nikolainen and Vice-Dean Pirinen were charged with officially presenting President Urho Kekkonen and his wife Sylvi Kekkonen with an invitation to the ceremony as guests of honor.²⁷

The President and his wife attended the Conferment Ceremony but could not be present at the Jubilee event in Helsinki because the President was invited to the October Revolution Jubilee in Moscow, where he went on 4 November. There is no mention of the Conferment Ceremony in his published diary.²⁸

The most time-consuming question with respect to the ceremony was the choice of people who would be awarded the title *doctor honoris causa*. The matter was discussed at seven meetings of the Faculty. Finally, it was decided that there would be more honorary doctors (11) than ordinary doctors (9) at the ceremony. Six of them were from Finland, among them Archbishop Paavali of the Finnish Orthodox Church. The five foreign guests were Leonard Auala, Bishop of the Ambo-Kavango Evangelical Lutheran Church in South-West Africa, whose invitation was quite natural considering the long involvement of Finnish missionaries in helping to create an independent Lutheran Church in the region known in Finland as Ambomaa;²⁹ Chitose Kishi, leader of the Japan Lutheran Church; Sven Kjällerström, professor of practical theology at the University of Lund in Sweden; Emil Koren, dean of the Evangelical Lutheran Parish in Fásor, Budapest; and Wolfgang Trillhaas, professor of systematic theology at the University of Göttingen.³⁰

It may also be interesting to note that not one of the regular doctors of theology at this ceremony was a Luther scholar. In contrast, however, one of the two systematic theologians

26 Cf. Helsinki University Archives (HUA), Protocol of the Faculty of Theology, 10.11.1966, §7.

27 Cf. *ibidem*, 23.2.1967, §16.

28 Cf. Juhani Suomi (ed.): *Urho Kekkonen päiväkirjat [Urho Kekkonen Diaries]*, vol. 2: '63-'68, Helsinki 2002, p. 357.

29 See e.g. Juhani Koponen, Hannu Heinonen: *Africa in Finnish Policy. Deepening Involvement*, in: Lennart Wohlgenuth (ed.): *The Nordic Countries and Africa. Old and New Relations*, Göteborg 2002, pp. 15-28.

30 Cf. HUA, Protocol of the Faculty of Theology, 27.5.1967, §17.

in the group had even written a thesis on Pope Pius XII.³¹ This was, in fact, a pioneering study, being the first doctoral thesis on contemporary Catholicism written by a Finnish theologian. It was also a sign of progress in ecumenical thinking and attitudes toward the Catholic Church.

There had been “a Luther renaissance” in Finnish theology after the 1917 Jubilee which had lasted into the 1960s, but by the late 1960s it had started to wane. Its most eminent representative, Professor Lennart Pinomaa, retired in 1968. Pinomaa’s internationally most famous work was his overview of Luther’s theology “Voittava usko” (translations: Faith Victorious. An Introduction to Luther’s Theology, 1963; Sieg des Glaubens. Grundlinien der Theologie Luthers, 1964).³² In the 1980s, Finnish Luther scholarship would become internationally famous once more with the work of Tuomo Mannermaa and his students, but in 1967, it was not very prominent.

The degree ceremony was held on 2 November 1967, just two days before the main Jubilee event, both at the Great Hall of the University. At the ceremony, Dean Professor Nikolainen first held the Chairman’s address. The title of his speech was “De rebus futuris libertatis”, “The Future of Freedom”.³³ He was followed by Professor Kauko Pirinen who presented the traditional Ceremonial Question which was answered by licentiate Kalevi Tamminen. The question concerned the subject of Tamminen’s doctoral thesis, the religious education plan in Finnish elementary schools from 1912–1939.³⁴ Next, Dean Nikolainen conferred the honorary and the regular doctorates. To conclude the ceremony, Professor Kjällerström gave a speech on behalf of the newly conferred doctors. Between the speeches some musical pieces were performed by the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra and the Sibelius Academy chamber choir Cantemus.³⁵ After the ceremony, the audience moved in festive procession to the nearby Helsinki Cathedral where the conferment service was held. Lennart Pinomaa, professor of systematic theology, gave the sermon.

This conferment ceremony was the first time that a non-Protestant had received an honorary doctorate in Finland. In his short speech to the Orthodox Archbishop Paavali, Dean Nikolainen said that “the Faculty of Theology is well familiar with the esteem you enjoy among the Orthodox Churches, and we have been able to follow your successful work closely both in the reconstruction of your own church and in forging ties between the churches of this country.”³⁶ Archbishop Paavali also gave the speech on behalf of all the doctors at the festive dinner in the hotel Marski.

31 Cf. Raimo Harjula: Roomalaiskatolisen kirkon ja Kristuksen mystillisen ruumiin identiteetti Pius XII:n mukaan [The Identity of the Roman Catholic Church and the Mystical Body of Christ according to Pope Pius XII], in: Suomen lähetystieteellisen seuran julkaisuja (1966), no. 13.

32 Cf. Kauko Pirinen: Seitsemänpäinen Luther. Martti Lutherin kuva eri aikoina [The Seven-Headed Luther. Martin Luther’s Image Through the Times], Helsinki 1984, pp. 104-121.

33 Cf. Aimo T. Nikolainen: De rebus futuris libertatis, in: Teologinen Aikakauskirja 72 (1967), no. 6, pp. 401-405.

34 Cf. Kalevi Tamminen: Kansakoulun uskonnon opetussuunnitelma 1912–1939 [The Religious Education Plan in the Public Schools in Finland 1912–1939], Helsinki 1967.

35 Cf. Kutsu Helsingin Yliopiston Teologisen Tiedekunnan tohtoripromootioon marraskuun 2 päivänä 1967 [The Invitation to the Helsinki University’s Faculty of Theology Conferment Ceremony].

36 Aamun Koitto (1967), no. 32, p. 257.

The choice of one of the honorary doctors, the Hungarian pastor Emil Koren, angered some conservative Finnish Christians who considered Koren a spy and an informer for the Hungarian secret police. Martti E. Miettinen, one of the leading members of conservative Christian circles, claimed Koren had obtained his position with the help of the Communist authorities and sought to advance their anti-church objectives through his work. Miettinen threatened to stay away from the Ceremony if the Faculty went through with Koren's honorary doctorate.³⁷ I have so far not come upon any research that would have provided documentary evidence of Koren's involvement with the secret police but the fact that he could travel freely and had quite a high position in his own church seems to indicate that there was some truth in Miettinen's accusations.

The Main Events of the Jubilee in Turku and Helsinki in November 1967

The Reformation Jubilee festival began in Turku on All Saints Day, 4 November. The Jubilee service was held in the Cathedral of Turku where Archbishop Martti Simojoki gave the sermon. He admitted that some of the previous Reformation Jubilees had taken place in an atmosphere of triumphalism but that the sentiments were now different. He referred to the "painful fact" that Martin Luther's actions had led to a divided Church, harsh judgements from both sides and quarrels that for centuries had caused more shame than glory to God's name. Simojoki described Luther as a man of conscience who had not wanted to oppose his own Church but had been forced to do so by his conscience.

In Simojoki's view, a true disciple of Luther follows three "lights" along his path. The first is freedom and clarity of rational thought. The second is the Bible, and the third is the Gospel message of justification by "faith alone, by mercy alone, by Christ alone".³⁸ Lutheran Christians cannot accept or defend anything that is in conflict with the Holy Bible and rational reasons.

The festivities in Turku continued in several other places after the Cathedral service. The main Jubilee festival in Turku took place in the full Theater House where the audience enjoyed the first public performance of the pastor and poet Jaakko Haavio's (1904–1984) church play „Laudes aamun sarastaessa” (Laudes at the Break of Dawn), which told the story of the arrival of the Reformation in Turku.³⁹

Martti Parvio, professor of practical theology in Helsinki, considered the play an unfortunate example of the old and still prevailing prejudice toward the Catholic Church. Although its aim to portray the liberating message of the Reformation was understandable, it was at the same time a regrettable piece of black-and-white Protestant propaganda according to which everything that was spiritually good originated with the Reformation. Parvio was afraid that if the play was performed by young people in parishes it would only work to "re-heat" old antagonistic attitudes toward the Catholics. In Parvio's opinion,

37 Cf. Uusi Tie, 25 October 1967, Teologinen tiedekunta oudolla tiellä [The Faculty of Theology on Strange Paths].

38 Uusi Suomi, 6 November 1967, Martti Lutherin oppilas kunnioittaa ajattelun vapautta ja selkeyttä [Martin Luther's Follower Respects Freedom of Thought and Clarity].

39 Cf. Uusi Suomi, 6 November 1967.

the Reformation Jubilee had the potential to be “the Evangelical world’s friendly gesture to the Catholic Church across the dividing past”.⁴⁰ This, however, required unbiased and broad-minded thinking on the part of church leaders but it should also be reflected “in the field”, among clergy and in the parishes.

In addition to Haavio’s play the public at the Theater House had the opportunity to listen to Professor Lauri Haikola’s lecture about the significance of the Reformation. The main part of the lecture dealt with Luther’s criticism of the sale of indulgences. Haikola was professor of theological ethics and philosophy of religion in Helsinki.⁴¹

There were also Jubilee events in various Turku parishes throughout the weekend. The other diocesan centres also held their own events. For instance, in the Cathedral of Oulu in northern Finland, one of the honorary doctors, Bishop Leonard Auala first talked about the situation in his church in Ambo-Kavango. He was followed by Bishop Aimo T. Nikolainen who spoke about the future of Christianity. He considered the 1960s “an age of crisis” in view of the declining number of Christians in the world. In his opinion, the worst enemy of the Gospel was “the same demonic spirit of the time as always”, man’s feeling of self-sufficiency, of feeling that he is his own God above whom there is nothing. This was nothing new and had followed Christianity throughout its history. Ultimately, however, Nikolainen was optimistic about the future: Christianity would survive but it would always need new reformations.⁴²

Next day in Helsinki, the Jubilee festival at the Great Hall of the University began with an address by Bishop Olavi Kares. He compared the core discovery of the Reformation to gold, which has retained its value even though it has been abused more than any other earthly treasure. He also compared – perhaps in somewhat confused terminology – the Reformation to a “nuclear charge” whose effects can be felt even today:

“We know that the world of the Reformation, ‘dreaming and pregnant with future’, contained in itself a nuclear charge that has discharged itself along the centuries often in very surprising directions within the spheres of both general culture and Christianity. The effects of this discharge have been felt, if we look at it from the point of view of Christianity, in numerous both positive and negative phenomena.”⁴³

Kares added that, at the beginning of the reformatory period, the Bible’s words that “the just shall live by faith” had gained new power and “blew the Middle Ages to smithereens”.⁴⁴ Modern man had been threatened by a feeling of emptiness, which the abyss of the Second World War and Sartrean existentialism had given him. Justification by faith was the only real alternative to that emptiness.

Professor Kauko Pirinen delivered the Jubilee lecture, in which he illuminated the problems of reforming the church in Luther’s day and later. Pirinen was the main Finnish expert

40 Martti Parvio: *Reformaation 450-vuotisjuhlan viettäminen* [The Celebration of the 450th Jubilee of the Reformation], in: *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* 72 (1967), no. 3, pp. 217-219.

41 Cf. *Uusi Suomi*, 6 November 1967.

42 Cf. Aimo T. Nikolainen: *Kristinuskon tulevaisuus* [The Future of Christianity], in: *Näköala* 6 (1967), no. 6, pp. 169-172.

43 *Uusi Suomi*, 6 November 1967.

44 *Ibidem*.

on the period of the Reformation. He wrote the chapter on Finland in “Reformation in Europa”, edited by Oskar Thulin and published by the East German publisher Evangelische Verlagsanstalt in Leipzig in 1967.⁴⁵ In “Näköala”, a journal published by the Finnish Ecumenical Council and the Union of Christian Culture, Pirinen published an article titled “The Reformation from an Ecumenical Perspective”.⁴⁶

The Ecumenical Aspects of the 450th Jubilee of Reformation

The Helsinki Jubilee event was quite ecumenical in character. Among the guests of honor were the Orthodox Archbishop Paavali and the recently (29 June 1967) appointed Catholic Bishop of Helsinki, Paul Verschuren, a Dutchman and a member of the Order of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

On the eve of the Reformation Jubilee events, Verschuren acknowledged in the Catholic parish journal “Kellojen kutsu” (The Call of the Church Bells) that as the local bishop he could not let the jubilee of the majority church pass without paying it any attention. He wrote that the jubilee reminded the Catholics of issues which were painful but also healthy to think about. He referred to the Second Vatican Council decree on ecumenism (*Unitatis redintegratio*) and stressed that the Catholics should not only forgive the wrongs committed against their own church but also as a church confess their own blame for the divisions. All this, as well as admitting that there is much that is worthy in Lutheranism, should, he argued, be done sincerely, and seen not only as a tactical move or in the hope of converting Lutheran believers. Unity of all Christians was the utmost goal, but achieving it was not easy and not possible through compromises on either side. Verschuren urged the Catholics to “whole-heartedly pray to God to show plentiful mercy to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, her reform efforts, the bishops and all her members”.⁴⁷

Jan Aarts, a Dutch priest who had also arrived in Finland after the Second Vatican Council continued in the same vein in the next issue of “Kellojen kutsu”. The title of his article was “What can we learn from Luther?”. He found many positive aspects of Luther’s work and writings and concluded that “we should not presume that Luther wrote and said this insincerely. Whatever one thinks of or however one judges him, anyone who has read his writings must acknowledge his courage.”⁴⁸

A new ecumenical era had clearly begun in Finnish Catholicism with Catholic priests who had been inspired by the ecumenical advances of the Second Vatican Council. In 1968, the Catholic Church in Finland joined the Finnish Ecumenical Council. This made Finland one of the first countries in the world in which the local Catholic Church joined the national ecumenical council.

45 Cf. Kauko Pirinen: Neues im alten Gefäß, in: Oskar Thulin (ed.): Reformation in Europa, Leipzig 1967, pp. 229-234.

46 Cf. Kauko Pirinen: Uskonpuhdistus ekumeenisesta näkökulmasta [The Reformation from an Ecumenical Perspective], in: Näköala (1967), pp. 119-128.

47 Kellojen kutsu (1967), no. 9, pp. 3 f.

48 Ibidem, no. 10, p. 2.

It may also be interesting to briefly note how the most anti-ecumenical denomination in Finland, the Confessional Lutheran Church of Finland (CLCF), celebrated the Reformation Jubilee. The CLCF organized three different celebrations in southern Finland, in Koskenpää in August, in Helsinki in October and in Lahti in November. For the first event, Pastor A. Aijal Uppala had translated the debate between Luther and Eck and performed it with Pastor Markku Särelä. The subjects of the speeches at these events included “How the Reformation happened”, “Luther and the Bible”, and “How Luther rid himself of the Pope’s church”. There is no information on the number of participants.⁴⁹

The Reformation Jubilee in Publications

Whereas the previous Reformation Jubilee in 1917 had seen the publication of several books thematizing either Luther or the Reformation in general, 1967 proved very weak in this respect. For the 1917 Jubilee, the Bishops’ Meeting decided to prepare an illustrated publication. The end result, titled “The Reformation and the Church of Finland 1517–1917”, contained 18 articles and 215 pages. The writers included the Archbishop, other bishops, professors and other eminent churchmen.⁵⁰ The Finnish Society of Church History published an article collection titled “Luther’s Reformation and the Church of Finland”, although it only came out in 1921.⁵¹ The Finnish Journal of Theology published a special Reformation issue. A few biographical novels about Luther also appeared that year.⁵²

Erik H. Erikson’s “Young Man Luther” has already been mentioned; other than this, little can be said about literary output in connection with the 1967 Jubilee. Unlike in 1917, there was no Jubilee “Festschrift”. It is noteworthy that the Finnish Society of Church History seems to have paid no special attention to the event, even though both Professor Pirinen and Professor Juva were members of the board, Pirinen as the President. The protocols of the Society from 1964 to 1967 contain no references to the Jubilee.⁵³

The Lutheran Evangelical Association of Finland (LEAF), which was the central organization of the Evangelical Movement, published an anthology of Luther’s texts which was described as “a selection of Luther’s core ideas”. The book was subtitled “Publication for the 450th Jubilee of the Reformation”.⁵⁴ The LEAF also published a twelve-part pamphlet series named “Uskonpuhdistuksen sanoma juuri nyt” (The Message of the Reformation Right Now). Jakob Knudsen’s novel “Martin Luther”, which had originally been translated into Finnish in 1917, was reprinted in 1967 under the title “Vuorimiehen poika” (The Mining Man’s Son) and published by a commercial publishing house.

49 Cf. Luterilainen (1967), no. 3, p. 92; no. 11, p. 115.

50 Cf. Jaakko Gummerus, Yrjö Loimaranta et.al. (eds.): Uskonpuhdistus ja Suomen kirkko 1517–1917 [The Reformation and the Church of Finland 1517–1917], Sortavala 1917.

51 Cf. Jaakko Gummerus (ed.): Lutherin uskonpuhdistus ja Suomen kirkko I [Luther’s Reformation and the Church of Finland I].

52 Cf. Pirinen, Lutherin (see note 10), pp. 42 f.

53 Cf. Martti Parvio (ed.): Suomen kirkkohistoriallisen seuran vuosikirja 1964–1967 [The Yearbook of the Finnish Society of Church History], Helsinki 1968, pp. 313–381.

54 Cf. Ossi Kettunen (ed.): Martti Luther. En minä kuole – vaan elän. Antologia [Martin Luther. I Will Not Die, But Live. An Anthology], Helsinki 1967.

Conclusions

The 450th Reformation Jubilee of 1967 took place in a year that proved to be a turning point in western political history. After the relative peacefulness and orderliness of the early and mid-1960s, the last couple of years of the 1960s were a period of revolutionary tumult and political instability. The same was true, although not to the same degree of aggression and violence, of developments within the western churches. Politically radical young Christians made their demands known, and the word “revolution” became a household term, even among many theologians. Things were not the same after 1967.

Professor Mikko Juva, a church historian, observed that even in historically Lutheran countries there seemed to be little enthusiasm about their Lutheran heritage on the eve of the Jubilee. In contrast, a new ecumenical thinking, inspired by the Second Vatican Council, had gained ground in all churches. Luther seemed to have collapsed into oblivion.

Even in Finland one could feel the new ecumenical atmosphere. The Finnish Orthodox Archbishop Paavali was the first non-Protestant to receive an honorary doctorate at the Helsinki Faculty of Theology. The newly appointed Catholic Bishop of Helsinki, Paul Verschuren, attended the main Jubilee event in Helsinki as a guest of honor. Professor Parvio was worried that the church play staged at the Jubilee event in Turku would offend the Catholics. However, not everyone found the rapprochement between the Lutheran and the Catholic Church commendable. For the recently organized Fifth Revivalist Movement, it seemed especially dangerous.

If the festivities seemed a little bland, as Parvio later suggested, the reasons for this were understandable. The Finnish Reformation Jubilee Committee was well aware that late 1967 was not an auspicious moment for organizing Jubilee events. The 50th anniversary of Finnish Independence, which took place only a few weeks after the Jubilee, was of much greater significance for the Finnish people as a whole, and the Jubilee could not compete with it for media attention. Even the October Revolution Jubilee in Moscow caught the attention of the media almost immediately after the Reformation Jubilee festivities in Finland were over. It is also possible that there had been so many big church events in recent years that it was unreasonable to expect much spontaneous enthusiasm about the Reformation Jubilee.

Nevertheless, one can judge the Jubilee festivities to have been a moderate success. In the religious press they were reported widely and the thematic pair “reform” – “Reformation” provoked discussion. In the daily newspapers reporting was much less intensive and rather limited. Perhaps one outcome of the decade-long Luther renaissance of the 20th century in Finnish theology was that Finland was the only one of the Nordic countries to issue a commemorative stamp for the Jubilee.

Zusammenfassung

Das 450-jährige Jubiläum der Reformation wurde im Jahre 1967 gefeiert. In dem vorliegenden Beitrag werden die wissenschaftlichen und kirchlichen Feierlichkeiten analysiert, die das Ereignis in Finnland begleiteten. Der Fokus liegt auf der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Finnland, auf welche Weise sie der Reformation gedachte, um bei Klerikern und

Laien gleichermaßen Anklang zu finden. Ein weiteres Augenmerk ist auf die theologische Fakultät der Universität Helsinki und deren Beteiligung an der Jubiläumsfeier gerichtet.

Der Beitrag basiert auf gedruckten Quellen und Archivalien, die die Aktivitäten der verschiedenen Akteure und Parteien im Vorfeld der Jubiläumsveranstaltungen zwischen Ende Oktober und Anfang November dokumentieren. Zeitgenössische Zeitungen und Zeitschriften vermitteln darüber hinaus einen Einblick in die Stimmung und die Haltungen rund um die Geschehnisse.

Das Jubiläum fand zu einer Zeit schneller kultureller und gesellschaftlicher Wandel statt. Die politische Radikalisierung hatte gerade begonnen. Eine Entwicklung, die sich in den Anschauungen einiger Theologen widerspiegelte. Mithilfe von ökumenischen Leitbildern konnten religiöse Vorurteile abgebaut werden. Dies zeigte sich in der Anwesenheit orthodoxer und katholischer Ehrengäste bei den Feierlichkeiten; fünfzig Jahre zuvor wäre ein solcher Zusammenschluss undenkbar gewesen. Dennoch blieb Finnland auch weiterhin ein lutherisches geprägtes Land, wie an der Herausgabe einer Sonderbriefmarke mit Luther als Motiv veranschaulicht werden kann. Kein anderes skandinavisches Land hob Luther in dieser oder ähnlicher Weise im Jahre 1967 hervor.

Aus dem Englischen übersetzt von Annika Rathjens, Lüneburg