Fig. 9.1: Witeberga, gloriosa Dei civitas, sedes et arx veræ doctrinæ catholicæ, septemviratus saxonici metropolis, academiarum in Europa clarissima, et postreimi millenarii locus longe sanctissimus (God's glorious city Wittenberg, seat and fortress of the true Catholic doctrine, capital of Saxony, the most excellent university in Europe, and the holiest of places of the last millenium). View of Wittenberg seen from the South, 1556. Coloured woodcut. Workshop of Cranach.

Martin Schwarz Lausten

Chapter 9

Wittenberg: The Holy City

Part II (Chapters 9–12) in this volume considers transformed perspectives on holiness and the Holy City of Jerusalem. Martin Schwarz Lausten introduces this part with this short chapter on how the Danish kings, Christian II and Christian III, perceived Wittenberg, not Jerusalem or Rome, as the Holy City from where authority sprang forth.

*Wittenberg, die kleine arme Stadt,
Einen grossen Nahmen itzund hat
Von Gottes Wort, das heraus leucht
Und viel Seelen zum Himmel zeucht.
Damit sie ein Glied wird genannt,
Der Stadt Jerusalem verwand¹*

In this excerpt of a poem by Martin Luther, he himself relates Wittenberg to the Holy City. Just as the Christian message had once emanated from Jerusalem, it now came from Wittenberg.² Luther has rediscovered the Gospel – the true word of God – which proclaims the true path to salvation. Luther deliberately refrains from mentioning the intervening period, when Rome was considered to be the Holy City, as in his view this was an age of decay. Thus, Luther draws a direct line from contemporary Wittenberg to the Holy City of Jerusalem.³

In the spring of 1524, ex-king Christian II of Denmark–Norway–Sweden sent a letter to his wife Elisabeth (Isabella). She was at the time residing in Berlin, while he was living in Wittenberg. The letter contained practical information concerning her planned move from Berlin. The letter is marked as “written in the Holy City of Wittenberg”.⁴ To a modern reader this description might seem a bit awkward. Was it not Christian II who, as a brutal regent, had orchestrated the so-called Stockholm Bloodbath in 1520, having roughly eighty Swedish noblemen and a couple of clergy beheaded despite having granted them amnesty? Was he not a man with more than one ruthless action on his conscience? While these things are true, this peculiar man

¹ WA 35,594,15–20.

² See Andersen Oftestad, *Introduction* (Chapter 1) to this volume, p. 12–48.

³ Martin Schwarz Lausten, *Den hellige stad Wittenberg. Danmark og lutherbyen Wittenberg i reformationstiden*. (Copenhagen: Anis, 2002), 7.

⁴ My translation of “skrevet udi den hellige stad Wittenberg.” Christian d. 2 til dronning Elisabeth, Wittenberg d. 5. Marts 1524 Riksarkivet, *Diplomatarium Norwegicum* vol. 10 (Riksarkivet, 1524).

had quite a different side as well. The humanist movement preoccupied Christian II and this intellectual movement demanded reforms of religious life and the educational system, as well as of social affairs. In the years 1521–22, the king had prepared a major reform, with the University of Copenhagen in particular to be modernized. At the king's request, the University of Wittenberg provided men to implement these reforms. Meanwhile, the case against Luther unfolded – declared a heretic and outlaw, he was sent to Wartburg. However, already during Lent 1522 Luther had left Wartburg. At this time many of Luther's controversial writings had already been published, but no one knew what was yet to come. Christian II's planned reforms petered out in the winter of 1522–23, as the *Rigsråd* (Council of the Realm) withdrew their allegiance – seeming tired, or, afraid of him. The king chose to leave the country with his wife Elisabeth, their three children, and a small group of still loyal counsellors and Household. As Elisabeth was the sister of none other than Emperor Karl V, a Catholic by conviction, Christian II hoped to win the support of Karl V and thus receive financial support needed to regain the kingdom. For that reason, Christian II and Elisabeth sailed to the Netherlands, only to be met with a cool reception and subsequently installed in a villa in Lier near Brussels. Yet, his conversion to Lutheranism would prove fatal. In October 1523 Christian II heard Luther preach in the church in Schweinitz, only a couple of hours from Wittenberg. He reportedly responded that: “never before had he heard the gospel preached like that. He would preserve this in his memory for all eternity; indeed, he would rather suffer all hardship (than forget) that Christ had suffered on the cross for a sinner.”⁵ Not only was the king now convinced of the truth in the Lutheran confession he even became a passionate Lutheran. That same autumn, Christian II travelled to Wittenberg for confidential meetings with the great reformer, with the king making many such journeys in subsequent years. Although Luther did not usually engage in political affairs directly, he did so in this heated political issue, openly opting for Christian II. Both letters and notes from Luther's sermons clearly show how closely the two were aligned. In the text *Ob Kriegsleute auch im seligen Stande sein können* (1526), which has played an important role even to the present day, Luther directly condemns the Danish rebellion against Christian II, their crowned and anointed king and supreme temporal authority.⁶

Christian II's fascination with the holy city of Wittenberg would prove costly. Totally dependent on Emperor Charles V and the Catholic powers, this was a political

⁵ My translation. “[...] han aldrig nogensinde havde hørt evangeliet således. Han ville altid bevare dette i sin hukommelse, ja han ville hellere lide alt (end glemme) at Kristus havde lidt korsdøden for en uværdig.” Martin Schwarz Lausten, *Christian 2. mellem paven og Luther, tro og politik omkring “den røde konge” i eksilet og i fangenskabet (1523–1559)*, vol. 3, Kirkehistoriske Studier (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1995), 17–19.

⁶ Lausten, *Christian 2*, 19–29, 243–49.

blunder and they instantly turned their backs on him. This does, however, demonstrate how seriously Christian II held his conversion to be, furthermore underwritten by the fact that he immediately had the New Testament translated into Danish. This book, the first ever New Testament in Danish, was printed in Wittenberg and already published in 1524. It included Lucas Cranach the Elder's portrait of the king as well as prefaces by Luther. Thus, Christian II announced to the world that he was now Lutheran.⁷ When he was not residing in Wittenberg, he corresponded with Luther by mail – whom he addressed “Dear Brother in Christ.”⁸ Moreover, he also communicated actively with influential Electoral secretary, Georg Spalatin.⁹ A Dane by the name Peter Kempe, who was running a school in Torgau, noted in one of his numerous letters to Christian II that: “concerning D. Martin, assuredly I say unto you that he loves you implicitly.”¹⁰ Kempe could also report that “all Christians in Wittenberg”¹¹ supported Christian II and promised to serve him faithfully.

Christian II was seized by the intensity in the religious way of life that unfolded around Luther in Wittenberg to such a degree that he adapted this to his little household in exile. Secretly, Christian II had commerce with the Lutheran circles in the Netherlands and he and his household opened their letters with prefatory remarks such as: “The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ Grace be with you,” “Spes Tua Christus,” or simply “Jesus.”¹² In one of his proclamations, smuggled into Denmark, Christian II even added in his own hand at the bottom of the draft: “Verbum domini manet in eternum” (Isa 40:8) – the slogan of the Lutherans, often cited in their texts and shown on standards, etc.¹³ In the mind of the exiled king Christian II, Wittenberg had become *the Holy City* – just as stated in the abovementioned letter. Wittenberg was holy because the holy gospel was preached there for the first time.

In the Danish printed edition of the New Testament, the translator, Christian II's chancellor Hans Mikkelsen, had included a religious and political appeal to the Danish commoners. Mikkelsen carried on a controversy against the Danish Catholic bishops while praising Luther's theology and he urged the readers to demand Christian II be reinstated as king.¹⁴ However, the superintendent of the Carmelite Priory in Copenhagen, Paul Helgesen, responded in much the same

7 Lausten, *Christian 2*, 109–37.

8 My translation. “Kære broder i Kristus.”

9 Lausten, *Christian 2*, 69, 143, 480.

10 My translation. “om D. Martin skal I visselig vide, at han elsker Eder i et og alt.” Ibid., 235.

11 My translation. “alle kristne i Wittenberg.”

12 My translation. “Jesus Kristi nåde og barmhjertig være med Eder.” E.g. Christian 2's breve af 5. Marts 1524, Riksarkivet, *Diplomatarium Norwegicum* 10, 345.; 20. Marts 1524, *ibid.*, 350.; 3. April 1524, *ibid.*, 354.; 12. April, *ibid.*, 372. Household letters e.g. 17. February 1524, *ibid.*, 325.; 20. February 1524, *ibid.*, 231.; 24. Marts 1524, *ibid.*, 352.; 4. October 1524, *ibid.*, 86.; 27 January 1526, *ibid.*, 462.

13 Lausten, *Christian 2*, 313–15.

14 Ibid., 122–27.

vein. In an extremely polemical text, Helgesen stressed the importance of true pilgrimage to holy cities like Rome and Compostella as opposed to the heretical Wittenberg. Praising St Bridget of Vadstena who, following a command given to her in a vision of God, had gone on pilgrimage to the holy cities of Rome and Jerusalem, Helgesen underscored that this devotional practice was a serious matter.¹⁵ Building on this, he turned to Mikkelsen's limited studies in Wittenberg.¹⁶ Helgesen makes the ironic remark that, in contrast to the "holiness" Mikkelsen held Wittenberg and Luther to represent, the Catholic Church – even in spite of the sinful acts committed within it – was at least not heretical.¹⁷ Moreover, Helgesen legitimizes the holiness of Rome by tradition: the true Christian faith did not originate in Wittenberg, a city where Luther had been working for only fourteen to fifteen years, nor did it originate in the heretic Johan Hus's city of Prague. Rather, it came from Rome, a city that could look back on centuries of true Christianity.¹⁸ The unkind fate of Christian II is not to be dealt with here. However, it should be noted that sources from his twenty-seven years of captivity indicate that he held onto his Lutheran belief.¹⁹

During the reign of Christian II's successor, Frederik I, there was no apparent contact between Denmark–Norway and Wittenberg. Yet, during the reign of his son, Christian III, interaction was resumed and intensified, as Christian III had been a zealous Lutheran for some time. Already as a young duke in 1526 he had imposed Lutheran reformation on his small dukedom of North Schleswig, having Kursachsen as a model. When proclaimed King of Denmark–Norway after the civil war (the so-called Count's Feud), Christian III introduced the Reformation within the kingdoms. He imprisoned all Catholic bishops, confiscated Church lands, and accused the bishops of causing the civil war. Obviously, this procedure was beyond the countries' jurisdiction, and thus, the king needed justification for his actions – which he found in Wittenberg. In a private letter to the king, Luther personally approved both the cause of action as well as the draft for the Lutheran Church Ordinance (*Kirkeordinansen*) as the foundation for the Danish National Church. In the Royal Charter opening the Ordinance, Christian III emphasizes that the law had been approved by the highest authority in the evangelical world: "We sent it to the venerable father doctor Martin Luther, by whom God's clemency in these last

¹⁵ Paulus Helie and Poul Helgesen, *Till thet ketterlige wcristelige och wbesindige breff* (Rostock: Sancti Michaelis Closter, 1527), 41.

¹⁶ Lausten, *Christian 2*, 6.

¹⁷ Lausten, *Christian 2*, 13–34.

¹⁸ Paulus Helie, *En Kort Og Kristelig Formaning* (København: Marius Kristensen, 1532; reprint, 1935), 13.

¹⁹ Lausten, *Christian 2*, 392–401.

[i.e. eschatological] times has restored the pure gospel of Christ for us. He and the other theologians of Wittenberg approved it.”²⁰

Just as was the case with Christian II, in the eyes of Christian III Wittenberg was *the Holy City*. Wittenberg was sanctified in that it was here God had called upon Luther to proclaim the Gospel, which had been repressed during Catholic rule. Thus, to Christian III Wittenberg became the earthly hub of Christianity. In Catholic times, the religious and spiritual centre had been the ‘Holy City’ of Rome, far removed from the kingdom of Denmark–Norway. However, after the introduction of the Reformation the religious centre of the kingdom was transposed to the ‘Holy City’ of Wittenberg which, while still outside the realm, was closer than Rome. On a practical level, this involved a number of implications for both Church and society. According to Luther, Church and state were to be separated in such a way that the leading clergy were no longer members of the *Rigsråd*. The legal basis for the Church became, as in Kursachsen, the abovementioned Church Ordinance, which followed similar ordinances composed by Johann Bugenhagen. From a theological basis, Christian III referred directly to books by Luther and Melanchthon.²¹ Moreover, the University of Copenhagen was re-established as governed by the King, as opposed to being subject to the Roman Catholic church, as it had been previously. Now, teaching as well as curricula was based on Philipp Melanchthon’s reformed thoughts on education.²² In the years 1505–59, no less than 300 students from Denmark–Norway went to study in Wittenberg, often on royal scholarships.

Christian III held the greatest admiration for Martin Luther, Philipp Melanchthon, Johann Bugenhagen, and other learned men in Wittenberg. He frequently sent them gifts or cash, and the correspondence between the king and Wittenberg includes approximately 300 letters. Christian III wrote personally to each of the Lutheran luminaries and from time to time he even addressed letters merely to “the learned in Wittenberg.”²³ Moreover, when the king needed leading offices filled in the Church, in the educational system, and even in the government, he began by asking Wittenberg for recommendations, who often accommodated. Furthermore they regularly sent

²⁰ “[. . .] misimus ad Reuerendum patrem Doctorem Martinum Lutherum, per quem dei clementia hisce nouissimis temporibus nobis restituit sacri Euangelii Christi synceritatem. Is cum aliis qui Wittenbergae sunt Theologis eam approbavit.” Martin Schwarz Lausten *Kirkeordinansen 1537/39: Det Danske udkast til kirkeordinansen (1537); Ordinatio ecclesiastica regnorum Daniæ et Norwegiæ et Ducatum Sleswicensis Holstatiæ Etc. (1537); Den Danske kirkeordinans (1539)* (København: Akademisk Forlag, 1989), 150–51.

²¹ Lausten, *Kirkeordinansen 1537/39*, 230–31.

²² Martin Schwarz Lausten, *Philipp Melanchthon: Humanist og luthersk reformator i Tyskland og Danmark*, Kirkehistoriske Studier 15 (Copenhagen: Anis, 2010), 241.

²³ C. F. Wegener, *Aarsberetninger fra det Kongelige Geheimearchiv: Indeholdende bidrag til dansk historie af utrykte kilder: I*, vol. 1 (København: I commission hos C.A. Reitzels bo og arvinger, 1852–1855), 215.

news and notices, and all of the many books they published. To Christian III, Luther was an apostle sent by God to Wittenberg. When Luther died, the king in a proclamation implored God to allow the Gospel to remain in the kingdom so that he (and his subjects) could remain “a man of God and a precious servant, an apostle along with the famous and blessed doctor Luther, and keep the Gospel as he hitherto had done by will of his holy spirit.”²⁴ Time and again, Christian III would stress that the unity between Wittenberg and the Danish–Norwegian Church was indissoluble, calling on the Wittenberg theologians to pray alongside him to preserve this unity,²⁵ in order to retain the Wittenbergian theology, namely the unity of Luther and Melanchthon. However, already during Christian III’s lifetime this unity was revealed as an illusion. When internal disputes broke out among the Lutheran theologians much to the dismay of Christian III, he wrote a strongly worded letter to Philipp Melanchthon concerning “the wretched and despicable agitators and fanatics questioning the very foundations of our faith; a faith brought to the fore by the grace of God in Wittenberg to lay the very cornerstone of the preaching of the Gospel.”²⁶ Addressing another of the feuding theologians, Professor Georg Major, Christian III raged at how they scorned and slandered “the praiseworthy school [i.e. the university] in Wittenberg; the place where the proper, and consolidated divine evangelical truth along with the true justification – found in Christ Jesus through faith alone – was formulated and conveyed for the very first time.”²⁷

Naturally, the leading theologians agreed with their king in this understanding of Wittenberg. They published their books in Wittenberg, and the first Lutheran bishop of Zealand, Peder Palladius, reminisced about the great experience of studying in this city. His brother, Bishop Niels Palladius, referred to Luther as “father” and “man and prophet of God,” while the last great professor of the Age of the Reformation, Niels Hemmingsen, spoke of Luther as the holy prophet whom God in Wittenberg had revived to convey the true message of the Gospel. Hemmingsen

²⁴ My translation. “Guds dyrebare mand og tjener, den berømte og salige doktor Luthers medapostle og disciple og holde fast ved evangeliet, som han med sin hellige ånd havde gjort,” Wegener, *Aarsberetninger*, 245.

²⁵ Wegener, *Aarsberetninger*, 258, 60, 71.

²⁶ My translation. “[...] de elendige og foragtelige uromagere og sværmere, som nu såede tvivl om vor tros grundlag, som ved guddommelig nåde atter blev bragt frem i lyset i Wittenberg, hvor begyndelsen blev gjort til evangeliets forkynnelse.” Christian III to Philipp Melanchthon, Copenhagen 14 September 1557, cited from Gustav Wolf, *Zur Geschichte der deutschen Protestanten 1555–1559* (Berlin: Oswald Seehagen, 1888), 382.

²⁷ My translation. “[...] den rosværdige skole (dvs. universitetet) i Wittenberg, hvor den rigtige, grundfæstede guddommelige evangeliske sandhed og den sande retfærdiggørelse, som vi har i Kristus Jesus alene gennem tro, først blev formuleret og fremført.” Christian III to Georg Major, Copenhagen 10 February 1558, cited from Wegener, *Aarsberetninger*, 287.

concluded: “just as we follow the same teaching, so we uphold the same ceremonies as the Wittenbergians.”²⁸ Yet, although at this time in Wittenberg the Lutheranism of Melancthon was now dominant, Niels Hemmingsen still maintained his reverence for Wittenberg, which eventually cost him his office in 1579. This, however, is another story not to be dealt with here.²⁹

²⁸ My translation. “[...] ligesom vi har samme lære, opretholder vi også de samme ceremonier som wittenbergerne.” Martin Schwarz Lausten, *Christian D. 3. og kirken (1537–1559)*, vol. 1, *Studier i den Danske Reformationskirke* (København: Akademisk Forlag, 1987), 19. *Biskop Niels Palladius: et bidrag til den danske kirkes historie 1550–60*, *Kirkehistoriske Studier* 27 (København: Gad, 1968), 54–60; Martin Schwarz Lausten, *Niels Hemmingsen. Storhed og Fald* (Copenhagen: Anis, 2013), 108, 288.

²⁹ Lausten, *Niels Hemmingsen*, 305–40.