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The world on fire
Right and Wrong in Lutheran Confessional Culture around the year 1600
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I am working on a project called "Mare lutheranum. Circulation of text and the Lutheran Confessional culture around the Baltic Sea 1550 - 1650". In the project I compare the outcome of Lutheran confessional culture around the Baltic Sea between 1550 and 1650. The project was from the beginning a comparative study between five early modern states (Sweden, Denmark, Pomerania, Mecklenburg and Hamburg), but the more I have worked on it, it turned out that a more open transnational perspective is useful to capture the similarity and differences in Lutheran confessional culture around the Baltic Sea. Therefore I will focus on people and texts circulating in the region.

Today I will talk about the opportunities what the concept of Lutheran confessional culture can offer. In particular I will focus on some perspectives on how theologians conceptualist the year 1600 in the Lutheran confessional culture.

The *concept of Lutheran confessional culture* is relatively new in research and it has grown in importance in the last decades. The leading scholar, Thomas Kaufmann, a German church historian in Göttingen, has developed the concept "confessional culture" as theoretical tool. The concept should be seen as a critique of the older concept of confessionalization, established and developed in the work of for example Heinz Schilling. While confessionalization is about seeing the state formation processes in early modern Europe as a result of how the political and religious conflicts interacted, thus essentially about political history, so is the concept of confessional culture a cultural-historical concepts. Lutheran confessional culture refers to the matrix of interpretation from which the world made sense for the Lutherans. This matrix of interpretation included symbols, concepts, institutions, practices and so one.

Kaufmann has developed various characteristics of the Lutheran Confessional Culture. He uses only examples from the German speaking area but assumes that these apply to the whole of the Lutheran area. He points to the large internal theological disputes where the Lutherans often put more effort to fight with other Lutherans than with the other confessions. He also sees an awareness of belonging to the Reformation tradition from Wittenberg as typical features of a Lutheran confessional culture. Furthermore, he sees a tension between the apocalypse and a conservative view of order in society as characteristic. Also a large vernacular publication was typical of the Lutheran confessional culture. Scholars have also pointed out that Lutheranism in the second half of the 16th Century was in a "defend position" because the confessional struggle on a European scale was between the Reformed ("Calvinists") and the Catholics. The Lutheran confessional culture produced a framework from which judgment about right and wrong could be made.

Lutheran confessional culture is therefore a concept that could be used for all the Lutheran territories – but this presentation will focus on the process in territories situated in the Holy Empire, and how the year 1600 was conceptualized.

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The conceptualization of the year 1600 can be divided in two categories that correspond to each other. The first way to conceptualize the year 1600 was important during the end of the 16 century. The year 1600 was associated with almost upheaval expectations with an *eschatological extent*. In the pre-modern world expectations about the end of the world was a frequent and always present part of how the world was contextualized. For example the year 1588 or the year 1604, also were connected with expectations of apocalypse.

Eschatology is a crucial part of Christian theology, but to discuss this topic in an early modern protestant context we have to have in mind that for the theologians of the reformation the end of the world was to expect very soon. For them Martin Luther and other reformers had revealed the untruth church and the antichrist, just as it was predicted. Before the end the humans had to improve.

According to contemporary observations there had never been so much talk about the end of the world as around the year 1600. The birth of handicapped children, or the appearance of as many as 30 persons with physical ill around the small town of Güstrow, were interpreted as signs of the apocalypse to come. Other things that were explained through this interpretation matrix were the war against the Muslims and astrological phenomena.

That this prohibitions didn't occurred was not a problem for the Lutherans, because the expected end of the world was never questioned. For them the human could prohibit wrongly and never totally understand the will of God.

Both the Lutherans, Reformed and Catholic thought that the time was out. But since the first two meant that the antichrist had been uncovered they saw themselves as a small selected group of the righteous fighting an uphill battle. In contrast the Catholic Church called for collection under the roof of the Great Church patronage. The church as an institution was strengthened in the Catholic way of understanding the expected end of the world.

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The second way of conceptualizing the year 1600 for the Lutherans was through *conflict with the Catholic Church*.

The Catholic Church proclaimed jubilee year, or Holy Year, in 1600. The German Lutherans focused on this and fought against the Jubilee. It was a struggle against the Catholic Church which was marked by change and the Jesuits' struggle and success. In German cities and territories which had a dual confessional identity (for example Augsburg) this battle was especially evident.

- The Catholics created a Jubilee indulgences. The advertising for the indulgence was explicitly directed against the Protestant indulgences criticism. For Lutherans it became another opportunity to present Luther's criticism of indulgences.

- The first Holy Year in the Catholic Church was celebrated in 1300. This served as an argument for the Lutherans that the Catholic Church was not the old church but a new and from humans created church.
- Celebration of the Holy Year decreed a pilgrimage for Catholics. This was another opportunity for Lutherans to re-formulate Luther's criticism of the belief that certain places, in this case Rome, would be especially holy.

The celebration of the Jubilee of the Year 1600 re-awakened old reformatory arguments and gave them new life in a contemporary debate. Luther and the early Reformation became relevant in light of the Holy Year. Luther's struggle against indulgences became in 1600 in a Lutheran confessional culture context a recurrent theme.

The Lutherans created the year 1600 as a "counter-jubilee" that served as an alternative to the Catholic Holy Year. What was celebrated was not the holiness of a year, but the remembrance of the past century and the historical events that took place in the 16th Century. It was the importance of the Reformation that was celebrated. Lutherans celebrated the Reformation and the historic struggle against the Catholic Church and a Lutheran culture of reformation memory was created for the first time. The Reformation was within this interpretative framework the most important event in human history since the birth of Jesus.

This culture of memory was often formulated in such a way that it had a local connection, where the state or the city's own reformers played an essential role. This is one example of how a confessional Lutheran culture could adapt to local culture and create a local variant.

Celebrating the jubilee in this way was not a counterweight to the notion of a world that would soon perish but supplemented it. The celebration would strengthen the righteous. Celebrating the year 1600 was to celebrate a chronological year - not taken from Luther's life or reformation history - and to focus on the history of the Reformation. Unlike the Catholic celebration that aimed to strengthen the institution "church", the evangelical celebration focused on the parish and the individual believer.

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To sum up we can see several ways of talking about right and wrong in the way the year 1600 was conceptualized in the Lutheran confessional culture. The Lutheran Confessional Culture was characterized by the expansion of the other confessions in the end of the 16th Century. This created an experience of threat and it underlined the interpretation of an apocalypse to come. At the same time there was a requirement of sincerity and intense development of new religious and theological interpretation patterns. *Apocalypse and individualization* were two sides of the same coin in the Lutheran Confessional Culture. In the context of a Lutheran Confessional Culture the world was on fire around the year 1600.