

The Johannes a Lasco Library Emden – on the Way to a Self-supporting Library

by WALTER SCHULZ

1. INTRODUCTION

The focus of this conference is new library architecture, so in my short lecture I will describe our new building and explain how it works. But to understand the special situation of the Emden library it is quite important to know the special and that means too the historical background and to see the different ways we use the library - really uncommon for a church-library. Most of the libraries represented at this conference are university or state libraries. The Emden library project is not comparable to most of them. The Johannes a Lasco Library was for centuries the book collection only of the reformed community at Emden and just the last ten years we started to build up a comprehensive special-library in the field of reformed protestantism on the basis of this old collection, not a particularly large but a well sorted specified one. Today the library is organized as a foundation or registered charity according to German law and belongs to the Reformed Church of Germany.

In the 16th century, the time of reformation, the two most important places with protestant foreign communities were London and Emden. At both places, first at Emden and later on from 1550 up to 1553 at London, the Polish nobleman John a Lasco was the superintendent of these small but well educated and skilled groups of exiles. At Emden the Dutch refugees were integrated into the Emden reformed church because the Dutch and lower-German languages were close related. The French und English speaking refugees built up their own communities. Probably 8 - 10,000 refugees settled in the mid sixteenth century at Emden. When the harbour of Antwerp was closed Emden gained a european importance for some years. Even though Emden had no university the reformed church became a training center for reformed preachers who were prepared for their work in the new reformed communities in the occupied Dutch area. Emden also advanced during this period to becoming an important printing place. Classical authors of the reformed literature (John Calvin, Heinrich Bullinger, Ulrich Zwingli; John a

Lasco, Marnix van St. Aldegonde and others) had their works published in Emden for the Dutch and partially for the English market. In 1571 the first synod of the Dutch reformed christians took place at Emden, this was the constitution of the Dutch reformed church. So the Emden Great Church was a mother-church of the reformed protestantism, especially for the Dutch but as well for the north-west area of Europe. In Germany the reformed christians are a minority today as they are in Poland, where John a Lasco in his last years founded the Polish reformed church, too.

The Polish humanist Johannes a Lasco, nephew of the Primas in Poland, student of Erasmus von Rotterdam and proud buyer of the Erasmian library, found his way to protestantism and also to Emden through the Dutchman Albert Hardenberg. John a Lasco was the only superintendent (Bishop) for East Frisia for the protestant church from 1542 to 1549. He also represented the reformed protestantism in its humanistic tradition and had an important influence on the structural and organizational questions within the reformed churches. A Lasco's influence was international as well as interconfessional. He had political and religious contacts throughout Europe. His great achievement had an own impact on the east frisian, Dutch, English and Polish church history.

The Great Church of Emden, in the middle ages consecrated to Cosmas and Damian, was destroyed in December 1943 as nearly the whole old town-center of Emden was. Only the eastern quire with three wings remained, lateron within the new after-war town of Emden a monument against war.

The library of the church, founded in 1559, and the archive were saved, today a well recognized collection for the history of reformed protestantism. When I started with the project in 1988 to rebuild the ruin to a modern library and research center a first crucial point was: What would it mean to rebuild a ruin which has already had become a monument? In the last nearly 20 years the ruin has been maintained by the city of Emden with the budget for unemployment benefit. Today nor the city of Emden nor the reformed church would be able to maintain a ruin, even though a monument, because it is an uncredible expensive and never ending long-term project as we do know from Berlin and the Gedächtniskirche. We can say: the only way to preserve the ruin was to integrate it into a new building as we did from 1992 – 1995.

2. THE LIBRARY-PROJECT AND ARCHITECTURE

During the period 1992 - 1995 15.6 million DM went into the project, though one must bear in mind that the final sum had not exceeded the sum calculated for the project in 1990. The financing was split three ways: 5.2 million DM was paid by the Reformed Church (Synod of the Reformed Churches of Bavaria and Northwest Germany), 5.2 million DM was paid by the Foundation of Lower Saxony - up to now the largest donation they have granted to any project - and 2.6 million DM each were donated by the state of Lower Saxony and by the city of Emden. Built on a foundation measuring 1,020 square metres (30 x 34) the library has approximately 3,000 square metres of actual space and 13,000 cubic metres of renovated space.

„A delicately mighty house full of character” said a book artist to note the tension between the old bricked ruin and modern construction. The architectural design can be broken down into the following ideas: a reconstructive project to restore the sacred late gothic character would not be appropriate due to the fact that the building was planned for use as a library. The historic ruins and the modern design and materials should be contrasted and blended with each other, with as little disturbance of the existing ruins as possible. The architect was successful in accomplishing this project. Modern architecture contrasts openly and noticeably with historical construction. This also without each of these losing its importance. Rather, these architectural contrasts are more surrounded by a harmony, a correspondence between ruin and renovation. This was made possible by the architect, Prof. Jochen Bunse (he died before the opening in september 1995). His creativity was not found in bringing out details, nor in domination of his modern architecture that equally used the location and the ruin (and also the history) as a stage. The new architecture found its goal in that it allowed the centuries old historical architectural torso and ruin to be the center of attraction and at the same time met the need of a modern and functional library. Concretely it can be described as follows: to the original three winged late gothic choir section a new cross section was added from the west side and through which there were added five levels at the north side of the ruin. These new useful areas were, however, only added as a shelving system without cutting into the walls of the ruin. The up to five story new building is statically and architecturally independent. Even the roof of the new building as well as the ruin rest on eaves supported by ring shaped planks and connect old and new constructively. The west side of the building is completed with a renovated gable, which, contrary to the original plan, was not constructed of steel-glass, but rather only a massive stone construction was possible. The north nave took on five work areas, and the large middle nave with the open choir remained open to the ground floor

with an inner height of 19 metres. The open steel-binder construction (Dipl.-Ing. Detlef Böttcher) allows the roof to be fully free, although it is stabilized by a steel construction and at the same time gives the impression of a wooden construction like the one in the original church before the bombing: clearly formulated architectural correspondence.

Similarly designed was also the flooring on the ground floor level. The modern designed heating system under the floor corresponds to the material used: belgian grey or bluestone from the Hennegau region. This is the stone that was used centuries ago to construct gravestones and was the original stone used for the flooring of this church. After describing the north and middle naves the south nave still remains to be mentioned. From the ground floor to the eaves and including a gravesite of the east frisian earls, the upper level houses the offices and seminar rooms. These new facilities are designed especially simply, although these rooms are also open to the ceiling and the steel support beam construction allows the ceilings to blend into the inner roof. The original foundation has already been mentioned. From this foundation branches out the system of levels upon levels with round and steel supports and double-T supports which remain a visible, not concealed construction. Flatly constructed middle ceilings, whose undersides are concealed with trapeze lead coverings and whose outer sides are painted with magnesium coating, refer to the material and form language of the modern industrial construction. This architecture is also matched with the decoration and designed to be functional. Large industrial lighting in the middle nave, in addition to stage spot lighting, and on the various levels vaulted wide range lighting.

The furniture also underlines reduced functionality and practicality. Tables designed by Linea, together with the old danish chair classic from Hansen in black. In this context the simple black shelving matches very well, which elsewhere are only used as magazine shelves. Ten reading places are spread out over two floors, and a separate reading room offers eight further places. Two seminar or lecture rooms, one 55 square metres large, the other 71 square metres allow in connection with the middle nave various types of activities, other rooms can be used for meetings, for example a separate book committee with old volumes. There are ample possibilities for exhibits on the ground floor with table- and free standing vitrines, further enhanced by a built-in collection of vitrines.

3. ONE LIBRARY - THREE FUNCTIONS

Of course the main objective of our project was to build a library, although we use it in different ways and for quite different events.

- a. To start with the library as a library I would like to summarize that we do have approximately 100,000 titles, nearly 10,000 printed before 1800, mostly in 16th and early 17th century. As I already said we just started some years ago to set up a modern library function and organization. To have a valuable book collection does not mean to have a library. And the other point is: up to 1990 the library only had an acquisition budget of 10,000 DM. During the last years we spent some hundred thousands DM every year for recent publications. A PICA-LBS computer system was planned from the beginning. Parallel to the building project the library was connected to the system of the University of Groningen since October 1991. Today we do have a PICA-system within the GBV Göttingen and in cooperation with the University of applied sciences at Emden. A CD-Rom network and a microfilm/microfiche reader-printer is also available. With a digital camera we started to digitalize the 16th century book collection of Albert Hardenberg, a friend of John a Lasco. We get financial support from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and the state of lower Saxony. With financial support of the EU (Interreg-programme) we started to set up a database and online-publishing project for the World Alliance of the Reformed Churches.
- b. An important aspect of our project was not only to have a library in the traditional meaning but to use this as a basis for a research center. The open central nave of the former ruin is an attractive place for meetings. While the library was already opened in November 1995 we could just start in spring 1998 with a conference program. We have our own symposia mostly in the wider field of reformed protestantism or history. Next to this we are hosting conferences from other organizations. The next year we will start a research-program with three departments abreast. An advisory board oversees the policies and projects of the library: The members are recognized in the field of theology or history and are coming from Berlin, Oxford, Zürich, Groningen, Apeldoorn, Münster, Hannover, München.
- c. The open library: Because our meeting facilities are very attractive we offer them for hire to a wider public. This means, not only meetings with a specific academic background are welcome. But also concerts, receptions, vernissages of the Museum for modern art, banquets. All this in the middle of a library, surrounded by books. The former secretary of foreign affairs

Hans Dietrich Genscher opened the exhibition of the Russian paintings from Henri Nannen, a famous German journalist and art collector. Meanwhile all important vernissages of the art-museum bring a lot of people into the library. Also the memorial service for this sponsor of the Emden museum took place in the JAL-Library, even synodal meetings from the reformed church. Reception for firms like Philipps-Petrol, Statoil, Daimler-Chrysler, VW, Commerzbank and many others were important steps to achieve in just a few years a widespread reputation as a unique meeting hall. This year in February we had a meeting from VW with some 600 participants to motivate young people to become entrepreneur. In June 2000 Chancellor Schröder will open a conference to discuss the importance and future of the German maritime industry. Other events are booked up to 2001 like the official opening of the action „Bread for the world”, in Germany an important Protestant organization for development assistance. This will be broadcast by television. And all this happens in a church-library: an open library by all means. This program for events can be regarded as strange or even as a disturbing burden to the core of librarianship and research. In any case it means much work and requires great efforts from all the staff. But on the other hand this policy achieved a wide public acceptance for the church library, a result one shouldn't take granted today. And: the open library opens doors for the library.

4. THE LIBRARY-FOUNDATION

In 1993 the former book collection of the reformed community was reorganized as a foundation or registered charity according to German law. This was a very important step and opened the way for a good development. To the leading committee of the foundation belong representatives of the reformed church, the city of Emden, University of Groningen, the European Leuvenberg Community of Protestant Churches and of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches at Geneva. The general operating costs we have to pay from the rent of the property of the foundation is approximately 500,000 DM each year. For the staffing costs we get an annual contribution from the reformed church amounting to a total of 465,000 DM last year. Whenever and whatever we need more, we have to get as support from the state or the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, the office for unemployment benefit, the EU or private foundations. And we do need more. The main objective for the future of the foundation is very clear: to exploit all possibilities to enlarge the assets to reach the target of a self-supporting library. I feel confident that we will reach it.

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