

**HISTORIC MEDALLION COMMEMORATING THE
500th ANNIVERSARY OF THE REFORMATION:
FROM CONFLICT TO COMMUNION - THE FIRST JOINT COMMEMORA-
TION OF THE REFORMATION - LUTHERANS AND ROMAN CATHOLICS
TOGETHER**



By Frederick J. Schumacher

It is widely known that had it not been for the invention of the printing press around 1440 by Johannes Gutenberg, the posting of Martin Luther's *Ninety-five Theses* on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517, might have ended in nothing more than a theological debate among the scholars and students at the University of Wittenberg. The printing press enabled Luther's Theses to become known as "the hammer blows heard around the world."

What is far less known is that the sixteenth century also witnessed the flowering of new means for striking medals and coins. Artists, sculptors, woodcutters, and other craftsmen could now make these durable miniature pieces of art to propagate the reform of the church creatively through the words of Scripture, symbols, and stories from the life of Luther and events of the Reformation. For a rather low price, the new middle class arising in Europe could collect these objects that were easy to store, display and transport. The expectation was that they would be treasured by future gen-

erations, bringing to remembrance events of which their ancestors were a part.¹ It has been said that not only the printing press spread the Reformation but also the medal and coin press. There was not only to be a printed witness but a striking one also.

Luther has remained through the years a popular subject of numismatic art. So much so that it is estimated that there are now close to four thousand different medals associated with Luther and the Reformation, more than anyone else in history. The earliest medal goes back to 1520 but not all of these medals are favorable to Luther and the Reformation. At the first centennial celebration of the Reformation in 1617 a medal was issued by the Roman Catholics with an image of the sun on one side and the inscription, "The constant age of the church. It shines still after one thousand six hundred and seventeen years without changing." The reverse shows the moon, a symbol of continual changes, and has the words, "The inconsistent novelties of the heresies as they change their form sixteen hundred times in one hundred years." The Jesuit professor Adam Contzen, apparently impressed with this medal, used it on the title page of his book *Jubilum Jubilorum* polished in Mainz in 1618. Under a sketch of the medal he quotes Ecclesiastes 27: 12, "The conversation of the pious is constantly wise, but a fool is as changeable as the moon." He then refers to the constancy of Roman teachings in contrast to the numerous shapes of the faith under the Protestant heretics who cannot even agree with one another. Christian Juncker includes this in his 1706 book on Luther medals (fig.1).²

One medal in my collection that directly attacks Luther is from 1917 in the United States. The obverse has a beautiful portrait of Luther, similar to many Luther medals produced during that year by Lutherans. But this one undoubtedly was sold to unsuspecting Protestants following Reformation rallies during the four-hundredth anniversary year. The purchasers were in for a great surprise when they arrived home, opened the lovely felt-lined box, and turned the medal to the reverse to read a six-line inscription:

¹ Hugo Schnell, *Martin Luther und die Reformation auf Münzen und Medaillen* (Munich: Klinkhardt and Biermann, 1983, 46.

² Christian Juncker; *Die Geschichte der Reformation in Münzen und Medaillen bis zum Jahre 1706* (Nachdruck Karlsruhe, 1982 [1706], 416.

“LUTHER THE SWINE __ A Filthy Mind, A Corrupt Soul, Enemy Of Christ’s Church” (fig.2).

The propaganda was, however, not from one side of the Roman Catholic - Protestant divide. The Jesuit priest, Gretser, writing in 1796 seems to indicate that the Protestants are even more successful in their anti-Roman Catholic medals and coins. He wrote, “There are many ways to bring things to the people and they (referring to the Protestants) have done this by medals and coins, so welcomed by everyone. In this manner these heretics of our time have used not only books, paintings, and statues to make fun of our bishops, cardinals, priests, monks and nuns but our spiritual life as well through the miserable use of coins.”³

In another place Gretser illustrates this by describing a medal that depicts the pope —but when it is rotated 180 degrees, the pope turns into the devil! (fig.3) The reverse shows a cardinal who when rotated becomes a fool or court jester.⁴ (fig. 4). I have four of these medals dating from the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and a very poor copy recently made that I purchased in 2014 at a tourist store at the Wartburg Castle. This medal type is often referred to as reversible or puzzle medals and are easy to come by at very reasonable prices, testifying to the great numbers created and their wide distribution as a means of propaganda.

Another anti-papal medal shows Jesus on the obverse with a dove descending on him indicating he is the Christ and referring to John 1:29. The reverse has an image of devils sitting on the back of the Pope’s head trying to take his tiara off and referring to the anti-Christ of II Thessalonians 2: 3-4 (fig.5).

A very interesting medal commemorating the death of Luther in 1546 has on the obverse his portrait facing right and wearing an academic gown and on the reverse a twelve line inscription in Latin supposedly quoting Luther: “I was your affliction while I was alive. Dying I will be your death, O. Pope”

³ Schnell, 17.

⁴ Ibid, 44.

and referring to Luther, “He died in Eisleben in the year 1546 at the age of 63⁵ (fig. 6).

In an article I wrote for *Lutheran Forum* in 2014 I referred to a medal issued in 1983 by the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau that pointed to a growing appreciation of Luther among Roman Catholic and his being recognized as a theological giant of ecumenical significance who never intended to divide the church. That medal depicted on the obverse Luther facing slightly left in academic gown and doctor’s hat and on the reverse Luther’s rose and a swan swimming reminiscent of the legend regarding Luther referring to himself as the goose (Bohemian for Huss) who was to be burned at the stake and that one day a swan would arise from his ashes. In bold letter the words of Luther, “I Believe THAT THERE IS ON EARTH THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD NO MORE THAN ONE HOLY COMMON CHRISTIAN CHURCH...” (fig. 7). In that article I then wrote, “I hope that in 2017 some church body or organization will design and mint a medal expressive of a joint commemoration by Lutheran and Catholics.”⁶

I cannot begin to express how pleased I am that the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, to best of my knowledge, has fulfilled this hope in creating what I believe is the first positive medal in the history of medals produced by Lutherans and Roman Catholics. The wonder of it all! From wars being fought against one another to the last fifty years of ecumenical dialogue and the growing appreciation of one another’s ministries to the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation — the event that split the Western Church — being commemorating together. Beginning on October 31, 2016, Pope Francis and leaders of the Lutheran World Federation commemorated the beginning of the 500th Commemoration worshipping together in the Swedish Lutheran Cathedral in Lund. Pope Francis even wearing a red stole worn by Lutheran pastors over many years on the Sunday the Reformation has been remembered. A few months later I was deeply moved by seeing a video of Pope Francis hosting a large audience of German young people, both Lutheran and Roman Catholic, asking the Pope questions. When the

⁵ I am indebted to Ralph W. Klein for the translation of this medal and to Kurt Handel for sharing that these words are not known to Luther but as having been credited to him by Philipp Melancthon.

⁶ Frederick J. Schumacher, *Lutheran Forum*, Fall 2014, 61.

questioning by the young people ended the Pope then said to the young people, “I now have a question for you!” His question was “Who is better, Lutherans or Roman Catholics?” There was a long pause with the young people not knowing how to answer. The Pope then said, “They are better when they are together.”

The President of the Lutheran World Federation said recently, “We have begun our irreversible journey from conflict to communion and we do not wish to let it cease ever again.” Pope Francis has affirmed this statement making it even stronger: “We are also called to be on the watch against the temptation of halting along the way. In the spiritual life, as in ecclesial life, whenever we halt, we are turning back.”

On October 31, 2017 the Vatican announced that a stamp would be released on November 23. (fig. 8). One hundred and twenty thousand stamps were issued on that date. They depict Luther and Melanchthon kneeling in prayer at the foot of the cross on which Christ is crucified with the city of Wittenberg in the background.

Design Concept of the Obverse ALPB Medal: From Conflict to Communion - Lutherans and Roman Catholic Together

The 2017 medal depicts Luther in his doctor's robe and hat based on an oil painting by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1529) and holding a book with German inscription on it, HEILIGE SCHRIFT (= Holy Scripture) in his right hand and facing very slightly toward Pope Francis. Francis is wearing a cassock with a short shoulder cape (pellegrina) and pectoral cross with image of Christ standing from the center of the cross to the bottom holding a lamb over his shoulders and filling the cross bar behind him with numerous sheep to his left and right. At the top of the cross there is a descending dove, symbolizing the Holy Spirit.



Above Luther's shoulder on the left is his crest (coat-of-arms or rose) that he designed and said was a compendium of his theology: The cross set on the heart reminded him that faith in the crucified Christ

saves us. The heart placed on the rose shows that faith brings joy, comfort and peace into bloom, and the ring around the seal attests that in Christ we will live eternally.

Above Pope Francis' shoulder on the right is his coat-of-arms. In descending order at the top is a three leveled headpiece called a mitre which Francis and his predecessor, Benedict XVI, preferred over the traditional papal tiara. Below the mitre are two keys, symbols of St. Peter, and then the emblem of the Jesuits (Francis' order) of a shining sun within which IHS (first three letters in Greek for Christ) is over a cross and toward the bottom a star and branch of spikenard, symbols respectively of St. Mary and St. Joseph. Spikenard is a plant from which ointment for making perfume is taken (Matthew 26: 7-9, Mark 14: 3-8, John 12: 3).



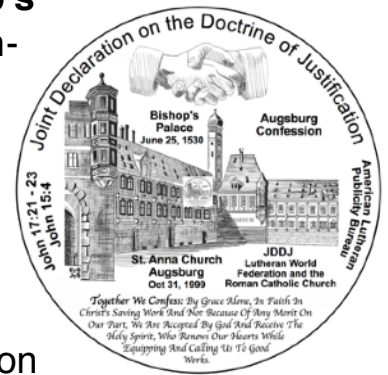
Above the heads of Luther and Pope Francis in a circle is a dove, symbolic of the Holy Spirit, descending upon them, and here being reminiscent of part of Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed in his *Small Catechism*, that it is the Third Person of the Holy Trinity that "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church... ."

To the right of the dove is the date **OCT. 31/ 2016**, and between the two of them the words **Lund / Sweden**, the location of the Lutheran Cathedral where Pope Francis with representatives of worldwide Lutheranism and the Roman Catholic Church marked the beginning of the yearlong Lutheran - Roman Catholic Commemoration of the Reformation expressed in the encircling inscription: **FROM CONFLICT TO COMMUNION / The First Joint Commemoration of the Reformation // 2016 // 2017 // Lutheran and Roman Catholics Together.**

Below the images of Luther and Pope Francis are two olive branches joined at the center with a bow. Olive branches on medals have always symbolized peace and reconciliation.

**Design Concept of the Reverse:
The Issue That Divided the Church Resolved in 1999 Agreement**

In the center of the medal is a 1530 drawing of the **Bishop's Palace** in the German City of Augsburg that divides two important documents presented in this city involving Lutherans and Roman Catholics. Above the palace the date **June 25, 1530** and name of the Lutheran document, the **Augsburg Confession**. On that date and place the Augsburg Confession, written by Philipp Melanchthon, was presented to the Emperor Charles V by seven Lutheran princes and two imperial free cities. The Confession contained thirty-five articles with the first twenty-one articles setting forth that the followers of Luther did not dissent to any articles of faith from Catholic teaching. The remaining seven articles outline abuses that had come to the Western church in the centuries immediately preceding the Reformation. On August 3 the Roman Catholic Church replied with a rebuttal rejecting thirteen of the articles and on September 22 a written reply of rejection by Rome was given to the Lutherans called the *Confutation*. On that same day the Emperor refused to accept the Lutheran response and the Lutheran Church came into existence followed by wars and bitterness over the centuries.



Below the 1530 image of the Bishop's Palace in Augsburg, in that very same city there are the words, **St. Anna Church** (built in 1521 as a Roman Catholic Church and later became Lutheran in 1545) and the significant Reformation date of **October 31** but this time in **1999**. It was in this church where some 50 years of theological dialogue bore significant fruit in a new document signed by representatives of the **Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church** called the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ). The primary theological issue that resulted in the Reformation and separation of the two churches was resolved in the agreement: **Together We Confess: By Grace Alone, In Faith In Christ's Saving Work And Not Because Of Any Merit On Our Part, We Are Accepted By God And Receive The Holy Spirit, Who Renews Our Hearts While Equipping And Calling Us To Good Works.**(JDDJ, paragraph 15).

Above the palace there are two hands reaching out to clasp each other, symbolizing friendship, and perhaps one day full unity. (A medal from 1855 commemorating the 300th Anniversary of the Peace of Augsburg has a similar image.)

Encircling the medal is the inscription: **Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification / John 17:21 - 23 / John 15: 4 // American Lutheran / Publicity Bureau.**

At the far left side of the palace immediately under the open door in the gate, ETS / JTS (= signatures of the artists).

While the concept and design for this medallion came from Frederick J. Schumacher, the drawings of the obverse and reverse were by his grandchildren, Emma Tomiko Schumacher, 15 years old, with John Taylor Schumacher, 17 years old. It is their hope that someday they will be able to receive Holy Communion with their friends in the Roman Catholic Church. The designer of this medal is hopeful that this day will come during their lifetimes.

Medal Produced by New Orleans Mint, Inc. New Orleans, LA. Mintage: 170 total medallions = 85 antique bronze (5 with loops) ; 50 antique silver (5 with loops); 10 silver matte (4 with loops); 25 gold matte (4 with loops). For more information go to ALPB.org.

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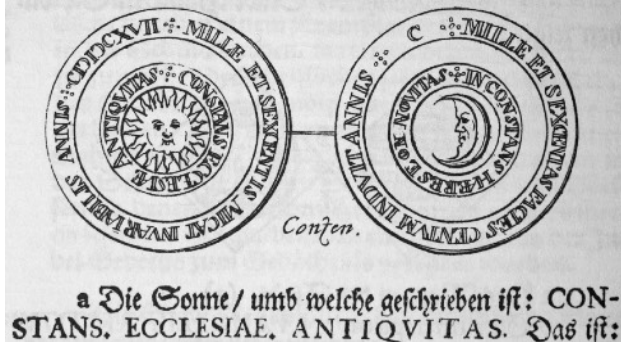


fig. 1



fig. 2



fig. 3



fig. 4



fig. 5



fig. 6



fig. 7



fig. 8