Chapter 3

Jewish Immigrants, Freedom of Religion, and the Anger of the Bishops

The Orthodoxy of the Seventeenth Century

Orthodoxy and Absolute Monarchy

The Luther Centennial of 1617, marking the day (October 31, 1517) that Luther posted his ninety-five theses, was a spectacular celebration of the exceptional position the Lutheran confession had in Denmark. During the next year, every resident of foreign extraction had to appear and take a vow according to the Fremmedartikler or alien laws of 1569, acknowledging the true Lutheran faith and denying all other faiths. In 1619 a binding vow, that is, a vow to abide by Luther’s Small Catechism, the Augsburg Confession and the creeds of the early Church had to be taken by all clergymen of the Church. A few years later, the same demand was made of all the professors at the university, not only the professors of theology. When absolute monarchy was established in 1660, the monarch also became the head of the Church, while spiritual authority belonged to the clerics. The Royal Law of 1665 stated that it was the duty of the king and his subjects to worship the one and only true God in the correct, that is, the Lutheran way as formulated in the Augsburg Confession of 1530. In a thousand-page work in Latin, Jus Regium [Law of the realm] (1663–1672), professor of theology Hans Wandal provided an explanation of the new form of government and of the king’s duty to oppose other notions.40

Judaism and Jews in Academic and Popular Literature

It was during this early period of Lutheran orthodoxy that Denmark had its very first encounter with Jews, and the government made wide-ranging decisions about the admittance of Jews to the country. As early as the beginning of the seventeenth century, the University of Copenhagen obtained a book by the German Jew, Christian Gerson (1567–1622), who had converted to Christianity. In this book Gerson explained why making Jews into Christians had been so unsuccessful, and he suggested that Jews be met with kindness; they should

40 Lausten, Church History of Denmark, 121. 127–133.
hearing sermons and discussions instead of abuse and invective. He also suggested that Christian missionaries to the Jews be educated in the Talmud. Unfortunately, we can no longer discover how the university professors reacted to the book, because the relevant pages in the records of the university’s consistory are completely blank.41

Extensive academic studies of the Hebrew language and of Judaism were begun by German and Danish theologians in the seventeenth century. Most of their books were published in Latin, so the number of lay Christians and Jews who could read them was limited. The authors of the many books, dissertations, and articles had purely academic interests, but some also had polemical and missionary goals. The Sabbath of the Jews was attacked as blasphemy, as were their marriage rules and their view of Jesus. In this context, there was reference to the piece by Luther, On the Jews and Their Lies. Many of these ‘results of scholarship’ became well known by theology students and were echoed in their sermons years later. Interest in the Hebrew language grew in the late sixteenth century and continued into the seventeenth. Grammar books, text books, and numerous printed exercises for learning Hebrew were published. An indication of the strength of Danish interest in Hebrew was the decision of the consistory of the university in 1598 to permit the university press to buy Hebrew type in Wittenberg. Hans Poulsen Resen (1561–1638) became professor of theology in 1597 and Bishop of Zealand in 1615. In 1597 he was among the first accomplished Hebrew scholars. He suggested that Hebrew be introduced into the Latin schools as a subject, and in 1607, he undertook a revision of the Danish Bible based on the Hebrew text. He was followed by series of accomplished Hebraists. The first book to be printed in Hebrew type was a grammar by Cort Aslaksson (1606).42

Niels Pedersen Aurilesius produced something close to a modern textbook for learning Hebrew in 1628.43 He had several characters conduct conversations in everyday situations. Their lines are written in Hebrew and translated,