

This is an electronic reprint of the original article. This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

The Reformation and the university church in Leipzig

Groop, Kim

Published in:
Approaching Religion

DOI:
[10.30664/ar.126047](https://doi.org/10.30664/ar.126047)

Published: 01/09/2023

Document Version
Final published version

Document License
CC BY

[Link to publication](#)

Please cite the original version:

Groop, K. (2023). The Reformation and the university church in Leipzig: Uses of the past to support the rebuilding of disputed religious heritage. *Approaching Religion*, 13(2). <https://doi.org/10.30664/ar.126047>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.


Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

The Reformation and the university church in Leipzig

Uses of the past to support the rebuilding of disputed religious heritage

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30664/ar.126047>

 Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

 VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD
PEER-REVIEWED
www.tsv.fi/tunnus

The purpose of this article is to investigate how memory activists from 2008 onwards used the past in their advocacy work for the restoration of the university church in Leipzig. The Paulinerkirche was built as a Dominican monastery church in the first half of the thirteenth century. In 1545, shortly after the Reformation had reached Leipzig, it was reconsecrated by Martin Luther and became the first Protestant university church in Germany. Following the demands of the GDR state, it was destroyed in 1968. In writings, demonstrations and speeches, advocates of church rebuilding made use of the Reformation, but also of other tropes in the local history to draw attention to their cause. The goal was not to create a new Reformation site; rather, the aim was to compel the university leadership to abandon its goal to build a multi-purpose value-neutral assembly hall and instead honour its cultural and religious heritage, undo some of the damage done in 1968 and allow the return of the university church.

Introduction

The city of Leipzig has a website entitled ‘Luther Landmarks in Leipzig’. On this site, the city pinpoints twelve so-called Luther sites. These are locations of varying importance relating to Luther and the Protestant Reformation; for example, locations that the reformer visited, and museums with art and objects relating to Luther and the Reformation. Some of these landmarks in Leipzig date back to Luther’s time, while others have ceased to exist or

have been rebuilt. One of the places on the list is a very modern building, inaugurated as late as 2017: the Paulinum-Aula und Universitätskirche St. Pauli (Paulinum assembly hall and university church of St Paul, henceforth shortened to the Paulinum) (Luther Landmarks in Leipzig n.d.).

In this article, I wish to draw attention not only to Martin Luther but the Reformation at large seen through Leipzig University’s previous church, which I call by its German name, the Paulinerkirche, and its successor, the Paulinum. The Socialist Unity Party (Die Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED) in the German Democratic Republic despised the Paulinerkirche, regarding it as incompatible with the socialist direction that the then Karl Marx University had taken. On 23 May 1968, the Leipzig city council decided to demolish the church, and one week later, the Paulinerkirche was blown up. Shortly after, the neighbouring main campus building, the Augusteum, was demolished. A new university main building in Soviet modernist style was built instead and it was furnished with a massive bronze relief depicting Karl Marx, amongst others (Fitschen 2009: 636–41). As an extension of the peace prayers organised in the

Nikolaikirche (St Nicholas Church), large numbers of citizens demonstrated in 1989 for increased rights, and these demonstrations would eventually lead to the fall of the Berlin Wall (Lohmann 1994: 67–71). After the German reunification (1990), the university wanted to reshape its campus and many Leipzig citizens hoped to be able to rebuild the university church. However, the university leadership was not interested in building a church and demanded that the State of Saxony invested its money in a practical multi-use building instead. The fallen university church was to be commemorated through a plaque telling the story of its destruction, and part of the artwork from the old church was to be displayed in the new campus building. Moreover, the university was prepared to build a worship room, but under no circumstances should a church be built (Universität Leipzig

2008; Wolff 2012: 163). Since its foundation in 1992, the Paulinerverein (Pauliner Society) had promoted the rebuilding of the destroyed university church and the Augusteum (Ziele des Paulinervereins n.d.). While public opinion seemed not to favour an *original* rebuilding of the church – not least for the fact that there were no original parts to use in such a rebuilding – the support for the rebuilding of the church in a more modern fashion was considerable (Lotz 1993; Orbeck 2003). Ultimately, the university had no option but to surrender to public and political pressure and accept the building of the Paulinum – a church and assembly hall with a strong resemblance to the old university church, but with a distinctly modern appearance.

My focus in what follows is neither on the Paulinerkirche as a piece of destroyed religious cultural heritage nor on the

Concord, 2012 (Wikimedia Commons, CC BY SA 3.0)



The Paulinum – Assembly Hall and University Church of St. Paul and the New Augusteum.

Paulinum as a new creation. Rather, I want to draw attention to memory activism (Gutman and Wüstenberg 2023) and the uses of the past by those who fought to have the university church rebuilt and to compel the university to restore the university church to its historic site. In other words, I wish to address the strategies used by the activists in their arguments. In their campaign, activists used events and ideas from the Reformation, but tropes from the turbulent twentieth century, such as the history of the struggle in and against the GDR regime, also had a central place. The activists were a motley crew, but many of them were members of the Paulinerverein and had personal memories of the Paulinerkirche. As the activism discussed in this article took place between 2008 and 2022, after the construction of the Paulinum had started, they had already abandoned their initial goal to build a replica of the Paulinerkirche. Rather, they wanted to ensure that the Paulinum being built did not turn solely into a church-like assembly hall, as the university wanted, but into the new university church with as much resemblance as possible to its predecessor.

Theoretical considerations

I employ the terms ‘uses of the past’, ‘memory’ and ‘heritage’. While these concepts have developed largely independently, they also represent overlapping themes. As the term reveals, using the past typically refers to the employing of history for various purposes. The past may be used, for instance, to achieve commercial, political or religious goals (Aronsson 2004). Like any usage directed at achieving a desired outcome, it tends to be highly selective and at times manipulative. As for memory, or more specifically collective memory, I subscribe to Jan Assmann’s

definition and distinguish between temporally distant cultural memory and more recent communicative memory (Assmann 2017). Memory reaches beyond a more formal understanding of history as (the study of) the past in the sense that it is of particular importance for the identity of the collective. Martin Luther’s sermon, turning the former monastery church into a university church, and Johann Sebastian Bach’s activity as a director of music in the Paulinerkirche are both central elements in the university’s cultural memory and are frequently celebrated through speeches, sermons, texts and music. Furthermore, the destruction of the Paulinerkirche on 30 May 1968, but also life and political repression in the GDR and the peaceful demonstrations in 1989, are part of the communicative memory. Not everybody campaigning for the university church had personally experienced the destruction, oppression or demonstrations (or even any of these), but they are nonetheless recent enough to be vividly spoken about – or collectively remembered. Finally, with regard to heritage, in this article, I refer to both tangible and intangible heritage. Like Rodney Harrison, I refer to heritage as objects, places and practices offering a relationship with the past (Harrison 2012: 14). Thereby, heritage also intersects with memory and history. A historical composer like Bach, being an immaterial cultural (or religious) heritage and being celebrated as cultural memory can be regarded as two sides of the same coin. The Paulinerkirche had been listed as a protected building since 1961 yet was destroyed nonetheless. In this case, the church as material heritage vanished but the memory lived on – as did part of the (material) heritage through the rescuing of most of the art objects, such as the late-medieval Pauliner altar, and the (immaterial) tradition of university worship ser-

vices. For, as the conservator and head of the Institute for Preservation (Institut für Denkmalpflege) in Dresden, Hans Nadler, pointed out to Rector Georg Müller in 1963 in an attempt to save the university church, not only was the church itself heritage, but also the unbroken tradition of university worship since 1710 (Hütter 1993: viii–xi).

The Reformation and the Paulinerkirche

In the history of the Reformation, Leipzig is particularly notable for the Leipzig Debate of 1519, where Martin Luther and his colleague Andreas Karstadt debated ecclesiastical issues with Andreas Eck. However, Leipzig was central to the Reformation in other ways too. The reformers in nearby Wittenberg had their gaze set steadily at Leipzig – a town with which Luther had a love-hate relationship. Disappointed with the outcome of the Leipzig Debate, he called it a town of mammon and greed, and he later compared it bitterly with Sodom and Gomorrah. In 1539, however, Luther was in a more celebratory mood when he preached in the Thomaskirche (the St Thomas Church) and introduced religious reforms in Leipzig (Rudersdorf 2009: 335–52). The reformers also had their gaze on the university in Leipzig, which had long and stubbornly resisted reform. Philipp Melanchthon was highly influential in the reform of the university. On his recommendations, progressive individuals like Caspar Böhner and Joachim Camerarius were chosen for central positions at the university. The Dominican monastery and its Paulinerkirche were at the heart of the church struggle. Not only was it the spiritual home of the famous indulgence preacher Johann Tetzel until his death in 1519, but the monastery was also the venue for pre-Reformation consultations in Leipzig. In 1534 and 1539, Melanchthon had been actively involved in religious dia-

logue in the monastery. The talks did not lead to unity between the Catholic delegates and the reformers, but when Leipzig turned Protestant shortly after the second round of talks, the Dominican monastery was already familiar to the reformers. Shortly after the monastery had been closed and its Paulinerkirche had been secularised, Duke Moritz of Saxony donated the premises to the university (Rudersdorf 2009: 355–67; Seifert 1883: 152–7).

‘Stätte der Reformation’ – Reformation sites

In the Reformation year of 2017, the Paulinerverein published a booklet entitled ‘Stätte der Reformation: Universitätskirche St. Pauli zu Leipzig’ (Stätte der Reformation 2017). In this booklet, the Paulinerverein draws attention to the Leipzig Debate of 1519 and Luther’s speech in the Thomaskirche in 1539 on the occasion of the implementation of the Reformation in Leipzig. The key task of the booklet, however, was not to shed light on the Reformation but to identify the Paulinerkirche as a Reformation site. The booklet takes the reader from the consecration of the Dominican church in 1240 to the destruction of the Paulinerkirche in 1968. It explores the connection between Martin Luther, the monastery and the Paulinerkirche. Because of Tetzel, Luther’s relationship with the monastery had started before he hammered the 95 theses onto the door of the monastery church in Wittenberg. In fact, it was Tetzel’s sermons on indulgence that made Luther write his theses. Luther and Tetzel wrote hostile exchanges, but also one or two rather friendly letters, to each other between 1517 and 1519, namely from when Tetzel started actively preaching indulgences in the archdioceses of Mainz and Magdeburg and until his death two years later. The booklet takes the reader through the secularisation

of the monastery in 1539, how Duke Moritz donated it to the university, and how it was subsequently adopted for academic use as an assembly hall, or 'Aula'. On 10 October 1543, the university inaugurated the space through a doctoral defence. The reformers Caspar Cruciger and Paul Eber were honorary guests, sent by Philipp Melanchthon as emissaries from Wittenberg University. The booklet draws attention to Martin Luther's most central contribution to the Paulinerkirche: his sermon on 12 August 1545. This occasion has later come to be regarded as the official reconsecration of the secularised Paulinerkirche as an evangelical worship room and a university church. The booklet cites a small segment of Luther's sermon:

There was indeed a fine political leadership [among the Jewish people] and many wise people at Jerusalem [Annas, Caiaphas, plus 72 princes in the council, who ruled wisely and led a proper regiment according to the Law of Moses], but see what they do. They are blind and crucify the one who is to redeem them from eternal death. Here too there are many learned and intelligent people, doctors, lawyers, etc. But when Christ comes and kindly knocks, and lets His Word [which proclaims to us forgiveness of sins and eternal life] be preached to them, they do not want to hear it, but cry [and say], Away, [beat this teacher to death]! (Stätte der Reformation 2017; Luther 12.8.1545. The words in parenthesis were omitted from Luther's original sermon. My translation.)

The quoting of this passage from the sermon is interesting. Luther had made use of a contemporary negative image of the Jews, who despite their 'fine political

leadership and many wise people' refused God's gift to humankind and instead crucified Jesus. The reformer applied this negative image to the 'fine' and 'wise' Catholic Christians of his time, who did not want to hear the word. The passage in the booklet can be interpreted as the Paulinerverein highlighting a similarity between the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and the leadership of Leipzig University. Just as the Jews refused to listen to Jesus and crucified him instead, and the Catholics of Luther's time did not want to hear the words of Christ but cried 'away', so the university in the 1960s as well as in the twenty-first century rejected the university church. Implicitly, the Paulinerverein draws parallels between the university church and the 'word'; the Christian church and the message that it represented was undesirable in both the socialist university and the value-neutral university of 2017.

The Paulinerverein booklet calls attention to the many graves in the old university church (Stätte der Reformation 2017). Until the late eighteenth century when the practice of burying the dead under the church floor was abolished, an estimated 800 individuals were laid to rest in the Paulinerkirche. Among them were Dominican monks, university rectors and professors, and people from the nobility. Their grave epitaphs made the church choir a dramatic memory gallery. After the destruction in 1968, the authors point out, the graves were destroyed, looted and taken away with the church rubble. The booklet presents three individuals previously buried in the Paulinerkirche that were of particular relevance for the Reformation. Elisabeth von Sachsen died in 1484 – in other words before the Reformation. However, she was the mother of Frederick III (Frederick the Wise), who supported and later rescued Martin Luther and took him to the

Wartburg castle. The aforementioned Luther antagonist Johann Tetzel, who died in 1519, was probably buried in the chancel. However, due to the Schmalkaldic War of 1546–7, the wall around Leipzig had to be rebuilt and the chancel was modified. It is unknown what happened to Tetzel's grave. The booklet simply notes that it was no longer preserved. The third person to be mentioned is Martin Luther's youngest son, Paul Luther, who was brought to rest in the Paulinerkirche in 1593. The booklet notes that early on he became a part of the work of the Reformation when, together with his brothers Hans and Martin, he accompanied his father on his last journey to Eisleben. Paul Luther was not a theologian but on the advice of Philipp Melanchthon, he decided to study medicine and would become a court physician for many royals.

Paul Luther and the destiny of the graves were also in the limelight when, in 2021, the Paulinerverein published an open information letter for the Reformation Day (Information des Paulinervereins zum Reformationstag 2021). The letter was published on the society's web page and distributed to individuals with interest and influence; it was one of at least three documents written and distributed that year on the same theme (Liebehenschel 2021; Universitätskirche St. Pauli zu Leipzig 2021). In the information letter, the Paulinerverein again drew attention to the desecration of the graves in 1968. This time, the society demanded that the university pay tribute to Luther and others who had been buried under the Paulinerkirche through a detailed commemorative plaque in the university church.

According to the Paulinerverein, Elisabeth von Sachsen, Johann Tetzel and Paul Luther were examples of people who had been buried in the Paulinerkirche and had a direct relevance to the Reformation. One

could argue that the Paulinerverein had a rather weak case since none of them was a reformer. Elisabeth had passed away a year after Luther was born, Tetzel was Luther's antagonist and Paul Luther was (merely) the son of the reformer. Neither the booklet nor the open letter mentions the first Protestant rector, Caspar Böhner, who was 'reforming' the university and who was close to both Luther and Melanchthon. This does not mean that Böhner was not considered important in the Reformation history of the university. Rather, he was probably not as interesting for the case that the Paulinerverein was building, given that his epitaph already had a central position in the chancel of the Paulinum. Elisabeth von Sachsen, Johann Tetzel and Paul Luther were examples of famous people whose memory the university had failed to acknowledge. They were famous personified examples of the university's shortcomings regarding the visibility of its own history and close enough to the Reformation not to be ignored. However, creating a new Reformation site was not the main purpose of the Paulinerverein; rather, the texts should be seen in the context of a larger effort to restore a university church that carried a Lutheran heritage but that also went back beyond the Reformation. Therefore, von Sachsen, Tetzel and Luther are to be regarded as characters employed in a tactical game to compel the university to bring the Paulinum closer to the tradition of the Paulinerkirche.

'Leipzigs dritte Bachstätte' - the third Bach site in Leipzig

In addition (or as an extension) to his position as cantor in the Leipzig Thomaskirche, Johann Sebastian Bach was also director of music in the university church from 1723 until he died in 1750. He did not have responsibility for the 'new worship ser-

vices' conducted every Sunday and religious holiday since 1710. However, he catered musically for the traditional 'old worship services', held from the sixteenth century on Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and Reformation day, and for other occasional services, not least funeral services (Spitta 1880: 36–50; Williams 2007: 174–6, 320). Bach has often been regarded as the musical extension of Luther. While the Paulinerverein regarded the Paulinum as a Reformation site, still in 2015 it did not consider the Paulinum as a Bach site. 'This is a completely new building,' said the founding member Martin Helmstedt in an interview, 'Bach was never here and therefore it cannot become a new Bach site' (Stötzner and Helmstedt 2015, interview). By 2022, the Paulinerverein had reconsidered its position on Bach and published a booklet titled 'Leipzigs dritte Bachstätte' (Leipzig's third Bach site), which it sent to members and friends for Christmas (Leipzigs dritte Bachstätte: Universitätskirche St. Pauli zu Leipzig 2022). Like the Reformation booklet five years earlier, the Bach booklet was also published on the society's web page. The booklet does not outline Bach's activity in the Paulinerkirche but offers some insights into it. The composer's inspection of the new organ in 1717 is mentioned but also two of his compositions that were premiered in the Paulinerkirche. The connection between Bach and Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy is also explored, namely how Mendelssohn gave rise to a Bach renaissance and how Mendelssohn's relationship to Bach was represented musically at his funeral service in the Paulinerkirche in 1847. The booklet further sketches how the Paulinerkirche developed into a centre for choir music under the leadership of renowned cantors and composers such as Johann Schelle, Johann Kuhnau, Max Reger, Robert Köbler and Hans Joachim Rottzsch.

With the destruction of the university church, writes the Paulinerverein, the university choir lost its traditional venue (the church and the worship service), and only after the peaceful revolution in 1989 could the university choir resume its participation in the academic worship services, relocated to the nearby Nikolaikirche. Finally, the brochure describes the favourable development of university music under productive musical leaders after the reunification.

This post-GDR creativity culminated in the 'recommissioning of the university church', as the Paulinerverein described the consecration of the Paulinum in 2017.¹ In a somewhat unproblematic way, the Paulinerverein seems to regard the Paulinum as a church consecrated by Luther, later destroyed by the GDR regime, and a site of memory at the same time.² While this can be taken as symbolic use of language, it also demonstrates the firm determination of the society to quench tendencies to regard the Paulinum as plainly a new multi-purpose and value-neutral assembly hall. This also seems to be supported

- 1 The original text reads as follows: 'Die Wiederindienstnahme der Universitätskirche St. Pauli wurde am 3. Dezember 2017 festlich begangen. So erhielt die Universität Leipzig fünfzig Jahre nach der Sprengung mit einem Neubau ihr geistig-geistliches Zentrum zurück.' Leipzigs dritte Bachstätte: Universitätskirche St. Pauli zu Leipzig 2022.
- 2 The text in the booklet reads: 'Die neue Universitätskirche St. Pauli ist ein Erinnerungsort: 1545 wurde die Kirche durch Martin Luther zur evangelischen Universitätskirche geweiht, 1968 ließ das DDR-Regime die Universitätskirche sprengen. Im inneren der 2017 als Neubau wiedereingeweihten Universitätskirche wurde eine Adaption der spätgotischen Hallenkirche mit Kreuzgewölbe und Orgelempore geschaffen.' Leipzigs dritte Bachstätte: Universitätskirche St. Pauli zu Leipzig 2022.

by the fact that the booklet mentions the bishop's consecration on 3 December 2017, but omits the university's inauguration two days earlier. The Paulinum (and not only the previous Paulinerkirche) was therefore still regarded as a Reformation site. Adding the Paulinum to the list of Bach sites was only a development of a conscious strategy of advocacy.

A demonstration, 'Five Leipzig Theses' and a speech

In 2008, the Paulinerverein teamed up with other friends of the university church and made use of a well-known Reformation theme. In an open letter directed at the 'friends of historic justice', Reverend Christian Führer organised a demonstration after the university worship service in the Nikolaikirche (Führer 2008). Christian Führer was a celebrity, known as the initiator of the peaceful prayers that gave birth to the peaceful demonstrations in 1989. His renewed call for demonstrations

gathered attention nationwide (WELT 2008). What Führer demanded was the same as the Paulinerverein: the return of the university church, with an altar and pulpit but without a glass wall. The pulpit and glass wall were particularly contentious: the university had decided to install a transparent glass wall or door between the chancel and the main hall, thereby enhancing the multi-purpose use of the space but also giving rise to a museum climate in the chancel and for its works of art. Critics said that this was simply a move to ensure the neutral integrity of the assembly hall – in other words, to make sure that the sacred in the chancel did not seep into the secular assembly hall (Bohl 2008). As for the baroque pulpit by Valentin Schwarzenberger (from 1738), the university deemed it too religious to be placed in this secular assembly hall. To Führer, the Paulinerverein and many others, the pulpit was the ultimate vehicle of the free word – a result of the Reformation. And to the same activists, the

Christian Jonas, Paulinerverein



Demonstration on 30 May 2008. From the left: Rev. Christian Führer, Rev. Gerd Mücke, Dr. Ulrich Stötzner, Dr. Stefan Welzk, and Martina Gerhardt.

glass wall was ‘unchurchly’ and a kind of division they believed that they had already rid themselves of when the Berlin wall fell. While Führer used his good reputation for what he saw as a good cause, the demonstrations reinforced the tensions between the university and the university church. Moreover, the demonstrations sent nationwide signals that once again a secular political system was oppressing the citizens and their beliefs.

On Reformation day later the same year, the ‘New University Church of St Paul’ movement (Die Neue Universitätskirche St. Pauli) organised a large event with the posting of ‘Five Leipzig theses’ (Fünf Leipziger Thesen). This was an action initiated by the president of the Leipzig Regional Council, Walter Christian Steinbach, but with many members from the Paulinerverein (Stötzner und Steinbach 2008; Wolff 2012: 169–70). The five theses were presented as demands according to the following (my translation and additions in parenthesis):

1. The rebuilding of the university church as a location of ‘the free word’ (as opposed to a multi-function university complex with a focus on academic needs);
2. The unrestricted threefold use of ‘the university church’ for worship, academia and music (as opposed to the university’s view that the Paulinum was predominantly an academic assembly hall, albeit with a worship room in the choir);
3. The building should be named University Church of St Paul (as opposed to the more neutral Paulinum);
4. The removal of the glass wall between the chancel and the assembly hall (as opposed to the university’s sharp separation between sacred and secular spaces);

5. The installation of the altar and the pulpit (as opposed to the university’s resistance to these objects’ placement, fearing that they would turn the space into a church) (2008).

The key difference in opinion and agenda was the interpretative prerogative of the space. In other words: should the use of the Paulinum predominantly be determined by the university according to its need for a future-oriented hybrid and value-neutral space or should it be predominantly a university church, as it was in the past, with worship, academic functions and music?

In 2017 – the Reformation year – the chair of the Paulinerverein, Ulrich Stötzner, held a speech on behalf of the 49th anniversary of the demolition of the Paulinerkirche. He said:

This university church is also a place of the Reformation. It is no longer the old surrounding walls between which the Dominicans walked – among them Johann Tetzel. But we have the altar where Martin Luther stood. We have the chancel again, where the coffin of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy stood on 7 November 1847. We have the pulpit from which Nathan Söderblom, Hans Bardke, Dedo Müller, Ernst Sommerlath, Pater Gordian, Siegfried Schmutzler and Heinz Wagner preached. At the place where the Scheibe organ stood, where Georg Trexler and Kurt Grahl were forcibly prevented from playing on 24 May 1968, we now have a new three-manual Jehmlich organ. It is the location of this history, with an exterior that reminds us of what has been lost, and with an interior with almost the same dimensions [as the old church]. (Stötzner 2017, my translation)

Ulrich Stötzner's speech here exhibits the same tendencies that I noted regarding the Paulinerverein's Bach booklet (Leipzigs dritte Bachstätte: Universitätskirche St. Pauli zu Leipzig 2022). In line with his society's principles, he presented the Paulinum as the university church and not the Paulinum. The Paulinerverein consequently spoke only about the university church – a church for worship, academia and music. In Stötzner's speech, the past and the present blend – despite the 49 years between the destruction in 1968 and the reconsecration in 2017. While the surrounding walls of the Dominican friars had been lost, he still regarded the university church as a Reformation site. It had 'the altar where Luther stood' in the chancel that had been the scene of many famous events and characters. The destroyed main organ had been replaced by a new one. And for once, the pulpit was not lamented. Rather it was presented as a part of a restoration narrative from which many famous German theologians (and one Swede) had preached the word and brought meaning to this location during the turbulent twentieth century.

More than the Reformation

The campaign of the Paulinerverein and other church activists was directly linked to the agenda of the university. In 1994, two years after the foundation of the Paulinerverein, Rector Cornelius Weiss expressed his doubts about the aims of the society. He described how the Paulinerkirche had been predominantly a 'spiritual centre', thereby signalling its incongruity with the character of the university, asserting that he did not believe 'that a new building for perhaps a billion marks would be embraced in the same way again' (Helmstedt 2015: 81). Though Weiss had a good relationship with the Paulinerverein

and on several occasions expressed his resentment over the destruction of the university church, he did not think it would be appropriate to rebuild it. Rather, the university, as declared in an official report, would designate a (smaller) part of the future campus as a place of worship for the faculty of theology and the university parish. The new campus would also host (at least part of) the artworks from the old church and other campus buildings (Topfstedt 2009: 571–2). The activists and the press often portrayed the university leadership as inflexible, blind to history and afraid of its church (Wolff 2012: 165–76; Finger 2008). Indeed, some of the campaigning reinforced this impression, and at times, as seen in the Reformation booklet, the proponents of the university church made accusatory comparisons with the university of the 1960s. To some extent, the criticism of the university leaders was misplaced or exaggerated, for it was legally problematic for the state to finance the building of a church. Yet the university's unwillingness to break with its principle of value neutrality also indicates a problematic relationship with religion, and thus also with its past, and it distanced the university from its own cultural and religious heritage. Following Cyril Isnart and Nathalie Cerezales, who note that works of art placed in a museum gain exhibition value while losing their cult value, the university was proud of its heritage but found it easier to relate to it as art than as a cult object. (Isnart and Cerezales 2020: 1). It was determined to put part of the works of art from the Paulinerkirche on display. It was also committed to the university parish, which Nadler had already in 1963 stressed as a part of intangible heritage, and promised it a worship room, but it did not want a new university church.

Despite activists' fears that Christianity would be neglected in the university's

new campus, the opposite happened. The still-active university congregation was determined to resume regular services on campus and wanted to use artefacts from the old university church. Even more, however, the return of the university church to campus was a result of the advocacy work of the Paulinerverein and other activist organisations and individuals. In a speech in 2018, the chairman of the Paulinerverein, Ulrich Stötzner, demonstrated how much his zeal was driven by traumatic memories.

We stood by the site fence every afternoon for a week, silent, grieving, angry, powerless. We had no banners. We were not taken [*zugeführt*] unlike so many others. ... I saw the collapsing building from Goldschmidtstraße. First, the bell tower disappeared, then the ridge turret buckled, and lastly the *Rosbach* façade fell. I have never forgotten this image. (Stötzner 2018, my translation)

The booklets, demonstrations and speeches presented above all demonstrate the painful memory of dramatic events and loss under communist rule. This was a memory of deep and systematised political oppression, culminating in the annihilation of organised Christianity and material church heritage at the university. Furthermore, they demonstrate an experience of continued powerlessness towards the university after the reunification – a university with a pragmatic agenda to build a functioning and value-neutral campus. At the same time as the university church activists experienced the personal memories (what Jan Assmann has termed ‘communicated memory’) as traumatic, the more distant cultural memory was less problematic. For instance, the fact that the actual pulpit that Luther preached from had been

replaced by Schwarzenberger’s art piece in 1738 has been little mourned.

In this article, I have regarded uses of the past – or the Reformation – in activism. No matter what the Paulinerverein or any other stakeholders said or did, it was not a primary goal to turn the Paulinum into a Reformation site. Rather the Reformation narrative was used alongside other momentous episodes in history to reinstate an old university church institution and thereby take back something that had been wrongfully ‘stolen’. By stressing the centrality of the university church as a Reformation site, and later also Bach site, the Paulinerverein tried to evoke the power of cultural memory and force the university to back away from its anti-church position. The agenda was clear. The Paulinum was to be a new university church, and to reach this objective a variety of tools and uses of the past were employed.

As in the past – as most campaigners wished – the new university church would serve as a site for worship, academia and music. It would harbour tangible heritage, like the Pauliner altar (and according to the activists: in due time most artefacts from the old Paulinerkirche), as well as the intangible heritage of an old university parish and a rich musical tradition. As the new university church, it would also carry the memory of the Paulinerkirche, which was a place for free speech in unfree times and for resistance to a communist regime. Therefore, the question of the Paulinum as a Reformation site is rather irrelevant. The history of the contemporary site is far more fascinating than its relationship to the early Reformation. It is a location that has, over the centuries, encountered religious and political transformation, turbulence and war, monologue and dialogue. The Paulinerkirche was sacrificed – replaced by a socialist alternative – and

eventually, the Paulinum arose. In this respect, the Paulinum joins the ranks of post-communist monuments established in many other locations in Eastern Europe previously possessed by other monuments and narratives (Saunders 2018); locations where there is an undeniable intersection of recent and deeper memories. What makes the Paulinum special, apart from its extraordinarily rich past, is that the suffering and protests of the people under a communist regime are intertwined with religion (both as memory and as action in the present). This turned into such a powerful catalyst that, against all odds, it brought the university church back into existence.

To many Leipzig citizens, the peaceful revolution is conceived as more meaningful than the Reformation, and the Paulinum is a locus for both. Its status as the first evangelical university church and protected heritage did not save the Paulinerkirche. However, its destruction, which has often been regarded as the rock bottom of East German oppression (flanked by the violent crushing of the Prague revolt the same year), ultimately inspired and nourished the demonstrations in 1989. After the German reunification, both the Reformation and the peaceful demonstrations were used as themes and tools to compel the university to rebuild its church. Thus, the memory of the Reformation is no longer only attached to the Reformation itself, but also to citizen participation and activism, and the Paulinum Assembly Hall and University Church of St Paul are regarded as a Reformation site with a distinct emphasis on the free word in unfree times. ■

Kim Groop is a university lecturer, associate professor (docent) and researcher in church history at Åbo Akademi University. He is also the chairman of the Donner Institute. In his research, he has dealt with the history and legacy of the



Christian mission and European colonialism in Tanzania and Namibia as well as issues relating to cultural memory and religious as well as political uses of the past. At present, his main interest is the university church in Leipzig: a church that the GDR regime demolished in 1968 and which was later rebuilt to be inaugurated in 2017.

References

Archive sources

Paulinerverein archive sources

Eckart, Rainer, Rainer Fornahl, Martin Henker, Regina Schild, Rolf Sprink, Walter Christian Steinbach, Ulrich Stötzner, Gunter Weißgerber, and Christian Wolff. 2008. 'Thesenanschlag', <https://www.paulinerverein-dokumente.de/app/download/7902558820/2008_10_31+Thesenanschlag+Aktionsb%C3%BCndnis.pdf?t=1530955290> (accessed 2.5.2023).

Führer, Christian. 2008. 'Aufruf, Mai 2008', <www.paulinerverein-dokumente.de/app/download/7916797720/2008_05_30+Pfarrer+F%C3%BChrer+Demo.pdf?t=1530955290> (accessed 2.5.2023).

'Information des Paulinervereins zum Reformationstag 2021', <<https://www.paulinerverein-dokumente.de/app/download/9094701820/2021.10.31+Information+zum+Reformationstag.pdf?t=1664470305>> (accessed 2.5.2023).

'Leipzigs dritte Bachstätte: Universitätskirche St. Pauli zu Leipzig'. 2022. <<https://www.paulinerverein-dokumente.de/app/download/9163110320/Weihnachtsbrief+2022.pdf?t=1672938652>> (accessed 2.5.2023).

Liebehenschel, Wolfgang. 2021. 'Das fünfte Kind von Martin Luther und Katharina, geborene von Bora – der geniale Medicus Dr. med. Paul Luther – zu seinem 428. Todestag am 11. März 2021', <<https://www.paulinerverein-dokumente.de/app/down>

- load/9069534720/2021_03_31+Liebehe
nschels+Ausarbeitung+zu+Paul+Luther.
pdf?t=1664470305> (accessed 2.5.2023).
- Luther, Martin. 'Eine Predigt von D. Martin
Luther Zu Leipzig Am 12. August 1545
Geschehen', <[https://www.paulinerverein-
dokumente.de/app/download/8268144520/
Weihepredigt+Luther.pdf?t=1614597211](https://www.paulinerverein-dokumente.de/app/download/8268144520/Weihepredigt+Luther.pdf?t=1614597211)>
(accessed 2.5.2023).
- 'Stätte der Reformation. Universitätskirche St.
Pauli Zu Leipzig'. 2017. Paulinerverein e.V.,
<[http://www.paulinerverein.de/reforma-
tion.pdf](http://www.paulinerverein.de/reforma-
tion.pdf)> (accessed 2.5.2023).
- Stötzner, Ulrich. 2017. 'Ansprache 30.5.2017
Augustusplatz', <[https://www.paulinerver-
ein-dokumente.de/app/download/82294
05920/2017_05_30+Ansprache+St%C3
%B6tzner.pdf?t=1508348348](https://www.paulinerver-
ein-dokumente.de/app/download/82294
05920/2017_05_30+Ansprache+St%C3
%B6tzner.pdf?t=1508348348)> (accessed
2.5.2023).
- Stötzner, Ulrich. 2018. 'Ansprache 30.5.2018
Universitätskirche St. Pauli', <[https://www.
paulinerverein-dokumente.de/app/down-
load/8534441620/Ansprache+300518.
pdf?t=1534320041](https://www.
paulinerverein-dokumente.de/app/down-
load/8534441620/Ansprache+300518.
pdf?t=1534320041)> (accessed 2.5.2023).
- 'Universitätskirche St. Pauli zu Leipzig' [Advent
2021: Flyer für Weihnachten und das neue
Jahr]. 2021. <[https://www.paulinerverein-
dokumente.de/app/download/9100937720/
Weihnachtsflyer+2021.pdf?t=1670523051](https://www.paulinerverein-
dokumente.de/app/download/9100937720/
Weihnachtsflyer+2021.pdf?t=1670523051)>
(accessed 2.5.2023).
- 'Ziele des Paulinervereins / Satzung'. n.d.
<[https://www.paulinerverein-dokumente.
de/paulinerverein-allgemeines/ziele-des-
paulinervereins/](https://www.paulinerverein-dokumente.
de/paulinerverein-allgemeines/ziele-des-
paulinervereins/)> (accessed 2.5.2023).

Stiftung Universitätskirche archive sources

- Bohl, Jochen. 2008. 'Stellungnahme von Landes-
bischof Jochen Bohl aus Anlass des be-
vorstehenden 40. Jahrestag der Sprengung
der Universitätskirche St. Pauli am 30. Mai
2008', <[http://www.stiftung-universitaet-
skirche.de/deutsch/2008_03_31_stellung-
nahme_ev__luth__landesbischof_bohl.
pdf](http://www.stiftung-universitaet-
skirche.de/deutsch/2008_03_31_stellung-
nahme_ev__luth__landesbischof_bohl.
pdf)> (accessed 2.5.2023).

Personal archive

- Ulrich Stötzner and Martin Helmstedt.
24.8.2015. Interview by the author.

Bibliography

- Aronsson, Peter. 2004. *Historiebruk: att använda
det förflutna* (Lund: Studentlitteratur).

- Assmann, Jan. 2017 (1992). *Das kulturelle
Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und poli-
tische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*
(Munich: C.H. Beck).
- Finger, Evelyn. 2008. 'Die Angst vor der Kirche',
Die Zeit 30.5.2008, <[https://www.zeit.
de/2008/23/Leipziger-Bilderstreit?utm_
referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.
com%2F](https://www.zeit.
de/2008/23/Leipziger-Bilderstreit?utm_
referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.
com%2F)> (accessed 2.5.2023).
- Fitschen, Klaus. 2009. 'Wissenschaft im Dienste
des Sozialismus: Die Universität Leipzig
vom Mauerbau bis zur Friedlichen Revolu-
tion 1961–1989', in *Geschichte der Universi-
tät Leipzig, 1409–2009*. Band 3: *Das zwan-
zigsten Jahrhundert 1909–2009* (Leipziger
Universitätsverlag), 567–777.
- Gutman, Yifat, and Jenny Wüstenberg. 2023.
'Introduction: the activist turn in memory
studies', in *The Routledge Handbook of Mem-
ory Activism*, eds. Yifat Gutman and Jenny
Wüstenberg (London and New York: Rout-
ledge), 5–15.
- Harrison, Rodney. 2012. *Heritage: Critical
Approaches* (London: Taylor & Francis).
- Helmstedt, Martin. 2015. 'Universität und Pau-
linerverein im Spannungsfeld', in *Vernich-
tet, Vergraben, Neu Erstanden: Die Univer-
sitätskirche St. Pauli zu Leipzig*, eds. Martin
Helmstedt and Ulrich Stötzner (Leipzig:
Evangelische Verlagsanstalt), 81–5.
- Hütter, Elisabeth. 1993. *Die Pauliner-Univer-
sitätskirche zu Leipzig: Geschichte und Be-
deutung*, Forschungen und Schriften zur
Denkmalpflege, Bd. 1 (Weimar: H. Böhlau).
- Isnart, Cyril, and Nathalie Cerezales. 2020.
'Introduction', in *The Religious Heritage
Complex: Legacy, Conservation, and Chris-
tianity*, eds. Cyril Isnart and Nathalie
Cerezales, Bloomsbury Studies in Material
Religion (London: Bloomsbury Academic),
1–13.
- Lohmann, Susanne. 1994. 'The dynamics
of informational cascades. The Monday
demonstrations in Leipzig, East Germany,
1989–91', in *World Politics* (Baltimore: The
Johns Hopkins University Press), 42–101.
- Lotz, Norbert. 1993. 'Immer mehr Leipziger
wollen den baldigen Wiederaufbau der
Paulinerkirche', *Welt am Sonntag* (Berlin)
30.5.1993.
- Luther Landmarks in Leipzig. n.d. 'Luther
Landmarks in Leipzig', City of Leipzig

- [web page], <<https://english.leipzig.de/leisure-culture-and-tourism/reformation-celebrations-2017/luther-landmarks-in-leipzig>> (accessed 2.5.2023).
- Orbeck, Mathias. 2003. 'Im Stadtrat flogen bei Debatte über Campus die Fetzen. Mehrheit gegen Wiederaufbau der Uni-Kirche', *Leipziger Volkszeitung* 17./18.4.2003.
- Rudersdorf, Manfred. 2009. 'Weichenstellung für die Neuzeit. Die Universität Leipzig zwischen Reformation und dreißigjährigem Krieg 1539–1648/1660', in *Geschichte der Universität Leipzig, 1409–2009*. Band 1: *Spätes Mittelalter und frühe Neuzeit 1409–1830/31* (Leipziger Universitätsverlag), 331–515.
- Saunders, Anna. 2018. *Memorializing the GDR: Monuments and Memory after 1989* (New York: Berghahn Books).
- Seifert, Friedrich. 1883. *Die Reformation in Leipzig* (Leipzig: Hinrichs).
- Spitta, Philipp. 1880. *Johann Sebastian Bach* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel).
- Stötzner, Ulrich, and Walter Christian Steinbach. 2008. 'Pressemitteilungen 2008 [LDL]: Offener Brief zur neuen Universitätskirche erfährt hohe unterstützende Resonanz', [sachsen.de](http://www.lds.sachsen.de) [web page], <https://www.lds.sachsen.de/?ID=3708&art_param=352> (accessed 2.5.2023).
- Topfstedt, Thomas. 2009. 'Die bauliche Entwicklung der Universität Leipzig seit 1990', in *Geschichte der Universität Leipzig, 1409–2009*. Band 5: *Geschichte der Leipziger Universitätsbauten im urbanen Kontext* (Leipziger Universitätsverlag), 77–132.
- Universität Leipzig. 2008. 'Die Zukunft beginnt im Gestern', *Der neue Uni-Campus im Herzen der Stadt. Sonderveröffentlichung der Universität Leipzig* 18.10.2008, <https://www.dbz.de/download/31048/2210_campusleipzig.pdf> (accessed 2.5.2023).
- WELT. 2008. 'Leipziger Kirchenstreit spitzt sich zu', *WELT* 14.5.2008, <https://www.welt.de/welt_print/article1992422/Leipziger-Kirchenstreit-spitzt-sich-zu.html> (accessed 2.5.2023).
- Williams, Peter. 2007. *J. S. Bach: A Life in Music* (Cambridge University Press).
- Wolff, Christian. 2012. *Osterweiterung: Leben im Neuen Deutschland* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt).