

A poor school boy from Ribe makes a career

Peder Palladius

Peder Palladius was born in 1503 in Ribe. His father's name was Peder Esbensen, and he was probably some kind of smith making armors. The name Palladius is Latin and means chest armor. When Peder Palladius died in 1560 he was a bishop on Zealand.

Told by Peder himself he went to school in both Ribe, Assens and in Roskilde. As a young, smart, but poor student he went abroad as an attendant of a wealthy man's son. On this journey he came to Wittenberg in 1531, and here he attended university. He studied theology and finished in 1533, and four years later he got his doctor's degree in theology. During that time Wittenberg was the center of the Reformation as the pioneers of the Reformation such as Martin Luther, Johan Bugenhagen and Philip Melanchthon were living and teaching there. Peder Palladius had a close relationship to these men who valued him.



In 1536, when the Reformation was implemented in Denmark, King Christian III sent a message to Wittenberg. Subsequent to the abolition of the old Catholic bishops, he needed someone to supervise the Lutheran churches in his kingdom, and he was recommended to hire Peder Palladius.

In 1537, when Peder Palladius was 34 years old, he became the first Lutheran bishop in Zealand, and he remained until his death in 1560. One of his jobs was to visit all the churches in his diocese. This is called: "visitants" From his notebook of these visitants you can tell that he was very thorough. Despite the miserable traveling opportunities at that time, he managed to visit all the 390 churches in his diocese within 5-6 years.

Peder Palladius was excellent at passing his thoughts on to the common people, including those who had never gone to school. His conversations with the congregations were unassuming; his speech was very direct. He explained that the dedicated (holy people) were not able to perform miracles, and that there was no such thing as purgatory. It was also useless to visit the holy wells and expect miracles there.

In his "Visitants notebook" you can read how he talked to the congregation – it is very direct speech e.g. when he tells them: "Many attend such places where the devil and the pope hold their business at an inn and are knocking for those who would want to whore with their false god."

He tells them not to address the old Catholic saints. Instead he gives this admonition: "Why don't you address the living in stead of the dead; the sick and poor who are helpless"

Furthermore he tells them not to fast during Lent in the weeks prior to Easter: "Fast is hunger, hunger, hunger. When Our Lord Jesus was fasting he hungered. After our monks fasting at Easter they were fatter than at Shrove-tide. Oh my Lord they really had been fasting. They had only been fattened by God."

Peder Palladius admonished the parents to send their young and intelligent sons to the Latin school so they could become priests or teachers, but as only Catholic school books were available at that time, he published the necessary elementary school books in 1553.

In the book "Who have lived since the Reformation and up until now" from 1761 about the 15 bishops of the diocese in Zealand, Peder Palladius is described as "He was one of the most distinguished men, who was significantly responsible for the continued existence of the Evangelical Doctrine, introduced by King Christian III before it was overrun by the Catholic weed in its frail beginning."

Assignments

1. Martin Luther, the founder of the Reformation, broke down the entire Catholic tradition as he stated that salvation was not gained by good deeds, but only by God's mercy. When reading the quotes above: Which good deeds did Peder Palladius want to abolish?
2. Peder Palladius was very unassuming and his speech very direct. Write down some examples of these characteristics from the quotes above.
3. Try to rewrite the quotes into modern words.
4. Discuss what Peder Palladius achieves by talking to people this way?
5. Discuss whether there are situations where it is an advantage to use direct speech, and if there are situations where it is not such a good idea. Try to come up with some examples.