



# REFORMATION Notes

News for Partners of the Richard C. Kessler Reformation Collection

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## Great Books, a Great Good

Timothy J. Wengert

**C**allimachus (c. 310-240 B.C.), the Greek poet and librarian at Alexandria, once wrote, "*Mega bibliion, mega kakon*" ("Large books are a large evil"). My own experience in some of the best libraries of Europe and the United States leads me to rewrite his skeptical remark as "*Mega bibliion, mega kalon*" ("Great books are a great good"). It is precisely resources such as the Richard C. Kessler Reformation Collection that prove the truth of this new aphorism.

**Getting into the Past.** We live in a communication age in which many new techniques have developed for processing and preserving documents: microfilm, tape, CD-ROM. Moreover, since the nineteenth century, scholars have labored mightily to produce critical editions of important historical figures, using the older, but still remarkable, technology of printing. As important as these resources are for the study of history, however, they can never replace the act of reading an author's work as that author and his or her printer actually produced it. There one finds the occasional fingerprint of the careless printer's assistant, the notes and doodles of the promising student, even remarks about the price and ownership of the volumes. "Nota bene!" "So-and-so bought me for 2 groschen."

**Discovering the Unexpected.** In the sixteenth century customers bought their books as unbound and uncut sheets, which they then turned over to binders who bound them into books. Not only do the bindings themselves tell us much about the owners of these books, but often the owners had other material bound in with one or more books (e.g., loose sheets of paper they wanted to preserve). In the course of fifteen years of research on the Reformation, I have been fortunate enough to have discovered previously unknown notes on sermons by Martin Luther from 1520, a school prayer by Philip Melancthon for the preservation of the church from around 1530, and lectures on how to create theological syllogisms, again by Melancthon.

Even the books themselves contain surprises. Several years ago I was examining forerunners to Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*, using a massive (to say nothing of impressive) four-volume critical edition of such catechisms published around the turn of the century by Ferdinand Cohrs. Imagine my surprise when I discovered (in a library Cohrs had used for his work) the very first edition of the very first evangelical catechism published in Wittenberg—hitherto unknown.

**Comparing texts.** A fine research library also allows the historian to do something more difficult to accomplish with film readers and photocopies: hold one text up to another. Some authors of the sixteenth century, notably Melancthon, often made important changes in subsequent editions of their works. For example, Melancthon produced a commentary on St. Paul's letter to the Colossians in 1527, a work available to scholars in a "study edition" since the 1960s. By 1534 that same work had undergone two translations and two subsequent editions (with fifty percent more material) for a total of nine separate printings.

Another kind of comparison occurs when two authors, often with opposing opinions, can be placed side-by-side. Sometimes earlier owners of these works help us out by binding these works into the same volume. At other times earlier readers will scrawl references to other works—often ones researchers themselves would never have dreamed to examine.

Benefits that good research libraries shower on the patient investigator could be listed without end. However, the conclusion would always be the same: a great book provides great good for students of history, theology, and literature alike.

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# Reformation “orphans” in need of adoption

The following Reformation “orphans” are in need of adoption by a Kessler Partner. Partners sponsor the purchase of a document by making a gift of at least \$1,500, which may be divided into monthly or quarterly payments. A bookplate listing the donor’s name is placed in the “adopted” book or document. Gifts may also be made in honor or memory of persons. Those persons honored will be notified of the gift, and the bookplate will list both the giver and honoree.



**Luther, Martin, 1483-1546.**  
*In primum librum Mose enarrationes....* Wittenbergae [i.e., Wittenberg]: [Peter Seitz], 1544.

**Rhegius, Urbanus, 1489-1541.**  
*Prophetiae veteris testamenti de Christo....* Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Braubach, 1542.

These two works are bound together and discussed at length in the “Marginalia” article on page 4 of this issue of *Reformation Notes*.

**Luther, Martin, 1483-1546.**  
*Von Ordnung gotes dienst in der gemain.* Wittenberg. [Augsburg: Heinrich Steiner], 1523.

This eight page leaflet is both an attack on abuses of public worship in the Catholic Church of Luther’s time and a guide for the proper conduct of worship. Luther observes that a congregation ought not come together unless someone preaches—even for only a short time—and recommends a weekly celebration of the Mass or Lord’s Supper. Nonetheless, he counsels the abolition of the daily Mass, to be replaced by two or three daily services (he suggests 4:00

or 5:00 A.M. and 4:00 or 5:00 P.M. as good times for these).

**Linck, Wenzeslaus, 1483-1547.**  
*Die letzte[n] drey Psalmen von Organen, Paucke, Glocken vnd der gleychen eüsserlichen Gotssdienst....*  
 Zwickaw: [Jörg Gastel], 1523.

This exposition of the last three Psalms is by a life-long friend and co-worker of Luther’s. Linck criticizes the excessive emphasis on the externals of worship of his day and addresses the use in worship of the instruments mentioned in Psalm 150.

**Sarcerius, Erasmus, 1501-1559.**  
*Zwo Predigten Erasmi Sarcerij, eine wider das Teuflische vnordentliche vnd vihische leben so man in der Fastnachts zeit treibet.* Leipzig: Jacobum Berwaldt, [1551].

This work includes two sermons preached at Leipzig in 1551 by Erasmus Sarcerius, a student of Luther and Melancthon and a second generation Reformer. The first condemns the excesses attending the celebrations of Carnival, while the second discusses proper fasting. They illuminate everyday parish life in sixteenth century Germany.

**Dvo volumina Epistolarum obscurorum virorum ....** [Roma [i.e., Frankfurt am Main]: David Zöpfel], 1557.

Among the most famous of those writings that prepared the way for the Reformation is this *Letters of Obscure Men*, a satire on religious philosophies and practices. Its colophon, which states that it was printed in Rome with the permission of the Pope, exemplifies its approach.

**Witzel, Georg, 1501-1573.**  
*Dialogus, das ist ain lustigs vnd nutzbarlichs Gesprächbüchlin von dem Concilio Zwischen zweyen strittigen partheyen.* [Augsburg: Philipp Ulhart d. Ä., 1535?]

This dialogue is an attempt to find a middle way between Catholic and Lutheran teaching and thus help the average person sort out the religious issues anticipated at an upcoming council of the church (eventually the Council of Trent). The disputants are Bebelus, a “Lutherist”; Disidemon, a “Papist”; and Christophilus (or Orthodoxus), who is described as someone who “walks in the right paths of evangelical truth.” The piece is attributed to Georg Witzel, a pupil of Melancthon and Luther with a monastic background, who returned to Catholicism. He saw value in both Lutheranism and Catholicism and tried to steer a course between the two.

**Uon Kayserlicher Maiestat einreyten, auff den Reychstag gen Augspurg, Beschehen am fünffzehenden tag Junij im 1530. Jar.** [Augsburg: Philip Ulhart], 1530.

This little piece is about as close to a newspaper as one can get in the sixteenth century. It describes the procession of Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, and other princes of the empire into Augsburg in 1530 for the Diet of Augsburg. It focuses not on the issues to be taken up at the Diet, but only on who accompanied the emperor and how they were dressed.

**Strauss, Jakob, ca. 1483-ca. 1533.**  
*Underricht D. Jacob Straussen, wartzu die Brüderschafft nütz seyen, wie man sy bissher gehalte[n] hat, vn[d] nu fürohin halten sol.* [Augsburg: Silvan Otmar], 1522.

Jakob Strauss, a lesser known Protestant preacher active in southern Germany, here distinguishes true Christian fellowship from the false fellowship of the Catholic clergy.

**Sadoletto, Jacopo, 1477-1547.**  
**Iacobi Sadoleti ... Epistolarum libri sexdecim. Eiusdem ad Paulum Sadoletum Epistolarum liber unus ... Coloniae [i.e., Cologne]: Petrus Horst, 1567.**

This is the second piece associated with Jacopo Sadoletto that has been added to the Kessler Collection within the last year. Sadoletto, an Italian bishop and cardinal, was known as one who promoted reform within the Roman Catholic Church and urged reconciliation with the Protestants. He remained in regular contact with both Catholic and Protestant figures of his day, as can be seen from a perusal of the names represented in this collection of his correspondence.

**Cumiranus, Seraphinus, fl. 1556-1558.**  
**Conciliatio locorum communionum Scripturae Sacrae, qui inter se pugnare videntur. Parisiis: Audoënum Paruum ..., 1556.**

This curious book by a little known friar from Feltre in northeastern Italy attempts to resolve apparent contradictions in the Bible and aptly represents the ongoing sixteenth century Catholic interest in biblical study. The volume is also of interest for its fine modern binding of wine-red morocco, with gilt title, blind-stamped boards with gilt ornamentation, inside dentelles, and marbled endpapers. The name of the binder, Hans Asper, is visible in gold above the lower dentelle on the inside upper board. This is the third piece to be added to the Collection cased in an Asper binding.

*The Richard C. Kessler Reformation Collection is a repository of rare and valuable documents that form the core of the Protestant Reformation. The collection now contains more than 1,600 pieces written by Martin Luther, his colleagues, and opponents and printed during their lifetimes.*

*Supported by the vision and resources of Lutheran laypeople Richard and Martha Kessler and partners throughout the Southeast, the collection is housed in Pitts Theology Library of Candler School of Theology. It provides a rich resource for scholars of the Reformation and for clergy and laity who seek to understand the history of our faith.*

*For more information about the collection, contact Dr. M. Patrick Graham, Pitts Theology Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia 30322 (404-727-4165).*

## Standing Committee for the Kessler Reformation Collection

Policy direction for the Reformation Collection is provided by a standing committee composed of representatives of Emory University and the local and national Lutheran community.

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# Marginalia

Daniel J. Rettberg

One of the most impressive of the recent additions to the Kessler Reformation Collection is the first printing of part one of Luther's large Genesis commentary (*In primum librum Mose*), the only part of the work that appeared within Luther's lifetime. Of all the books of the Hebrew Bible, it was Genesis and Psalms that Luther most preferred, probably because he found them most compatible with his own understanding and experience of the Christian Gospel.

The large Genesis commentary covers all fifty chapters of the biblical book (his small commentary treated only Genesis 1-34) and is based on several transcripts of a cycle of lectures that Luther gave at Wittenberg University between 1535 and 1545. Coming at the end of his career (Luther died in 1546), in this work we see the Reformer at his most mature theologically and academically. His knowledge of Hebrew is at its best; he cites both Jewish and Christian commentators; and he focuses especially on devotional concerns, pointing out passages particularly suited for preaching and for the care of souls. The broader Christian perspective from which Luther approaches Genesis is evident from the outset: the elaborate woodcut on the title page depicts not only Adam and Eve with the serpent and the tree in the Garden of Eden—something one might expect in a Genesis commentary—but also the images of the

Annunciation, the crucified Christ with open wounds, the resurrected Christ slaying death and the devil, and demons driving impenitent sinners into Hell. Luther clearly saw these lectures with their comprehensive Christian concerns as his last bequest to the church.

Bound with this copy of Luther's commentary on Genesis is a second work: the *Prophetiae Veteris Testamenti de Christo* (*Old Testament Prophecies of Christ*) by Urbanus Rhegius, an early disciple of Luther. As indicated by the title, the book examines those passages in the Hebrew Bible that have traditionally been interpreted as predictions of the Messiah. This is the first printing of the work to contain a preface by Luther, memorializing Rhegius, who died in 1541.

The two works are impressive in size and have been bound in a contemporary, alum-tawed pigskin over boards binding. Together they bring the total number of pieces in the Kessler Reformation Collection to 1,600 and illustrate most amply how first generation Lutherans interpreted the Hebrew Bible.

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