



# REFORMATION NOTES

News for Partners of the Richard C. Kessler Reformation Collection  
Spring 2000, Number 16

## Living Today in the Sixteenth Century

*Eugene C. Bianchi*

### A Brief Introduction

*Professor Eugene C. Bianchi—faculty member of the Department of Religion at Emory College for more than thirty years—prepared an exhibit last summer for those coming to Emory to attend the Fifth Congress of the International Federation of Married Priests. The exhibit was titled “Celibacy and Gender in Sixteenth-Century Christianity,” and it drew most heavily on materials from the Pitts Theology Library, especially those in the Kessler Reformation Collection. I have asked him to comment on his interest in and work with the Pitts collection.*

—M. Patrick Graham

*The Richard C. Kessler Reformation Collection is a repository of rare and valuable documents produced in connection with the Protestant Reformation. The collection now contains more than 2,400 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 the 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 the Christian faith.*

*For more information about the collection, contact:  
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Putting together an exhibit of books from the Pitts Library on the topic of celibacy and gender in sixteenth-century Christianity was a new venture and adventure for me. The occasion was an international gathering of hundreds of resigned Catholic priests (Corpus) who, among other things, advocate a change in the discipline of celibacy for their clergy. The exhibition that I prepared included thirty documents arranged in the Special Collections area of the Woodruff Library at Emory, and so the process involved coordination of Pitts and Woodruff staffs. I was fortunate to have such fine assistance from experts in both libraries in the matter of finding and handling the old materials.

I had heard about the valuable and extensive sixteenth-century collections at Pitts, especially the Kessler Reformation Collection, but the search for appropriate themes turned out to be

similar to detective work. I was looking not only for statements that presented the pros and cons of clerical celibacy during that period of intense debate over the issue; I also was trying to find interesting passages that might illustrate the place of women in society during the Reformation period. In the latter search, I was aided by some recent publications. An older set of books by Roland Bainton supplied pictures of women from the period, which I enlarged into rather handsome wall hangings to give the whole exhibit a visual dimension.

Another part of the adventure was holding in my hands documents that had been printed more than 500 years ago—many produced less than a century after Gutenberg. I could almost feel the revolution of the printed word that changed Western culture.

*(continued on the next page)*

# Kessler Collection Update

M. Patrick Graham

About forty pieces have been added to the Kessler Reformation Collection since September 1, 1999. Many are by familiar figures—Luther, Melancthon, Bugenhagen, Erasmus, and Cochlaeus—while others are by more obscure persons. In the latter category is a collection of ten publications by Georg Witzel (1501–1573), as well as an attack on Witzel by Justus Jonas of the Wittenberg University faculty.

Although Witzel was a student of Luther and an early convert to the Lutheran Church, he returned to the Catholic Church early on—as a married priest—and worked on behalf of ecclesiastical reform and ecumenism. He was a prolific author who wrote more than 130 pieces (John Eck caricatured him as issuing books more often “than the rabbit her young”), and he was attacked by

both Catholics and Protestants. He served in the court of Duke George of Saxony and worked to develop a *via media* between the views of Rome and Luther, advocating a return to the ancient, apostolic church.

Another interesting acquisition this year was the purchase at auction of the fourth edition of the Rabbinic Bible. A handsome, four-volume folio set, this work now joins the first, second, third, fifth, and seventh editions of the Rabbinic Bible on the shelves of the Pitts Library. This landmark publication was printed in Venice by Daniel Bomberg, as were the earlier three editions, and will prove a valuable resource not only to students of sixteenth-century history but to those interested as well in the history of the text of the Hebrew Bible.

Finally, I am pleased to announce that October 24 has been set as the date for the thirteenth-annual Kessler

Reformation Concert which, together with other lectures and worship services, will constitute Reformation Day at Emory. The theme of reconciliation will run throughout the year at Emory University; thus, it seems especially appropriate that Presiding Bishop H. George Anderson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America will be the guest lecturer and comment on the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, the document signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church in October 1999. Please note October 24, 2000, on your calendar and make plans to join us for what promises to be an important celebration.

M. Patrick Graham is Librarian and Margaret A. Pitts Associate Professor of Theological Bibliography.

## Living Today in the Sixteenth Century

(continued from first page)

Here was the feisty Luther inveighing against the rule of celibacy; I could almost see him running down to the printer in Wittenberg with his latest essay. The learned Melancthon held forth in his stately prose, while marrying priests wrote tracts to defend and explain their actions. On the other side of the controversy, an excellent 1566 printing of the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent upheld a celibate clergy, as did the famous humanist scholar-politician Thomas More, who was executed in the Tower of London under Henry VIII. The 1557 version of More's works had a dedication by his nephew to Queen Mary; I could sense the tension of that period just before Elizabeth I. So much was at stake in both church and state; tones were strident and compromise hard to come by.

An unexpected highlight was finding handwritten marginalia, sometimes

from the sixteenth century itself. A Jesuit author of a collection of Augustine's writings wrote a dedication by hand on the title page of his volume, offering the book to a cardinal who had been instrumental in founding one of his order's schools in Dillingen, Germany. In an era when the lack of publications by women said much about their status in society, one remarkable document was a touching piece of consolation literature, written by one woman to another who had lost her husband.

The year I spent researching this project—carving out time between duties in the classroom and other professorial tasks—turned out to be a lively exploration for me. Earlier in life, I had spent twenty years as a Jesuit. I left the order in part over the issue of celibacy, which since Vatican Council II again has become a controversial discussion in Roman Catholicism. As I read those old

texts, on one hand I could see both the reaffirming of the medieval rule for clergy and the modern questioning of it after almost five hundred years. I knew about all this theoretically, of course, but actual physical contact with original, sixteenth-century documents made the voices on both sides of this issue nearly audible.

Eugene C. Bianchi is Professor of Religion at Emory University.

### News and Notes

REFORMATION DAY  
AT EMORY

OCTOBER 24, 2000



### 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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This woodcut is taken from Sebastian Franck's *Die Guldin Arch* (Augsburg, 1538) and depicts the all-powerful God blessing creation. Franck (1499–1542) was an early follower of Luther, but later abandoned Luther and became famous for his advocacy of freedom of thought and a spiritual theology with roots in late-medieval mysticism. In the present work he brings together what he deemed the best of ancient literature—whether from biblical, patristic, or pagan authors—and the text is illustrated with impressive woodcuts.

In addition to this image, more than 300 other woodcuts from the library's special collections have been scanned into digital format as the first step in the creation of a digital archive of sixteenth-century woodcuts. These images will be linked to bibliographic information about the publications from which they were taken, and all this will eventually be mounted on the web and made accessible from the Pitts home page (<http://www.pitts.emory.edu>). The aim is to make these images freely available to all in hopes of advancing teaching and research in both the academy and the church.

—Dr. Richard A. Wright, Director of Digital Archive Project, Pitts Theology Library



# Marginalia—When Hebrew Prophets Began to Speak German



The prophet Nathan confronts King David

*Daniel J. Rettberg*

The story of the translation of the Bible into German by the great sixteenth-century reformers cannot be told without mentioning Ludwig Haetzer and Hans Denck. Both received a humanis-

tic education and were influenced by Swiss Reformers—Haetzer by Zwingli, and Denck by Oecolampadius. Neither man, however, found his way into any of the mainstream orthodoxies of the day. On the contrary, both maintained the importance of the “inner light” as opposed to the outward signs of Scripture and Sacrament, and they found themselves most at home in Anabaptist circles. Due at least in part to their theological individualism, they led peripatetic lives and died young, probably in their twenties—Haetzer executed in Constance and Denck being felled by the plague.

Apart from their contributions to the theological ferment in southern Germany and Switzerland in the 1520s, Haetzer and Denck left one significant monument to their activities: the first Reformation-era translation of the Hebrew prophets into German. The two met in Strasbourg and later settled in Worms, where they collaborated on their translation. It was published first in Worms on April 13, 1527, and was reprinted four more times that year. It would be used later by Martin Luther and by Leo Jud’s team of translators in Zurich as they composed their own translations of the Hebrew Bible.

It is the fifth printing of Haetzer’s and Denck’s *Prophets* in 1527 that was recently purchased for the Kessler Reformation Collection. It was printed by Heinrich Steiner in Augsburg—an important center of Anabaptist activity in the late 1520s—and measures only about five inches tall—truly a “pocket-book.” It fits comfortably in the hand, is printed in small but clear type, and is attractively illustrated with a title border, a full-page depiction of the Prophet Nathan confronting King David (see woodcut at left), and a variety of whimsical initial letters.

The addition of this piece to the Kessler Collection now makes it possible for researchers to compare the Pitts copy of Leo Jud’s *Zurich Bible* (1535) and early printings of Luther’s translation of the Old Testament with a most important source used by these translators. The consequence, of course, is the possibility of seeing more clearly how these vigorous reformers taught the ancient Hebrew prophets to speak German in its sixteenth-century forms of expression and so enabled them to reach new audiences with their powerful preaching.

*Dr. Daniel J. Rettberg is Rare Book Librarian at the Pitts Theology Library.*



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