

REFORMATION NOTES

News for Partners of the Richard C. Kessler Reformation Collection
Spring 1999, Number 14

Luther in the Digital Age

Christina Bray

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Christina Bray first was introduced to friends and supporters of the Kessler Reformation Collection last year at the exhibit of new acquisitions. She presented in electronic form some of the woodcut illustrations from the collection and discussed a strategy for making them available over the internet. Christina now has finished her MTS thesis on this topic, and her article in this issue of Reformation Notes explains in general terms how she proposes to use computer technology in the effort and underscores the educational value of the enterprise.

The purpose of my MTS thesis project was to employ digital technology to make a case for the use of visual arts in theological education. Although there is already significant theoretical precedence for incorporating the visual arts into seminary curricula, there is still a noticeable scarcity in actual practice.

The tension between the visual arts and theology is caused by two issues: the ambivalence of seminaries toward the arts and an overdependence upon texts in teaching. Scholars have contended that this ambivalence arises from the notion that although art can move its viewers intellectually and emotionally, it also can produce inflam-

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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 2,200 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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Title-page woodcut for a sermon by Luther on the suffering of Christ.

Luther in the Digital Age

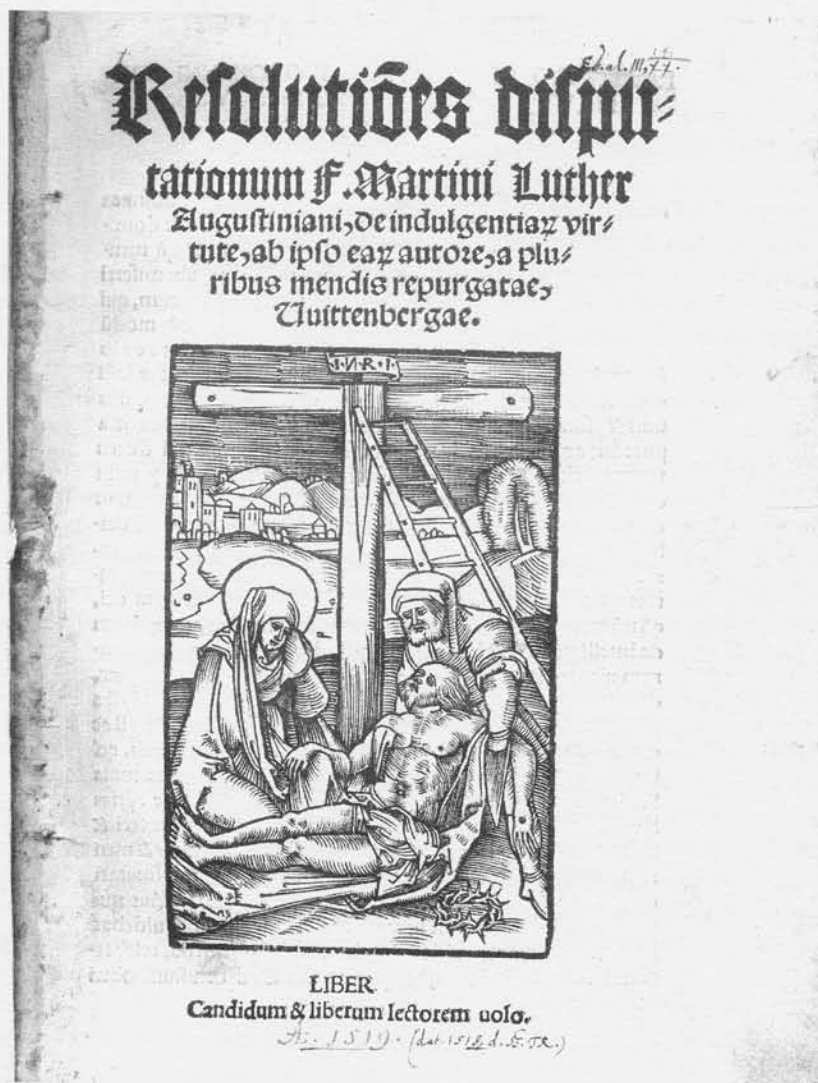
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matory social critiques that keep it on the margins in education. I would add that the frequent underemphasis on nonverbal means of communication in most theology courses tends to short-change the interpretive capacities that we all possess.

Significant historical support for this argument comes from Martin Luther himself, who insisted on having his writings richly illustrated with woodcut images. In his preface to the Bapst hymnal of 1545, he wrote, "Therefore, the printers do well if they publish a lot of good hymns and make them attractive to the people with all sorts of ornamentations, so that they may move them to joy in faith and to gladly sing. In such pleasing fashion the book by Vall[en]tin Babst has been prepared."¹ Luther believed that these images would convey his ideas more thoroughly than texts alone: he recognized the value of the visual arts as legitimate educational tools.

The Kessler Reformation Collection contains hundreds of books and pamphlets that employ woodcut illustrations for educational purposes. These illustrations take the form of title-page woodcut borders; portraits of major Reformation figures; polemical, devotional, and narrative illustrations; printed music; printers' devices; initial letters; and maps. My task has been to research the various types of woodcut images and how they were used as teaching instruments, and then to apply this information to an analysis of specific woodcuts from the Kessler Collection. A key example from this project is the *Passional Christi und Antichristi*, a block-book containing twenty-six woodcut illustrations by Lucas Cranach the Elder. Supplemented with antipapal commentaries by Philipp Melancthon, these prints constitute what is perhaps the most successful work of Lutheran propaganda in the Reformation era.

In addition, my thesis project aimed at devising a way to make the



Title-page woodcut of an attack by Luther against indulgences.

magnificent, yet delicate, works of art in the Kessler Collection accessible to a much larger audience of students, researchers, ministers, and laypeople. The underlying motive, again, is to increase the use of the visual arts in theological education, and the creation of a digital archive is the most promising solution. In this process, a digital scanner takes electronic "snapshots" of the woodcuts; these images are then placed on the library's internet server and linked to the library's computer catalog. People seeking images of Luther or information on woodcuts would then be able to access the images through

keyword searches of the on-line catalog. Such a user-friendly system could enhance significantly the academy's and the church's educational enterprises and make the riches of the Kessler Reformation Collection readily available to an international audience.

Christina Bray has just completed her master of theological studies degree at Candler School of Theology, Emory University.

¹Luther's Works (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965) 5:333.

Kessler Collection Update

M. Patrick Graham

About a year ago in this space, I was pleased to announce that the Kessler Reformation Collection had passed the 2,000 mark in titles (2,054, to be exact). Today that number stands at 2,230 and could reach 2,250, depending on how well we did at an auction in Germany. More than 120 items have been added since September 1, 1998, and these include pieces by Luther (28), Bugenhagen, Cochlaeus (2), Eck, Erasmus (2), Flacius Illyricus (3), Karlstadt, Major (3), Melancthon (2), Munster, Schwenckfeld, and Zwingli. Among the works by Luther, one is particularly impressive: a first edition of Luther's Christmas sermons, a folio volume printed in Basel in 1522 and issued with lavish woodcut illustrations.

In addition to these items, there is the magnificent four-volume folio Bible that Dr. Rettberg discusses in his "Marginalia" column (page 4), which means that the collection now includes both the first and second editions of this monumental work. Another impressive Bible added to the collection this year is the fresh Latin translation of the Bible by Sante Pagnino, a famous

Dominican Hebraist. (His was the first translation to use numbered chapters and verses.)

As always, this year's acquisitions represent a wide diversity of theological perspectives and often include—through bindings, inscriptions on endpapers, and marginalia—a wealth of additional information about the provenance of the book that makes it truly unique.

We expect to publish and have on hand at the October concert this year the four-volume bibliography of the Kessler Reformation Collection that describes the first 1,400 titles acquired for the collection. The title page of each book or pamphlet is reproduced, along with a detailed description of the publication and a brief statement about the contents or significance of the piece. This reference work represents the culmination of more than a decade of work by several contributors and editors and should assist researchers internationally as they work on materials from the Reformation period.

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

OCTOBER 26 HAS BEEN SET AS THE DATE FOR THE TWELFTH-ANNUAL KESSLER REFORMATION CONCERT.

IT, TOGETHER WITH OTHER LECTURES AND WORSHIP SERVICES, WILL CONSTITUTE REFORMATION DAY AT EMORY.

PLEASE MAKE A NOTE OF THIS ON YOUR CALENDAR AND MAKE PLANS TO JOIN US.



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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—Filling in the Gaps in Hebrew Bibles



Initial letter beginning the Gospel of Matthew in Luther's *September Testament*.

Daniel J. Rettberg

One of the most important, yet often underrated, academic trends of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was the move toward the study of the Hebrew and Greek languages. Bringing Greek into the European university world began among humanist scholars in the fifteenth century, driven by the influx of Greek-speaking Christians into Italy following the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Hebrew soon followed, encouraged by contact between humanist and Jewish scholars.

The first dated Hebrew printed book appeared in 1475; the first printed portion of the Hebrew Bible (the Psalms) came along in 1477. The first complete Hebrew Bible text with rabbinic notes and commentary appeared in Venice in the year 1517, issued by the firm of Daniel Bomberg. While Bomberg was a Christian, he had Jews in his employ and served both Jewish and Christian customers. The 1517 Rabbinic Bible was edited by Felix Pratensis, a Jew who had converted to Christianity. Pope Leo X gave Bomberg a copyright for the book. The Pitts Theology Library owns a copy of this Bible and counts it as part of the Kessler Reformation Collection.

It is significant that the first complete Rabbinic Bible appeared in 1517, the same year that Luther made public his Ninety-five Theses: both are watershed events. With the advent of the Reformation, Christian Hebrew Bible scholarship did not become the preserve of either Lutherans or Catholics, but continued to be valued by scholars on both sides of this division; moreover, the Bomberg Rabbinic Bible became the Hebrew Bible of choice. As such, it and other tools for the study of the

Hebrew Bible text printed in the sixteenth century rightfully find their place in the Kessler Reformation Collection.

As great an achievement as the 1517 Bible was, it was simply an essay in a craft yet to be perfected. In 1524–1525, Bomberg issued a completely revised Rabbinic Bible under the editorship of Jacob ben Hayim ibn Adoniya, a Jewish refugee from Tunisia. This second Rabbinic Bible became, and remained for 400 years, the standard by which all other Hebrew Bible texts were to be judged. Its layout also became the model for all Rabbinic Bibles of its type until the first part of the current decade.

Six months ago, the lack of a copy of this Bible remained a major gap in the holdings of the Kessler Reformation Collection. At that point, a copy came on the market and was purchased for the collection with funds from Pitts Library, the Woodruff Library, and the Judaica Studies endowment at Emory. Such partnership is very much in the spirit of Daniel Bomberg.

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



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