

A Catholic Prayer Book from the City of Mainz

Armin Siedlecki

A third prayer book added to the Kessler Collection this year is that of Johann Ferus (1495–1554; in German, his surname means “wild”) titled *Christlichs sonder scho[er]nes vn[d] Catholischs Betbüchlin (An Especially Beautiful Christian and Catholic Prayer Book)*. This printing was issued in Mainz in 1556, and with its 452 pages it is as substantial as the 1566 Lutheran prayer book discussed above. In addition, it shares many of the characteristics of its Protestant counterparts, both in terms of its general appearance (octavo, bound in pigskin) and in terms of its structure and content. It includes the Lord’s Prayer, the Ave Maria, the Ten Commandments, and selections from the Gospel of John, as well as other prayers for specific situations—such as morning and evening, before meals, after completing a task, confession, and before the Eucharist. Finally, it should be noted that the volume is beautifully illustrated with many woodcuts.

Ferus was a Franciscan friar and cathedral preacher (*Domprediger*) in Mainz who defended Catholic doctrine but took a moderate stance with regard to the Reformers, stating that he had found some good in their writing. In time, Ferus’s work became suspect; and after his death, some of his writings were



“PENTECOST”
FROM THE
MAINZ
PRAYER
BOOK, 1556

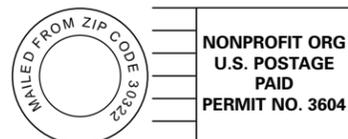
even placed on the Index (the Catholic list of prohibited books). It is not entirely clear to what extent Ferus was criticized before his death; however, in the foreword to this prayer book, Ferus pleads that “the Christian writings of this cathedral preacher in this and his other published books should meet with the assiduous and well-disposed support of the universal Christian Church” (l. 5). Such an appeal appears even more significant in light of the cultural and political circumstances of the city of Mainz, an important religious and cultural center in Germany.

Situated in Germany between the Lutheran North and the Catholic South, Mainz generated much support for the Protestant cause. Thus in 1555—one year after Ferus’s death—Daniel Brendel of Homburg (1555–1582) was chosen

elector with a single-vote majority over the Luther-friendly Pfalzgraf Reichart von Simmern. Brendel proceeded to consolidate Catholic power in Mainz and became known primarily for his insistence on the implementation of the decrees of Trent. Given these circumstances, Ferus’s prayer book is remarkably devoid of political rhetoric.

In this prayer book by a moderate Catholic preacher, it is possible to see a substantial body of devotional and liturgical materials that many Lutherans and Catholics shared in mid-sixteenth-century Germany. Although Lutheran and Catholic theologians continued their debates, and their respective political and religious institutions continued to compete for advantage, the catechetical and devotional practices of the two continued to share much in common. The Ferus prayer book comes, then, at a transitional moment for Catholicism; and while it went through a series of reprints well into the 1580s—suggesting both popularity and official support—the suspicion shown to some of Ferus’s work later may illustrate the complexity in defining Catholic identity in the decades after the Peace of Augsburg and even after the Council of Trent.

Armin Siedlecki is Catalog Librarian for the Kessler Reformation Collection.



REFORMATION NOTES

News for Partners of the Richard C. Kessler Reformation Collection
Spring 2003, Number 22

Kessler Collection Update

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 2,700 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.

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The 2002 Reformation Day at Emory program was well attended again this year and featured two important commendations to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the Kessler Reformation Collection. First, Timothy Albrecht’s fifteen years of service in planning and performing at the Kessler concerts were acknowledged and celebrated during the evening program. Second, Dean Russell E. Richey of the Candler School of Theology awarded Dean’s Medals to Richard and Martha Kessler for their vision, leadership, and gifts to establish and nurture the Reformation Collection

at Emory’s Pitts Theology Library. Through the contributions of these three and many others in the last decade and a half, the collection has more than doubled in size, provided the primary impulse for six publications, and enriched the research of many scholars. It also has given birth to the Pitts Library’s Digital Image Archive, which now includes more than 5,000 images on the Internet—most from the Kessler Collection.

In the first half of this academic year, an additional thirty books and pamphlets have been acquired, bringing to 2,720 the total holdings of the collection. The recent

additions include: eleven items by Luther (including a copy of his Small Catechism), five by Erasmus, two by the famous Lutheran preacher Veit Dietrich, printings of the Augsburg Confession from 1533 and 1540, a 1565 publication of the Decrees of Trent, and the stunning first edition of Gratius’s collection of historical documents (including the Donation of Constantine) arguing for Catholic reform (folio, 1535). One of the more important of these new acquisitions is a *Sammelband*—or collection of works into a single book—that includes a 1524 printing of Erasmus’s famous treatise,

De libero arbitrio (On the Freedom of the Will), and a 1526 printing of Luther’s impressive response, *De servo arbitrio (On the Bondage of the Will)*.

The body of this issue of *Reformation Notes*, however, will be devoted to three prayer books acquired this year. Two are Lutheran and one is Catholic, and together they attest the vitality of mid-sixteenth-century German piety and the efforts of religious leaders to instruct the people in the Christian faith.

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

REFORMATION DAY AT EMORY UNIVERSITY

OCTOBER 21, 2003

9:30–10:30 A.M.

“Bach’s Musical Theology”
Timothy Albrecht

11:00–11:50 A.M.

Chapel Service
Bishop Ronald Warren

Noon–1:00 P.M.

“Charles Wesley as Theologian”
S. T. Kimbrough

1:15–2:15 P.M.

“Web Resources for the Congregation”
Library Staff

4:30–6:00 P.M.

“Sweet Singer: Charles Wesley Dramatization”
S. T. Kimbrough

8:15–9:15 P.M.
Kessler Reformation Concert

Two Lutheran Prayer Books

M. Patrick Graham

Luther and his followers continued the Catholic tradition of issuing prayer books for the laity, and 1522 witnessed the publication of his famous *Eyn bett buchlin* (*A Prayer Book*), which included the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Ave Maria, selections from Psalms, and Paul's Letter to Titus. A first edition of this small,

eighty-page book is held in the Kessler Collection. The popularity of this work led Luther to enlarge and republish it throughout the rest of his career. After the reformer's death, it continued to be issued at approximate five-year intervals for the rest of the sixteenth century. The two Lutheran prayer books described below represent different permutations of this tradition.



"THE CRUCIFIXION" FROM THE LEIPZIG PRAYER BOOK, 1543

The Leipzig Prayer Book, 1543

One of the significant additions to the collection this year is a handsome, little octavo volume (about 4.5" x 6.5") that was bound in the blind-stamped, bleached pigskin so characteristic of sixteenth-century Germany. One can still make out illustrations and the Latin names of three virtues on the top (wisdom, patience, love) and bottom covers (hope, patience, faith). This *Sammelband* includes four separate publications—the first three published by Valentin Bapst in Leipzig in 1545 and the last by Bapst in 1543—and all are decorated with exquisite, metal-engraved page borders.

At this time, Leipzig was the largest city of Saxony, and the Reformation had been accepted officially there only a short time before, in 1539. The university at Leipzig was reformed in the early 1540s, and Luther dedicated its church in 1545, during his last visit to the city. Although there is little marginalia in this volume and therefore scant clues in establishing the provenance or ownership of the book, the sixteenth-century binding and the fact that each of the four works included in it derives from Bapst at Leipzig leads one to suspect that the first owner of the volume (who also would have commissioned the bookbinder) was in fact a resident of Leipzig or its environs, perhaps in the mid- or late 1540s.

The first work in this volume is Luther's Small Catechism, lavishly illustrated with engravings of biblical scenes. Luther first issued this work in 1529, and it quickly became one of his more popular publications, exerting enormous influence on Lutheran piety. The second work in the *Sammelband* is a treatise by the famous Lutheran preacher Urbanus Rhegius on ministering to the sick, and the third item is Luther's treatment of intercessory prayer (*How to Pray for a Good Friend*).

The last work in this collection is a small Lutheran prayer book. Its pages are unnumbered, but each of its forty-two prayers is numbered, and a final index provides the reader quick access to them. It includes prayers of confession and



CHART FOR CALENDRIAL CALCULATIONS, THE WITTENBERG PRAYER BOOK, 1566

thanksgiving, as well as prayers to be said in connection with observances of the Lord's Supper and at baptisms. Also included are various Psalms from the Old Testament, an elaboration of the Lord's Prayer, and a prayer for times of plague. Indeed, this *Sammelband* constitutes, in itself, a small library of sixteenth-century Lutheran piety, attending to the instruction, worship, and comfort of the faithful.

The Wittenberg Prayer Book, 1566

A second Lutheran devotional work, *Betbüchlin mit dem Calender vnd Passional* (*Prayer Book with Calendar and Passional*; Wittenberg: Hans Lufft, 1566), is also in the octavo format, bound in pigskin, has original metal clasps, and is adorned with intricate blind-stamped figures. Its 572 pages make it seven times larger than its precursor, Luther's prayer book of 1522.

Following earlier Catholic prayer book tradition, a liturgical calendar begins this volume, noting the feast days for various saints, making use of red to mark days of special significance ("red-letter days"),

and offering charts and tables to assist the reader with calculations. The foreword by Luther from his first prayer book (1522) then introduces a rich variety of devotional and catechetical materials on the Ten Commandments; the Ave Maria; the Lord's Prayer; the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds; and the Prayer of Manasseh. In addition, there are several sermons by Luther on prayer, baptism, confession, the Lord's Supper, the suffering of Christ, preparation for dying, as well as

a letter to his barber entitled "A Simple Way to Pray," a prayer against the pope and the Turks, and so on. The text and detailed woodcuts of the "Passional" in this volume may surprise the modern reader, since it is far more ambitious than the title suggests: rather than treating only the suffering of Jesus, it aims to recapitulate the entire story of God's dealings with humanity—beginning with creation and extending to the final judgment. The German litany, Psalm 103, and a brief index conclude the volume.

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