

Luther—The First Best-Selling German Author

Armin Siedlecki

Martin Luther's significance as a literary giant can hardly be exaggerated. In the words of Reformation historian Mark Edwards, "The presses of the German-speaking lands produced substantially more vernacular works by Luther in the crucial early years (1518–1525) than the seventeen other major Evangelical publishers combined. During Luther's lifetime these presses produced nearly five times as many German works by Luther as by all the Catholic controversialists put together. Even if consideration is restricted to polemical works, Luther still outpublished all his Catholic opponents five to three. By Hans-Joachim Köhler's calculation, Luther's works made up 20 percent of all the pamphlets published during the period 1500 to 1530."¹ In addition, Luther's translation of the Bible represents one of the earliest German literary works that could be understood in northern and southern German-speaking regions alike and is therefore a benchmark in the linguistic development of the German language.

The Richard C. Kessler Reformation Collection now holds 923 works by Luther that were printed between 1517 and 1570, more than any other library in North America. More than seven hundred of these were printed during Luther's lifetime. These materials show Luther to be not only

a prolific writer but one who covered a broad range of subjects and literary forms. The Kessler Collection also holds 118 works on biblical interpretation, as well as fourteen printings of biblical translations, eleven works on liturgy, and six hymnals with several compositions by Luther himself. In addition, there are works on doctrinal theology, pastoral theology, and polemical writings.

Included are 290 sermons by Luther, comprising almost one third of the collection's total holdings. The sermon "is perhaps the most significant genre of literature stemming from the Lutheran Reformation,"² and the large number of sermons by Luther in the Kessler Collection underscores the importance of preaching to the Reformation in general and to Luther in particular.

Luther preferred to publish his works in the vernacular, reflected in the fact that almost eight hundred of the Kessler Collection's Luther holdings are in German or contain significant German portions. This tendency, combined with the importance of pamphlets or *Flugschriften* as an important medium for theological discourse, contributed greatly to the rapid dissemination of Luther's ideas and the wide accessibility of his teachings. The cost for a pamphlet has been estimated at eight pennies or the price of a hen or of a wooden pitchfork.³

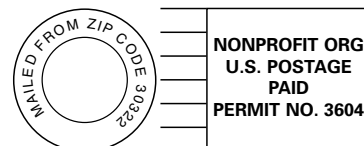
Finally, Luther also encouraged printers to decorate his books with wood-cut images, in particular for catechetical, biblical, or devotional works, although polemical works too would often be illustrated with images that could be quite provocative or controversial. The use of images to supplement the printed word helped to extend Luther's appeal not only to the educated classes, but also to those who could not read or write, thereby propelling forward the democratization of religion that was so central to the German Reformation.

Armin Siedlecki is catalog librarian of the Richard C. Kessler Reformation Collection.

1. Mark U. Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 1–2.

2. Beth Kreitzer, "The Lutheran Sermon," *Preachers and People in the Reformations and Early Modern Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. 35.

3. Cf. Hans-Joachim Köhler, "Die Flugschriften der frühen Neuzeit," in W. Arnold et al., eds., *Die Erforschung der Buch- und Bibliotheksgeschichte in Deutschland* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1987), p. 325.





REFORMATION NOTES

News for Partners of the Richard C. Kessler Reformation Collection
Summer 2006, Number 29

Concert Invitation

Timothy Albrecht

REFORMATION DAY AT EMORY 2006
OCTOBER 24 8:00 P.M.

THE EVENING OF WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2006, MARKS OUR
NINETEENTH REFORMATION DAY AT EMORY UNIVERSITY CONCERT.

THE CONCERT CHOIR, UNDER THE DIRECTION OF ERIC NELSON,
SOLOISTS, ORCHESTRA, AND I WILL PERFORM COMPOSITIONS DERIVED
FROM THE MUSICAL-THEOLOGICAL HOLDINGS OF OUR REFORMATION
COLLECTION, BEGUN ALMOST TWO DECADES AGO BY RICHARD AND
MARTHA KESSLER AND HOUSED IN THE PITTS THEOLOGY LIBRARY
AT EMORY UNIVERSITY'S CANDLER SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY.

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 3,200 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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Emory University
Atlanta, Georgia 30322
404.727.4165
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One of the most significant aspects of the sixteenth-century Reformation was the creation of the German Lutheran chorale. Martin Luther (d. 1546) not only encouraged contemporary poets and composers to write hymn texts and tunes, he himself authored some forty chorales, including both chorales found in the 2006 concert. Luther valued chorales as a way of singing the evangelical faith in church, school, and home. Our two featured chorales are found in Kessler Collection hymnals: "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" and "Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands."

Usually, one speaks separately of the origin of hymn texts and hymn tunes. For example, while the text for "A Mighty Fortress" is Luther's own

German paraphrase of Psalm 46, Luther himself freely composed the melody for this chorale. However, both the text and tune for "Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands" are based on an earlier model, the medieval liturgical Easter Day sequence, *Victimae Pasacali Laudes*. This Latin church music was so esteemed in Germany that already in the Middle Ages, it had been translated into the vernacular as *Christ ist erstanden* (Christ has risen). In 1524 Luther made his own "new and improved" German version of the text and tune (he calls it "*eine Verbesserung*" [an improvement]), which he titles "*Christ lag in Todesbanden*" ("Christ lay in death's bands").

continued on page 2

Concert Invitation—

continued from page 1

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), truly a “good Lutheran,” composed some of his greatest music for the Lutheran church, often using Martin Luther’s chorales as starting point. This year’s program gives example of such high-water mark Lutheran church music, composed by both Luther and Bach.

Our concert-menu this evening consists of the following musical courses:

- We will begin by listening to Johann Sebastian Bach’s festive organ *Soli Deo Gloria* acclamation, “*Wir danken Dir, Gott* (We Thank You God)” This I will perform on our 2005 Jaeckel Op. 45 Emerson Concert Hall Organ.

- Then the entire audience will join in singing Luther’s most famous chorale, *Ein’ feste Burg ist unser Gott* (“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”). Using the time-honored alternatim style, we will move stanza by stanza between Luther’s original polyrhythmic version and today’s more familiar version by Johann Sebastian Bach.
- We follow the singing of Luther’s most famous chorale by hearing Bach’s most famous organ composition: his youthful and exuberant *Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor*. Contemporary scholars think Bach wrote this work early in his two-year tenure (1707–1708) as Lutheran Church organist in Mühlhausen.
- We conclude by listening to another work the young Bach composed

while in Mühlhausen: the church cantata *Christ lag in Todesbanden* (“Christ Jesus Lay in Death’s Strong Bands”). The Emory University Concert Choir will sing this eight-movement church cantata, itself a musical homily based on the entire seven stanzas of Martin Luther’s 1524 chorale of the same name.

GUTEN APPETIT!

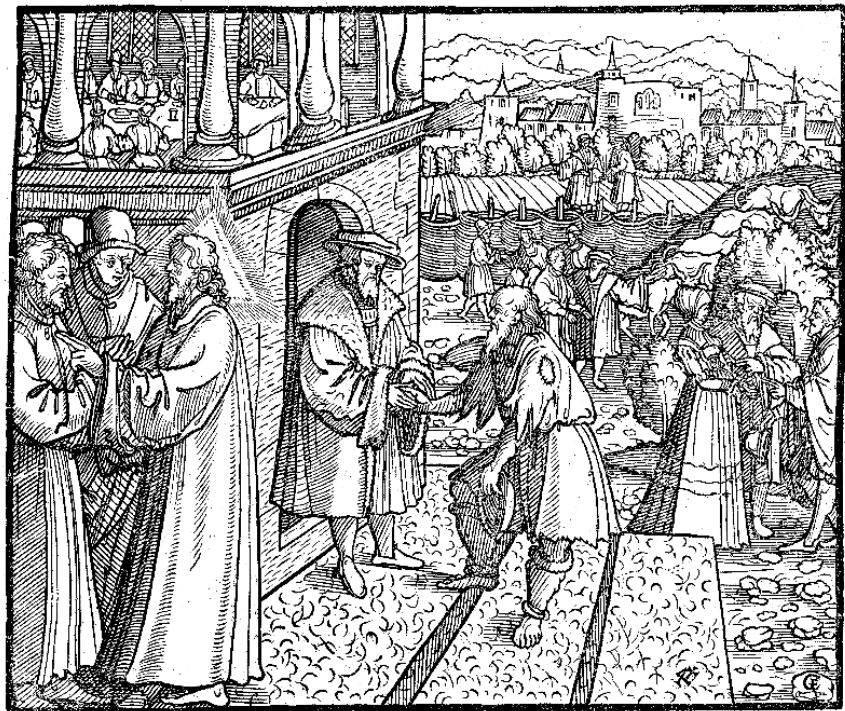
Our concert venue again this year will be the elegant Cherry Emerson Concert Hall in the Schwartz Center for Performing Arts. The hourlong concert is free, open to the public, and begins at 8:00 p.m. We welcome you to mark the date and attend this celebration.

Timothy Albrecht, Emory University organist and Candler School of Theology professor of church music.

Completion of Thrivent Grant

In 2005 Thrivent Financial for Lutherans made a \$25,000 grant to Pitts Theology Library, Candler School of Theology, for the digitization of 2,500 images from the Kessler Collection and other special collection materials of interest to Lutherans. We are pleased to announce that this work has been completed, and the images have been added to the Digital Image Archive (accessible via the library’s homepage at www.pitts.emory.edu). This brings the total number of images in the archive to 13,500, almost half of which are biblical illustrations. All materials are available without charge for download and noncommercial use.

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans is a faith-based membership organization called to improve the quality of life of its members, their families, and their communities. It offers a wide range of financial products from insurance and annuities to investments. Its grant program supports Lutheran projects.



PARABLE OF THE GREAT BANQUET FROM MARTIN LUTHER, *KERCKEN POSTILLA* (WITTENBERG, 1563).

Kessler Collection Update

M. Patrick Graham

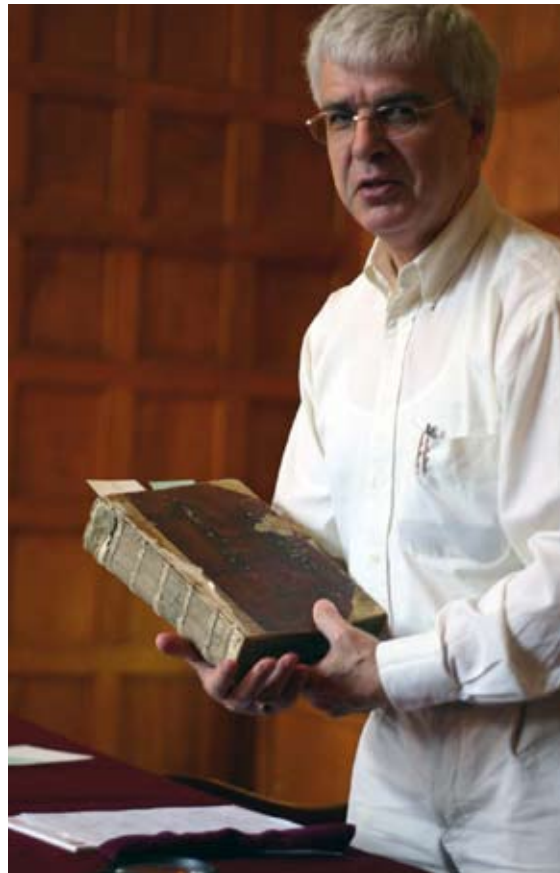
The 2005–2006 academic year has brought record acquisitions to the Kessler Collection—a total of 372 titles. This lifts the total number of items in the collection to 3,279, of which 923 are by Martin Luther himself. By next year’s celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the collection, we should have passed 3,300 total pieces and have drawn much nearer the one thousandth Luther publication. To all of you who have made donations to the collection over the years and helped us reach this point, we extend our sincerest thanks.

Among the distinguished guests visiting the Kessler Collection this year we must mention at least two. First, on April 11 Bishop Wolfgang Huber, chief of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany and Bishop of the Evangelical Church in Berlin-Brandenburg, visited Pitts Library with his wife, and then on May 5, about thirty members of the Grolier Club of New York, the nation’s “oldest and largest society for bibliophiles and enthusiasts in the graphic arts,” came to the library for a presentation of Kessler Collection items.

Finally, I am pleased to mention that one of the world’s premiere experts on bookbindings, Jan Storm van Leeuwen, keeper of the bookbinding collection at the Dutch Royal Library (The Hague), came to Atlanta to spend several days with the Kessler Collection and other special collections materials at Emory and deliver a

public lecture for the Friends of the Emory University Libraries titled “Decorated Bookbinding: Why, How, and by Whom?” This was followed by his workshop “European Bookbindings at Emory as Cultural Artifacts” for academic librarians in the area. While much of our discussion over the years in *Reformation Notes* has been about the content of Reformation Collection pieces, the bindings of these materials are not without their own significance, and we were pleased to have such a renowned figure as Jan Storm van Leeuwen come to Emory to help us explore this aspect of the materials.

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



JAN STORM VAN LEEUWEN



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