Making the Past Accessible

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A central purpose of Special Collections is to maintain the sometimes fragile links connecting the Seminary’s past and present. Our perspective is frequently generational rather than annual. The Department of Special Collections exists because those who came before us took care to preserve and pass along significant books, manuscripts, photographs, and other artifacts of historical relevance to the Seminary. In turn, we are dedicated to preserving and describing this inheritance for future generations.

We strive, however, to make this historic material accessible to researchers using contemporary means. In an era of swiftly changing technologies, we are constantly seeking new ways to make our collections accessible to patrons. Special Collections recently purchased a new content server from the Mark Logic Corporation to render its digital collections searchable for the first time (see http://libweb.ptsem.edu/collections/digital/release102007.aspx for more information). Patrons may now easily search and peruse articles from The Princeton Theological Review and The Princeton Seminary Bulletin, among other items. The new digital collections are located at http://digital.library.ptsem.edu. Please take a look at our new site and let us know what you think.

The articles in this issue illustrate the wide range of activities that take place in our department of the library. If something catches your interest, please come by. We are always glad to welcome friends old and new.

Upcoming Conferences

The Abraham Kuyper Center is sponsoring a conference on “Civil Society and Sphere Sovereignty,” on April 17–19, 2008, at Princeton Seminary. Speakers include Oliver O’Donovan (University of Edinburgh), Gordon Graham (Princeton Seminary), and John R. Bowlin (Princeton Seminary). For more information, please email kuyper.conference@ptsem.edu.

The Center for Barth Studies is sponsoring its third annual conference on Karl Barth on June 22–25, 2008. The theme of the conference will be Barth’s theological ethics. Speakers include Nigel Biggar (Trinity College Dublin), Timothy Gorringe (University of Exeter), David Haddorff (St. John’s University), Kathryn Tanner (University of Chicago), and William Werpehowski (Villanova University). For more information, please email barth.conference@ptsem.edu.
Disdaining priestly vestments, he dressed in a secular gown, read a simplified Latin service (omitting all references to the mass as a sacrifice), spoke the words of institution for the first time in a public service in German, refused to elevate the host, and served both the bread and cup to the laity, placing the elements directly into the trembling hands of the communicants (one of whom was so frightened by this that he dropped the wafer and was too terrified to pick it up).

Meanwhile, Melanchthon and Karlstadt, Luther’s associates in Wittenberg, sought to carry on the Reformation. On Christmas Day 1521, Karlstadt celebrated the first public “Protestant” worship service in Germany. Disdaining priestly vestments, he dressed Arabic, Hawaiian, and the various languages of the Indian sub-continent. There are histories of Christian hymnody, biographies of hymn-writers, and books of religious poetry.

Among the items in this collection are a large medieval Cistercian choir hymnal, Roman Catholic breviaries from the 15th century, the first complete edition of the Sternhold and Hopkins metrical psalter (a very rare item, not even to be found in the Bodleian Library at Oxford), handwritten music manuscripts from Ephrata Cloister in colonial Pennsylvania, first-editions of the hymnal of Isaac Watts, a full set of the earliest Methodist hymnbooks, and early printed materials on African American gospel singing as presented by the Jubilee Singers of Fiske University. At his death he bequeathed this valuable collection to Princeton Theological Seminary, along with an endowment for the purchase of additional books on hymnology and for the upkeep of the collection.

Benson was chosen by the General Assembly to serve as general editor of the 1895 Presbyterian Hymnal, which set a new standard for church hymnals of all denominations. He was also responsible for two further revisions of this hymnal, one in 1911 and another in 1917. A very special copy of this hymnal, as published by the Presbyterian Board of Education in 1915, has recently been added to the Princeton Theological Seminary Library. It is an inter-leaved and re-bound copy, carefully hand-annotated in pencil with the lives and stories of the authors and composers of each of its hymns. Many of the annotations are also supplemented with sketches and portraits of the authors and composers cut out from various sources and pasted onto the pages. A rare copy of the sermon that Karlstadt preached on this historic occasion (printed in Wittenberg in early 1522), in which Karlstadt seeks to explain the Protestant understanding of the sacraments, was recently acquired for the Princeton Theological Seminary Special Collections. The title page is especially handsome, featuring a fine woodcut border, with a depiction of Abraham and Isaac climbing the mountain in the lower center area.
The light cord overhead extending from the ceiling, he imagined as the arm of Michaelangelo’s Adam reaching for the hand of God. Like his father, he had a deep love of the tradition of Christian hymnody. “I used to recall as many different hymns as I could, and I found as I struggled that it was like unraveling a sweater—I’d get more and more as I worked at it.”

Although not allowed to sing out loud, Weir would recite psalms and Bible passages and sing his well-loved hymns “in my head.” Following his eventual release, he received the Distinguished Alumnus Award from Princeton Seminary in 1986 and was elected moderator of the Presbyterian Church USA. The Seminary’s citation acknowledged “the inspiration of his steadfast Christian example of grace under pressure” and his “gentleness in the midst of violence, love for those who had grievously wronged him, and confidence that in the strong hands of God…there was always hope.”

Thus, this volume comes to us as a testimony of faith—the faith of Louis Benson, who compiled the hymnal out of his vast knowledge of and love for the tradition of Christian hymnody, the faith of Thomas Weir, who devoted many hours to learning the stories of the lives and Christian testimony behind the hymns he found in that hymnal and writing them out to share with others, and the faith of his son Benjamin Weir, who relied on his memory of those hymns and silently sang them to help sustain his faith and Christian witness in a time of extreme adversity and daily uncertainty about whether he would even live to see another day. It is a very special addition to the Seminary’s widely respected and still growing Louis F. Benson Hymnology Collection.
Over the summer I prepared a selection of the material in the Seminary’s pamphlet collection for addition to its digital library, as part of a summer internship in Special Collections. I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of History at Princeton University, working on a dissertation in the area of seventeenth-century Dutch publishing.

In the struggles to shape the Dutch Reformed Church in the early modern period, predestination proved to be a divisive issue. In 1604, Jacob Arminius and Franciscus Gomarus, professors of theology at the University of Leiden, gave public disputations on the topic of predestination. Whereas Gomarus taught a doctrine of absolute predestination, that God had chosen some for salvation and others for damnation, Arminius taught a conditional view of predestination: that God’s decision was conditioned on the individual’s faith.

What began as an academic controversy over predestination soon spread beyond the university, and continued long after Arminius’s death from illness in 1608. In 1610 forty-three Arminian ministers submitted a formal petition, or Remonstrance, to the States of Holland, enumerating the key points of their doctrinal views, and asking for toleration within the Reformed Church. Hence the Arminians came to be known as Remonstrants, and their Gomarist opponents as Counter-Remonstrants. Each side allied itself with key politicians: Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, chief advocate for the States of Holland, and Prince Maurice of Nassau, stadholder of a majority of the provinces of the Dutch Republic, respectively. Control of the church and control of the state became inextricably linked.

In a time of schism and near-civil war, pamphlets—short, timely printed tracts designed to persuade—were one of the key ways in which both sides tried to appeal to the common man. Pamphlets were spread from town to town by traveling book-peddlers who carried a few copies from one city to another, and had additional copies produced by local printers on arrival. As local governments attempted to control the content and the spread of subversive pamphlets, many were published anonymously.

Due to the generosity of Francis Landey Patton (1843–1932), Special Collections is home to one of the largest collections of seventeenth-century Dutch pamphlets outside of The Netherlands. The collection contains more than 650 pamphlets bound in thirty-six volumes, relating to the Remonstrant controversy and the Synod of Dort. Francis Landey Patton, known as a theologian who championed conservative Presbyterianism, was an alumnus of Princeton Seminary and served as its president from 1902 to 1913, as well as president of Princeton University from 1888 to 1902. Through a Dutch dealer, he purchased the Remonstrant pamphlets from the renowned collection of rare works on religion and philosophy assembled by Jacob I. Doedes, a theologian at the University of Utrecht, after Doedes’s death in 1897. He donated them to the Seminary in 1907.

Most of the pamphlets are eight to sixteen pages long, in quarto format. They range in size, however, from single-sheet posters (broadsheets) to thick tracts a few hundred pages long. The broadsheets in particular are of interest due to their ephemeral nature, since they were intended to be posted on walls, rather than bound, and so relatively few have survived. Several show the fortifications built in the Dutch towns by the besieged Remonstrants as their position grew more tenuous in 1618. Some broadsheets include striking illustrations of the tensions between the townspeople and the troops (waardgelders) the Remonstrants hired to maintain order. This collection can be seen at http://digital.library.ptsem.edu/default.xqy?src=remonstrantpamphlets.

The Center for the Study of Scottish Philosophy hosted the fourth International Reid Symposium at Princeton Theological Seminary from October 7 to 9. The symposium, titled “Philosophy, Theology, Education: Scottish Foundations of American Tradition,” featured plenary talks by Gordon Graham, the Seminary’s Henry Luce III Professor of Philosophy and the Arts, Nicholas Wolterstorff of Yale University, Rachel Zuckert of Northwestern University, Aaron Garrett of Boston University, and Samuel Fleischacker of the University of Illinois at Chicago, as well as six sessions of current papers.

The Abraham Kuyper Center for Public Theology cosponsored a conference this fall with New Brunswick Theological Seminary titled “Making All Things New: Explorations in the Trinitarian Theology of A.A. van Ruler.” The conference took place on Friday, October 5 in New Brunswick. Dirk van Keulen presented Special Collections with the first volume of the Collected Works of Van Ruler, which he edited on behalf of The Theological Scholarship Institute of the Protestant Church in The Netherlands.