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JOHANNES NIDER, *Praeceptorum divinae legis, sive expositio decalogi*  
In Latin, manuscript on paper  
[Southern Germany, Bavaria, c. 1455-60]

303 leaves, complete (collation: i<sup>4</sup> [of 12, blank canceled], ii-xxv<sup>12</sup>, xxvi<sup>4</sup> [of 8, blank v-viii canceled]), paper, the central folds with parchment guards, written in double column, on 39-45 lines, ruled in ink (justification c. 217 x 136 mm.) in brown ink in a small rectangular German cursive bookband slightly sloping to the left, horizontal catchwords, running titles for books and chapters in brown ink, capitals and marginal paragraph marks touched in red, quotations underlined in red, headings in red painted initials (up to 4 lines high) with guide-letters throughout, LARGE TEN-LINE DIVIDED INITIAL in red on fol. 1r, marginal scribal corrections and contemporary notes by different hands, a small portion of paper cut away at the upper fore-edge of fol. 1, last leaf largely defective, some worming especially in the lower margins, a dark stain along extreme edges of upper margin and some occasional staining, some thumbing and tears at edges, with wide white margins. CONTEMPORARY BLIND-STAMPED-BINDING of great rarity, of tanned leather (probably sheepskin) over wooden boards on inner edges and flush with text-block at fore-edge, sewn on 5 raised double white-tawed leather bands pegged into grooves in the boards, sides treble ruled into frame and saltire patterns and stamped with at least 18 small tools, including flowers, leaves, fleurs-de-lys, hearts, stars, a miter, a hand with a decorated cuff, a shield with a paling fence, etc., headband of cotton and tailband of white-tawed leather, both sewn in herringbone patterns, traces of original square-plate catches at fore-edge of upper cover, 2 clasps (replaced) fitting over original pins on edge of upper cover, metal fittings in each corner, nailed studs on upper and lower edges, HASP MARK FROM A CHAIN once attached to the upper edge of the lower cover, lower cover with leather partly torn away, other wear and small defects. Dimensions 296 x 207 mm.

Excellent, wholly intact copy of a text unknown in manuscripts in North American collections, extremely rare in early printed editions, and unedited. The collection of precepts on divine law with an explication of the Ten Commandments is by Johannes Nider, an important Dominican theologian and canonist, who was an avid reformer,

attacking the Hussites, witchcraft, etc. The present copy, completed within about two decades of Nider's activity, is in its signed original binding that was once chained. It predates by a quarter century printed editions of the text.

## PROVENANCE

1. Made in southern Germany based on the various stocks of paper used and on the binding. There are four distinct watermarks from the areas of Brixen, Munich, and Freising: a Tower, close to Picard *Turm* II, 337; 1452-56, Brixen, Innsbruck, Munich; a Bull's Head Cross, apparently identical to Piccard *Ochsenkopf* XI 221, 1455 Freising; a Bull's Head Flower apparently identical to *ibid*, XII 178, 1454-56, Brixen, Nordlingen, Munich; and a tilted Balance, apparently identical to Piccard *Waage* I 306 and 307, 1455-57 South Germany and Nuremberg. The binding of considerable interest and great rarity is from the same area. Bearing the scroll-form name-stamp *eriber*, it is presumably by Eriber I (flourished 1444-1462), an unlocalized binder of whom Kyriakos recorded only eight bindings (in Augsburg, Donaueschingen, Eichstatt, Munich, Prague, and Stuttgart, etc.).
2. Unidentified European collections: the shelf-mark Lu.303 inside the upper cover, c.1800, and an early nineteenth-century printed label on the spine reads "Cod.Ms." with the number "86" added in ink.
3. New York, Sotheby's, 12 December 1991, lot 74a; acquired at the sale for Mr. J.R. Ritman.
4. J. R. Ritman, Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, Amsterdam, his sale, London, Sotheby's, 6 July 2000, lot 26.
5. Private European Collection.

## TEXT

f.1r, *Incipiunt Sermones et precepta Reverendi magistri doctoris Johannis Nider, Decalogi, Decalogi legem ...*; the text is divided into ten precepta or books, subdivided in chapters (on ff. 1r, 66v, 83v, 119v, 134r, 173v, 194v, 231v, 239r and 256r), and it ends on fol.287r, "... deus benedictus in secula, Amen".

fols. 288-92v, table of contents, including a quodlibet on the value of indulgences, a topical subject in pre-Reformation Germany, "Utrum indulgenciis concessis remittitur pena solvenda ..." all ending on fol. 303 with the admirable colophon, "Scriptor scripsit, Perlegens corrigat." (Written by the copyist, Corrected by the revisor).

The Dominican friar, Johannes Nider (b. 1380 in Swabia; d. 1438 at Colmar) became well-known in his day as a theologian and a reformer. In 1425, he taught at the

University of Vienna. He was appointed prior of the Dominican convent at Nuremberg in 1427. He was sent to the Councils of Constance (1414-18) and Basel (1431-49), the latter as an intermediary between the Church and the Hussites, whom he made several attempts to reform. His writings are significant for their themes of reform, and he was in the forefront of the theological issues of his day: heresy, lay spirituality, convent reform, witchcraft, and even the relationship between commerce and religious life. Two works by him are famous. The first, *Formicarius (The Ant Hill)* written in 1437 is often cited for the light it throws on the methods of persecution of witches. The second, *De Contractibus Mercatorum (On the Contracts of Merchants)*, is considered to be the first-ever work on modern business ethics. Noteworthy also is a third work, the *Vierundzwanzig goldenen Harfen*, his only work in German, a text on how to adapt the ideals of a monastic life to lay spirituality.

The present work carefully outlines an interpretation of the Decalogue for confessors and preachers. It enjoyed great popularity in the later Middle Ages. Kaeppli (*Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum Medii Aevi*, no. 2540) cites 57 surviving manuscripts, and it was printed 17 times before 1500 (Goff N-196 to N-214). A copy of the early edition published in Cologne by Ulrich Zel with a chain binding recently appeared on the art market, and an early inscription in it permits a revision in the dating of this and the first edition printed at Basel by Ruppel to "not after 1470" or perhaps before that date.

No manuscripts of the text are recorded in North American collections by De Ricci and Bond, and there is as yet no critical edition of his works see Ehrenschtendner for extensive further bibliography).

## LITERATURE

Kaeppli, Thomas. *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum Medii Aevi*, 4 vols (vol. 4 by Emilio Panella), Rome, 1970-93.

E. Kyriss, "Deutsche Buchbinder der Spätgotik und der renaissance," *Archiv für Geschichte d. Buchwesens*, III, 1961, no. 183.

Nider, Johannes. *Praeceptorium divinae legis, sive Expositio decalogi...*, [Basel, Berthold Ruppel, circa 1470].

Nider, Johannes. *Praeceptorium divinae legis, sive Expositio decalogi...*, Basel, Johann Amerbach, 1481, in-folio. Described in Oberlé, G., *Les Fastes de Bacchus et de Comus*, Paris, Belfond, 1989.

## Online Resources

Biography of Nider in the Catholic Encyclopedia  
[www.newadvent.org/cathen/11072b.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11072b.htm)

Excerpts from *The Ant Hill* (in translation) from the Medieval Sourcebook: Witchcraft  
Documents created by Paul Halsall, Fordham University  
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/witches1.html>

Ehrenschtendner, Marie-Luise. Bio-bibliography of Johannes Nider's life and works in  
the Kirchenlexikon  
[http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/j/Johannes\\_nid.shtml](http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/j/Johannes_nid.shtml)