The Beginnings of a Historic Collection

Many of the printed books and all of the prints by Albrecht Dürer featured in
Reformations: Dürer & the New Age of Print were donated to the Gleeson Library by
German businessman and collector, Reinhard F. Timken-Zinkann. A devoted admirer and
collector of early printed books and incunabula (printed works before 1501), Timken-
Zinkann first encountered Dürer’s prints as a schoolboy in the final year of World War I,
and soon became a collector of prints himself.

“As a lad of seventeen I was held spellbound,” he wrote for a Gleeson Library Associates
newsletter in 1987. “Dürer’s graphic work startled me... How masterly did Dürer’s
woodcuts express the anxieties and the despair which my contemporaries experienced in
my own time.”

In the 1930s, Timken-Zinkann began collecting rare books and prints, especially those
published before 1500, and continued collecting them until he left Germany at the onset
of World War II. After settling in Palo Alto, California, he met and began a friendship
with William J. Monihan, S.J., then Director of Library Relations at the University of San
Francisco. In 1957, Timken-Zinkann lent, and later donated, a significant portion of his
exquisite collection to the Gleeson Library.

Since then, the books and prints have been kept in the permanent study collection of the
Library’s Donohue Rare Book Room for use by USF faculty and students. They have also
been loaned to other institutions like the Crocker Art Museum (Sacramento) and to the
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco for the Legion of Honor’s exhibition celebrating
Dürer’s 500th birthday in 1971.

Objects from the Timken-Zinkann Collection that are exhibited here include all of the
prints in Dürer’s Life of the Virgin, the Small Woodcut Passion, and the Engraved
Passion series, as well as the Nuremberg Chronicle printed by Anton Koberger (1493), a
popular, early printed Latin Bible (Biblia Latina, c. 1468-70), Vitruvius’s influential
architectural treatise (De architectura, 1511), and a very rare example of early biblical
commentary by Nicholas of Lyra (Repertorium in postillum..., 1494). When not on display
these and thousands of other rare volumes are available for study in the Donohue Rare
Book Room in Gleeson Library.