

Domica prima aduentus. In.
De te leuavi ani-
mā meam deus
me⁹ in te cōfido
nō erubescā. ne-
qz irrideant me
inimici mei. et enī uniuersi q̄
te expectāt nō cōfundētur. *Ps*
Vias tuas domine demōstra
michi et semitas tuas edoce
me Gloria patri Sicut eāt
Gloria i excelsis deo nō dicis
Neqz etiā Ite missa ē mili ubi
in matutinis Te deū cōtatatur
Exulta quaelumus *Collca.*
dñe potenciā tuā et veni
ut ob īmīnētib⁹

surgere. Nunc enim prior est nos-
 tra salus: quam cum credidimus.
 Nos precessit: dies autem appro-
 pinquavit. Abiciamus ergo
 opera tenebrarum: et induamus
 arma lucis. sicut in die honeste
 ambulemus. Non in comessatio-
 nibus et ebrietatibus: non in cu-
 bilibus et impudicijs non in co-
 tentione et emulatione. Sed
 induimini dominum ihesum christum.
Ps. Universi qui te expectant
 non confundentur domine. **V.**
 Vias tuas domine notas fac mihi
 et semitas tuas edoce me.
Alleluia. V. Ostende nobis

Religious Publishing in Early Modern Europe

Renowned British historian Andrew Pettegree delves into how the printing press influenced 15th century European religion – and how religion influenced the early publishing industry



Professor Andrew Pettegree is a renowned British historian and a leading expert on Europe during the Reformation. He holds a professorship at St Andrews University, the oldest of four ancient universities in Scotland, where he is the director of the Universal Short Title Catalogue (USTC). The USTC is a collective database of all titles published in Europe between the invention of printing and the end of the 16th century.



ProQuest and the USTC have partnered to improve access and discoverability of materials essential to scholarship of the early modern period. In this essay, Prof. Pettegree highlights content from ProQuest Early European Books Collection 15 – which is focused on the important themes of science and religion – to explore the relationship between religion and the printing press.

Struggles of the early publishing industry

In the fifteenth century, printing was rightly celebrated as an astonishing technical achievement, expanding the range of texts available to Europe's readers many times over. Contemporary observers who recognised print as a progressive force have been dutifully echoed by scholars through the ages.

This should not, however, disguise the fact that, though the technology may have been revolutionary, the first printers were decidedly conservative in their choice of texts. Within thirty years of when Gutenberg first exhibited his new technology, the market was saturated. Many of the first publishers went bankrupt, victim of the unexpected paradox of new technology: that it was far simpler to print the texts than to sell them.

Printers gradually learned that the route to prosperity lay through cultivating established markets and reliable partners; and that the most reliable of all were institutional clients: the state, the universities and the church. Europe's governments were precocious in adopting this novel form of distribution, and in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries universities also proved a steady source of work, often in towns that would not otherwise have been major centres of production.

But religious printing, publishing for church institutions and the works of clerics, was from the beginning of print to the end of the eighteenth century, the solid bedrock of the industry. In almost every part of Europe, in every era, religious books, including Bibles, missals, sermons, catechisms, devotional texts and religious polemic, accounted for almost half of all the books printed.

The popularity of religious texts

Gutenberg's signature project in the 1450s was, of course, a Bible. But this was a text so expensive that most of Gutenberg's customers were institutions, largely monasteries who could afford the extra expense of decoration.

The market for complete texts of the Bible would grow steadily as prices fell, particularly after the Protestant Reformation brought a new theological urgency to the reading of the text of scripture in vernacular languages. Mostly people contented themselves with smaller texts: an edition of the New Testament or a



collection of psalms. Church institutions also provided a large and robust market for missals and other texts required for the regular round of church services. These could be very large books, intended to be placed on the church lectern, the sort of complex projects that could only be taken on by the best equipped print shops (and even then, most likely with subsidy from the commissioning diocese).

A more flexible market, and one eagerly pursued by printers, was the commission to print the certificates of donation and other printed paraphernalia accompanying the sale of indulgences. Indulgence campaigns were big business in late mediaeval Europe, raising large sums, normally for local churches. Energetically preached by indulgence specialists, they required hundreds of thousands of printed certificates which pious donors received in return for their contribution.

Rather ironically, several of those who later made a fortune printing for Martin Luther were up to the eve of the Reformation heavily involved in the indulgence trade. Printing was a very pragmatic industry.

A revolution in religious publishing

In 1517, this cosy, complacent world was shaken to its foundations. This was not because the printers had lost confidence in their Catholic patrons: rather, they had found in Germany an outlet even more profitable.

Martin Luther, an Augustinian friar in mid-career, not previously particularly well known, emerged as a brave, resilient and outspoken critic of the church. More importantly, he found a voice for the occasion, turning out a stream of short, original writings; ideal products for the printing press in a time of high drama and fast-moving events.

Luther revolutionized religious publishing, writing in German, taking complex theological debates, previously regarded as the preserve of a closed circle of theologians, to a far wider audience. This very public quarrel was largely propelled by print, with multiple editions of the works of Luther and his loyal band of supporters. Europe would be irrevocably changed by the Reformation, divided into competing Catholic and Protestant Churches. The torrent of print generated by the religious quarrels brought the habit of book-buying to new generations of readers, vastly expanding the market for printing, making the decisive shift away from reliance on the core audiences of the manuscript era.

In time, the fires of controversy would die down, but the new energy in the print industry did not disappear but was simply redeployed. As the evangelical movement took root in the cities and states that had followed Luther in repudiating the authority of the Papacy, other types of literature were required: church orders, catechisms, hymn books and psalters – the “church” books that defined the new vernacular worship and which pious believers would now carry with them to the worship service. This created a whole new lucrative market for printers who had flourished making quick profits from Luther’s writings. The apogee of this pyramid of print was the text of holy scripture.

In the near panic created by the unprecedented fury of Luther’s assault on the church, defenders of the old order tried hard to hold the line. Talented men came forward to contest Luther’s theological precepts, though usually in Latin. In many parts of Europe, where rulers stayed faithful to the old church, the writing, selling or ownership of Luther’s works was banned. Publishing Luther became deadly dangerous: in these places editions of his works were generally published anonymously.

But the attempt to root out Luther’s beliefs had some serious consequences. There was no reason why the vernacular Bible should have been Protestant property, but Catholic prohibitions on translation, as for instance in France, effectively made it so. This handed evangelicals the largest slice of a huge market. Editions of the Bible, New Testaments and psalm books became a staple of the trade for over four centuries: editions in all sizes and for all pockets. In emerging markets, the production of a Bible in the native tongue, in Finnish, Swedish or Estonian, was a symbolic coming of age for both the print industry and the local vernacular.

Efforts to build an informed Christian people

In the mid-sixteenth century, the Council of Trent brought stability to the church Luther had abandoned, ending the haemorrhage of talent and drawing clear theological dividing lines between the competing churches.

The Catholic Church became a mission church, both in parts of Europe that had abandoned the true faith, and in new mission fields overseas in Asia and America. In all these endeavours, print played an important role. In France, an outpouring of vituperative denunciations of the surging Calvinist movement helped rally the Catholic majority in defence of traditional practice at the onset of the religious wars. In England, devotional works published abroad played a major role in sustaining Catholic recusant communities.

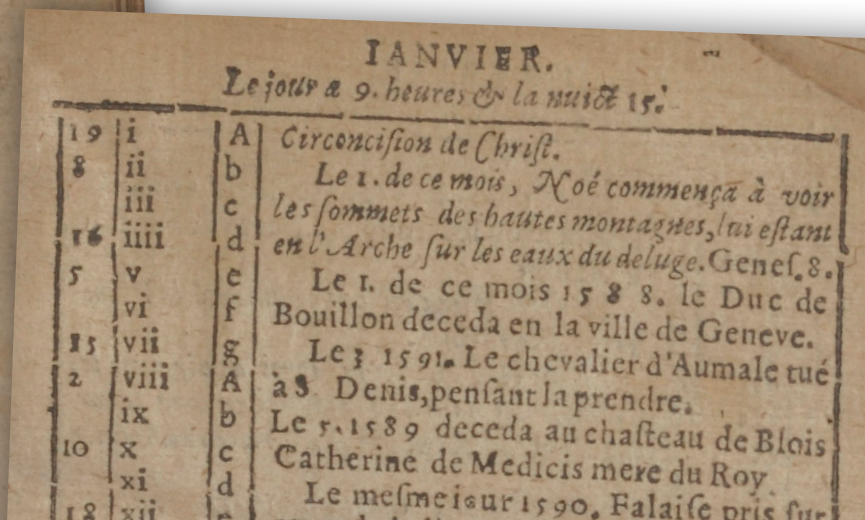
Colonial powers carried with them abroad religious texts intended to convert the indigenous peoples: one notable by-product of this was the first generation of bilingual texts in indigenous and European languages. In this, as in attempts to reconvert Protestant territories in Europe, the Jesuits played a leading role. Their creativity in commissioning and distributing expositions of the Catholic faith demonstrated how much had been learned from Luther's movement.

Jesuits too were profoundly committed to educational initiatives like those that had transformed literacy in Protestant Europe. Additionally, Jesuit colleagues planted libraries in frontier territories, an important statement of purpose. When Swedish armies embarked on their campaigns of conquest in the 1620s, these Catholic libraries were a first target, their contents carefully packed up and shipped back to Stockholm and Uppsala: where many remain today.

In all these efforts to build an informed Christian people, the publication of sermons played a leading role. In the first generation of print, the hopes of aspirant authors were not always realised. But sermons were always popular, in every era, every part of Europe, and in every language; after editions of the scripture and texts for use in church, these were probably the predominant form of religious publication.

Sermons were an infinitely flexible medium: the literature of consolation and spiritual encouragement, comfort in sickness, grief and misfortune, a reminder of obligations to Christ's less fortunate children. They served as an introduction to theological understanding, a means to deepen Christian knowledge. During periods of confessional tension, preachers excoriated their opponents and celebrated military triumphs as a sign of God's favour. These too were swiftly relayed to the print shops. The messages they contained also had a timeless quality.

On the eve of the French Revolution, eight of the most popular texts, as revealed in the official records of the Parisian print industry, were devotional works. The absolute bestseller, the *Ange Conducteur*, was written over one hundred years earlier, and constantly in print thereafter. It is a reminder that, while scholars (and librarians) constantly seek out texts breaching new frontiers of knowledge, most readers of the time preferred eternal verities: a structural reality of the book trade that was largely unchanged until deep into the nineteenth century.



Selections from Early European Books Collection 15

Half-printed books

If print was an agent of change, many of the first generation of printers seem not to have been aware of this. Their choice of texts was remarkably conservative. They rendered into print texts that had been in high demand in the manuscript age, serving largely established markets: scholars and students, noble collectors, and especially the church.

This text, a missal for the diocese of Liège, is a demonstration that this large and reliable market extended to complex texts that would have required considerable investment. In the mediaeval world, monastic scriptoria would have been the major source of missals and other texts required in the daily round of worship, in this case the celebration of the Mass.

This market was robust because many dioceses had their own local rite. Manuscripts were often highly decorated, with different coloured inks to help guide the reader, or presiding priest, through the text. This would have been all the more necessary when Mass was celebrated in poor light or by candlelight. These features of church books, particularly the presentation of part of the text in red letters, proved complex and costly to produce mechanically.

Early experiments in double impression printing, first with black ink, then a second pass to ink in the parts of the text in red, had not gone well. It was difficult to ensure that the different inks did not encroach on the plate, and the paper had to be exactly aligned for the second pull. Far simpler was to print the page in black, and add the red highlights by hand, as here. This allowed for both the rubrication of the text, and the more elaborate decoration of the opening initial. But this implied considerable extra expenditure of time and effort after the book left the print shop, essentially half finished. This was not what print was supposed to have achieved.

It would be many decades before these technical problems were resolved, and in fact large format church books remained the most enduring market for red/black printing. The cost would probably have been underwritten by the sponsoring diocese; few printers were in a position to undertake this sort of risky work from their own resources, even for regular and lucrative customers.

Missale Leodiense (Delft: [Christiaen Snellaert], 1495), in folio:

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/2090314166?accountid=8312>

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USTC 436313. NB 10757

A dangerous vocation

At one point in the early 1520s, the writings of Martin Luther and his supporters accounted for half of the books published in the Holy Roman Empire. So, it bears emphasis that Luther's movement in fact did not export very well. This was partly because Luther was often addressing German issues and stirring German grievances; but it was also the case that government authorities in much of western Europe, in France, England, Italy and Spain took swift action to forbid the publication or ownership of Luther's works.

Persecution of evangelicals was particularly severe in the Netherlands, despite (or perhaps because of) the early enthusiasm for Luther's message in the Low Countries. To spread Luther's words, and avoid prosecution or even execution, printers had to adopt very different strategies to the bold marketing of Luther's works in Wittenberg and other German towns.

This book, *A Very Useful Meditation on the Suffering and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ*, has all the appearance of a pre-Reformation Catholic devotional text. In fact, it is a sermon of Martin Luther, first published in Wittenberg in 1519. At no point is Luther's responsibility for the text acknowledged; the confident use of Luther's name to market the German originals of these sermons and works of consolation is here entirely absent.

Nor is the printer, Jan Seversz, keen to associate his name with the project. Seversz was a courageous man, risking his life for the cause. In the first years of the Reformation Seversz reprinted several of Luther's Latin works, an offence for which he was banned from Holland in 1524. He moved to Utrecht but his reputation pursued him: here too he was banished, and when he moved to Antwerp, a larger city where concealment was more plausible, he was briefly imprisoned.

This modest work, with its comforting message of salvation, unlocks a tumultuous world of underground printing and clandestine distribution. In one respect this deception, the carefully non-confessional title and elegant woodcut, seems to have worked. This was only rediscovered as the work of Martin Luther comparatively recently. But the clampdown on dissident print was in other respects successful. This delicate pamphlet is the only surviving example of the original edition.

[Martin Luther], *Een seer nuttelijke bedenckenisse onser salicheyts* ([Leiden: Jan Seversz, 1522]), in octavo:

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/2090317234?accountid=8312>

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USTC 424778. NB 19926

To the victor go the spoils

Throughout the history of print, the Bible was a perennial favourite of the industry. This was the text with which Gutenberg chose to announce his great invention, and for centuries thereafter Bibles, New Testaments and psalm books formed the cornerstone of the collections of those who could afford books. And if households only owned a handful of books, these would invariably include a biblical text.

But this was at the same time a challenging market, for purchasers and producers alike. Rival translations could stir controversy. So, it was not surprising that in both England and the Dutch Republic, a commission of experts was tasked with producing an official translation. Writing by committee is seldom a happy experience, and in the Dutch Republic the production of the States Bible turned into a saga of battling egos, rivalries and greed.

Most of the roadblocks were erected by the printers. Almost as soon as the translation got underway, the printers protested that they faced financial disaster if their large stocks of earlier translations became suddenly redundant. They estimated this stock at 80,000 copies, an extraordinary witness to the vitality of the marketplace of scripture. Happily, the lengthy deliberations of the translators negated this problem, but as the work reached completion leading figures in the print industry began manoeuvring for the coveted commission to publish the book.

It was clear that the Bible had to be printed in the university city of Leiden, where the translators had been given hospitality, so the major Leiden publishing houses were confident of success; until, that is, the printer to the States General, the widow Van Wouw, based in The Hague, established a Leiden subsidiary and carried away the coveted privilege by buying off the Leiden city magistrates and the translators.

This caused uproar both in Leiden and Amsterdam. Since every church and many private citizens would buy the new translation, the potential profit to Van Wouw was enormous. In Amsterdam, a number of printers came to an agreement to oppose the privilege granted to Van Wouw and produce a local rival edition. This consortium was promptly supported by their local magistrates, eager to display their displeasure with the regents in The Hague and Leiden.



This majestic edition is one of the fruits of this unseemly squabble, published with a title-page engraving displaying a harbour view of Amsterdam and proudly proclaiming the authenticity of their edition. In the end, the market was big enough to sustain publication in both Leiden and Amsterdam; the States Bible was popular with Mennonites and Lutherans as well as with the Reformed Church. It remained, with numerous New Testaments in various sizes, a cornerstone of the Dutch book trade for two centuries.

Biblia, dat is, de gantsche H Schrifture (Amsterdam: Theunis Jacobsz, Jan Fredericksz Stam and Company, 1639), in octavo:
<https://search.proquest.com/docview/2090306470?accountid=8312>

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The memory of grievances past

For Protestantism, France was both the greatest prize and the greatest missed opportunity. During a few heady years in mid-century, it appeared, at least to members of the expanding Calvinist congregations, that the conversion of France was at hand. A decade later these hopes lay in tatters, the dying embers snuffed out by the horrors of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. The movement regrouped in urban strongholds far from Paris in the south and west, but never again posed a significant threat to France's Catholic identity.

The psalms, sung in the metrical versions devised in Geneva by Clément Marot and Théodore de Bèze, played a critical role in all stages of the movement's growth, tribulation and survival. Calvin's Geneva church rejected the hymn-singing tradition of Luther's church, where the new hymns were often set to tunes appropriated from secular songs, for the more austere alternative of metrical psalms. Yet in both churches communal singing became a staple of the worship service, a pedagogic tool, and a badge of identity.

This was even more the case when the Calvinist movement was transposed to Catholic France. Psalms became a comfort in adversity, while the young churches still faced persecution, and then, a triumphant demonstration of defiance as royal authority was challenged, and the Calvinists sought freedom of worship. In the French Wars of Religion, Huguenot armies sung psalms before battle. In places like Saumur, psalms became not only a tool of edification, but a badge of identity, a memorial of liberties preserved through years of tragedy.

In this beautiful edition, this is reinforced by a poignant calendar, where the traditional Catholic holidays are replaced by special days of Protestant memory. The day when the Flood began to recede when Noah spied dry land, and the conversion of Saint Paul, vied for remembrance with the death of Catherine of Medici and memories of Catholic treachery. Even in the sanctified space of worship, the true enemy was never out of view.

Les pseumes de David mis en rime françois (Saumur: Thomas Portau, 1609), in duodecimo:
<https://search.proquest.com/docview/2090310654?accountid=8312>

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The power of the pulpit

The normative narrative of print lays stress on the speed with which the new technology spread through Europe, and it is true that printing was established in over 200 towns and cities in the fifty years before 1500. The problem is that in many of these places the presses could not be sustained; the publishing industry retrenched into a small number of major centres of production, in France, Italy, Germany and the Low Countries.

Most of the trade in books took place in a nexus uniting Northern Italy with the Low Countries and France along the Rhine, a pentagon with outer limits defined by Hamburg, Leipzig, Rome, Paris and Antwerp. Many places outside this nexus were essentially subsidiary markets, where collectors looked to the major print centres for more serious purchases. In Scandinavia and the Baltic, the development of a robust print industry was far more halting.

This sermon by Johannes Lassenius preached in 1692 is a case in point. Published seven years later, this is a relatively crude piece of work, printed in a large format black letter typeface that would not have troubled the most inexperienced compositor. Furthermore, this was a text published in German, not Danish, for the benefit of the congregation of the local church.

The print industry in Denmark and Sweden had depended heavily on foreign expertise to sustain a local press, but still not altogether successfully. Works in Danish were also frequently put to the press of more experienced printers in North German, or as far away in Antwerp. In this slow developing market, the trade in vernacular religious texts placed an ever more important role.

In the seventeenth century, Danish and Swedish collectors looked mostly to the Dutch republic to build an elegant library. There was little scope for local printers to compete with the well-capitalised print shops of Amsterdam. But the local market for vernacular texts was a different story; here there was scope for an enterprising business.

Once the market for basic church books was satisfied, sermons, as elsewhere in Europe, provided an opportunity for authors and printers alike. Sermons provided an infinitely flexible medium for theological instruction, comfort and exhortation, celebration and repentance, or comment on contemporary events.

This example also provides opportunity to reflect on the active role of women in the book trade. Publishing had lower barriers to female agency than mediaeval guild trades. There was no mandatory apprenticeship; daughters frequently married within the trade, and widows often succeeded their husbands. For young men in crowded markets, marriage into an established print family was often the only plausible career opportunity. Women worked as partners in the business long before they took over from their deceased husband, and often grew the business in their years as independent proprietors. As here in Copenhagen, the female entrepreneur was a familiar figure in the early modern book world.

Johannes Lassenius, *Nach-Predigt, gehalten den 2. Febr. 1692, in der Deutschen Kirchen zu St Petri in Kopenhagen* (Copenhagen: widow of Conrad Neuhoff, 1699), in octavo:

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