Karen E. Spierling (ed.)

Calvin and the Book

The Evolution of the Printed Word in Reformed Protestantism

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For David Foxgrover,
with deep gratitude for his dedicated service
to the Calvin Studies Society

Contents

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Karen E. Spierling

Introduction:
Calvin, the Book, and Reformed Traditions

"Calvin and the Book" is a deceptively simple title for a deeply complex topic. For many scholars of John Calvin and Reformed traditions, "the book" may, first and foremost, refer to the Bible – thus, is this to be a volume focused on Calvin's scriptural exegesis, commentaries, and sermons? Or perhaps on the influence of his biblical interpretations on later times and place? On the other hand, in the context of John Calvin, one may think of "the book" most crucially as his *Institutes*, evoking questions regarding Calvin's ideas about the correct structure and discipline of the Christian church, how the *Institutes* transmitted his ideas to emerging Reformed congregations beyond Geneva, or perhaps even how the ideas in the *Institutes* were adapted and re-formed by followers of Calvin in other times and places. In addition, scholars of the Reformation or early modern Europe more generally may think first of "the book" as printed texts generally, bringing to mind topics such as Calvin's connections with his printers, or the importance of the printing trade in spreading Calvin's teachings. Clearly, the topic of "Calvin and the Book" casts a wide net across a variety of disciplines and historical time periods. The papers collected in this volume, initially presented at the Spring 2013 meeting of the Calvin Studies Society at Princeton Seminary, explore a variety of the issues indicated by this terse phrase. Taken all together, as different voices in a lively conversation, these essays highlight the themes of the interactive relationships between people and books and the potentially malleable nature of ideas that appear fixed in print – two important dynamics that are all too easily overlooked in studies of Calvin, his ideas, and his ongoing influence on Reformed traditions.

While scholarly scrutiny of Calvin's scriptural exegesis and his *Institutes* began during his lifetime, as part of sixteenth-century discussions and debates, studies of early modern books as material objects and of the printing industry that produced them are considerably more recent developments. The history of the book has blossomed as a field of study, especially in the past four decades, as the painstaking compiling of detailed bibliographies has allowed scholars to map the contours of the early modern European printing industry and book

distribution process. This work has, in turn, begun to improve our under-standings of how Reformation-era ideas spread through Europe – and were transformed in the process.[1]

These recent decades of work on the history of the book and printing have called attention to the importance of examining the interplay among printed objects, ideas, and contexts. Clearly, the material object of a book is fixed, at least insofar as the placement of the original text on the pages. This permanence of the printed text on the page gives the impression that the ideas themselves are fixed and unchanging – as if the author would always, at any place and time, articulate those same exact ideas in precisely the same words. And yet, how people interact with both a physical book and the ideas it presents changes across time and place, from person to person, and even within the mind of an individual author or reader.

These seemingly abstract questions of the fixed and mutable characteristics of printed books take on particularly concrete significance in the context of the religious debates and shifts of the sixteenth-century Reformation. From the start of the Protestant reform movement, participants recognized the crucial role of printing in the spread of reformers' teachings, and later scholars also perceived the critical role of printed texts and Scripture in the development and articu-lation of those teachings.[2] But only relatively recently have scholars begun to delve more deeply into the myriad possible ways to examine the relationships among authors, texts, and readers, in addition to the roles that printers played within these relationships. With this complexity in mind, rather than focusing on a singular book or particular disciplinary approach, the following chapters represent an impressive breadth of thinking on the broad topic of "Calvin and the Book". Considered together, they advance a multi-faceted discussion and open

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1 Significant contributions related to Reformed books and printing include, for example: Jean-François Gilmont, *John Calvin and the Printed Book*, trans. Karin Maag, Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies 2 (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2005). Id., ed., *The Reformation and the Book*, trans. Karin Maag (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998; orig. 1990). Id., "Protestant Reformations and Reading" in: Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, ed., *A History of Reading in the West*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Amherst: University of Massach-usetts Press, 1999; orig. 1995), pp. 213–237. Andrew Pettegree, *The French Book and the European Book World* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007). Francis Higman, *Piety and the People: Religious Printing in French, 1511–1551* (Aldershot and Brookfield, VT: Scolar Press, 1996). Elizabeth Evenden and Thomas S. Freeman, *Religion and the Book in Early Modern England: The Making of Foxe's "Book of Martyrs"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
For a thought-provoking discussion on developments and paths forward, see: Philip Benedict, "Propaganda, Print, and Persuasion in the French Reformation: A Review Article," *Biblio-thèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 69:2 (2007), pp. 447–472.
2 As Andrew Pettegree has remarked, "The connection between the book and the Reformation seems so obvious that it needs little extra comment." Andrew Pettegree and Matthew Hall, "The Reformation and the Book: A Reconsideration," *The Historical Journal* 47:4 (2004), pp. 785–808, here at p. 785. (But note that he makes this comment to start off a discussion about what else there is still to know on the topic.)

useful avenues for thinking about the interplay between theology, printed texts, and Reformed practices over time.

We begin with Andrew Pettegree, whose discussion emanates from his work on the St Andrews French Book Project and the Universal Short Title Catalogue. In this paper, Pettegree compares Martin Luther and John Calvin as "book professionals", arguing that one key to their success as reformers was their mastery of the printing trade as an industrial process. Both men were highly aware of the importance of establishing relationships with printers and distinguishing which printers could handle which types of texts. Pettegree describes Luther's striking success in branding himself, as illustrated by a discussion of title pages that increasingly highlighted Luther's name. In contrast, Calvin faced the challenge of concealing his "brand" for protection from French royal censors, but was keenly attuned to the annual cycle of the book trade, ensuring that he completed books in time to appear at the Frankfurt Fair. In a time period when most authors and printers were still figuring out the dynamics of the new industry, Luther and Calvin both demonstrated an impressive awareness of the new possibilities of print, a recognition of the new type of writing required for printed texts (pithier sermons, for example), and an arguably unexpected adaptability to these new circumstances. Pettegree insists that we cannot fully understand the formation and impact of the ideas presented in early modern books until we also understand the process by which the physical books were themselves constructed and disseminated. In terms of "Calvin and the Book", this means keeping the reformer firmly grounded in his historical context and examining how the spread of his ideas was shaped by the necessities of the print trade, as well as how the influence of his ideas benefitted the printing industry – in other words, looking at the final texts as the product of multiple interactions among author, printer, booksellers, and audience.

Following Pettegree, Margo Todd focuses on a particular book – Scotland's *First Book of Discipline*, produced in 1560 by John Knox and his colleagues – to explore how the standards articulated in that book were initially influenced by Genevan texts such as the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances of 1541* and Calvin's *Institutes*, and then carried out in practice by Scottish kirk sessions. In this chapter, we turn from the question of how books were produced and circulated to the problem of how the ideas in a book were put into action, once the book arrived at its destination. Todd's discussion centers on the importance of context – how did traditional aspects of Scottish society influence the ways that the kirk sessions read and enacted the *Book of Discipline*? She approaches this question by looking at the Perth kirk session records as a case study to determine whether the processes of the sessions were as egalitarian as others have argued, or whether the records instead reflect the continued influence of a sexual double standard and preferential treatment based on social status. Ul-

timately, Todd finds that the Perth sessions did endeavor to uphold Calvin's ideal of imposing discipline equally across gender and social status but that, at the same time, in certain cases traditional social connections or gender hierarchies still determined (or at least influenced) case proceedings and outcomes. One of Todd's most striking contributions to the conversation on "Calvin and the Book" is her insistence that we must acknowledge the historical importance of the kirk sessions' attempts to meet the ideal, despite the fact that those efforts inevitably were less than perfect. In applying this observation to her own discussion, she demonstrates a productive way for scholars to grapple with the interactive nature of texts and contexts, and ideas and actions, as historical realities.

Chapter three enters the conversation with another fruitful approach to examining the changing role of a printed text and the ideas it contains over time. While Todd's discussion covers several decades of kirk session proceedings, Jennifer Powell McNutt explores the shifting place of Calvin's *Catechism* in Geneva over more than two centuries. McNutt focuses primarily on the concerns of eighteenth-century Genevan pastors regarding the effectiveness of their catechetical practices. In this study, McNutt is contributing to recent discussions challenging the well-established notion that religion had become irrelevant in the 1700s. Her work in the Genevan archives demonstrates, rather, the lengths to which the Genevan pastors continued to go in order to ensure that their religious teachings were both correct and effective. Her discussion provides an excellent window onto the issue of how words and ideas are connected. First, she points out that Calvin's catechism had never fully dominated Genevan religious instruction – by the early 1560s, competing catechisms already existed and were being put to use. This observation is an important reminder that books existed (and competed with one another) as an ongoing discussion with their readers – there was not always a single right answer in terms of ideas and practice, even in the first century of the Reformation, even in Geneva. Second, McNutt finds that the eighteenth-century Genevan pastors did preserve Calvin's catechism; while it still was not the sole accepted text at the end of the 1700s, the pastors retained the book as a source of what some perceived to be the most correct version of Christian teachings, uncorrupted by the intervening centuries. Thus, the Reformed catechism, a book specifically intended for teaching by memorization, was in some ways the most fixed of texts (to be memorized, not interrogated) and yet also the most changing, with a variety of versions by a variety of authors always in circulation. As McNutt discusses, many different catechisms appeared in Geneva over time; in her analysis, Calvin's catechism itself becomes a symbol of the tension between maintaining Calvin's original vision (as later followers understood it) and adapting to social and cultural needs in 1700s Geneva. In other words, the printed text of Calvin's catechism lay at the center of ongoing

exchanges and debates regarding both the articulation of Reformed tenets and the inculcation of those beliefs into Reformed congregations.

Following McNutt's examination of these issues raised by both the material object and the intellectual content of Calvin's catechism two centuries after his death, Euan Cameron returns us to Calvin himself. This chapter examines the reformer's interactions with one aspect of Scripture: the question of the importance of historical context in the interpretation of the Bible. Cameron sets Calvin firmly into a web of printed texts including the Old Testament, historical works of fellow reformers such as Bullinger, and works of classical historians such as Herodotus. He asserts that, while Calvin did not produce historical accounts, as some of his contemporaries did, his strong sense of historical eras as past and irrecoverable was fundamental to his exegesis of the Old Testament. Further, while Calvin does not qualify as a modern historian, certain aspects of his historical thinking regarding the Bible were strikingly modern and distinct from other reformers' notions. For example, Cameron argues that Calvin both insisted on the providential nature of the scriptural message and perceived clear limits on the meanings of Old Testament prophecies – in particular, Cameron reveals the important role that historical context played in Calvin's scriptural exegesis. This emphasis on context allowed Calvin to interpret the words of the Old Testament prophets as messages articulated in particular ways for particular times and peoples; these were prophecies that looked to the coming of Christ, not far past it to the sixteenth century. For readers and listeners in the sixteenth century, Calvin emphasized the importance of the moral lessons presented by biblical prophecies. In Cameron's analysis, we gain entrance not only to Calvin's engagement with a printed text, but also to a discussion about the interactive nature of the ideas represented in that text. Calvin's emphasis on historical context highlights the Old Testament prophets as figures engaged with their contemporary audiences, at the same time that their prophecies convey different messages to audiences in later times and places.

Bruce Gordon pursues the question of the significance of historical context beyond Calvin himself, shifting the story of Protestants and the Old Testament to the next generation of reformers.[3] His discussion suggests ways that Reformed scholars were aware both of the historical context of Scripture and of their own historical contexts, particularly in terms of the ways that existing contemporary knowledge could both improve and limit their comprehension of scriptural truths. Specifically, Gordon examines the sixteenth-century Protestant practice of producing Latin translations of the Bible. He explains that while many Protestants – including Calvin – continued to be influenced by aspects of the Vulgate, they were

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3 I wish to thank Bruce Gordon for contributing this highly relevant essay to this volume, despite the fact that it was not originally presented at the Spring 2013 Colloquium.

also moving toward a new kind of text: a "study Bible" with annotations meant for both pastors and theological students. A crucial concept here, as Gordon explains, was the Protestant idea that "truth could be linked not to any one text but to the on-going process of translation and interpretation".[4] He demonstrates the impact of this interactive approach to Scripture by examining the work of Reformed scholars Immanuel Tremellius and Franciscus Junius, whose Latin version of the Old Testament, the *Testamenti veteris biblia sacra*, first appeared in 1579 and was still popular among highly educated Protestants a century later. Gordon explores how this edition of the Old Testament was both a product of the first century of the Reformation *and* a dynamic text well-adapted to "the intellectual and ecclesiastical culture of post-reformation Reformed Christianity".[5] By closely comparing the 1580 and 1590 versions of the Tremellius/Junius Old Testament, Gordon identifies connections among scriptural interpretation, historical context, and the early modern publishing process. He considers how the background and position of the editors shaped their editing decisions and how their goals connected to contemporary events and concerns, ultimately revealing their collaborative text to be something that they themselves saw as a work in progress. As Gordon explains, Tremellius and Junius sought to produce the best possible edition of the Old Testament based on current knowledge (including literary, historical, and scientific knowledge) in the late sixteenth century, while carefully indicating areas that might be better understood in the future, when scholars had uncovered additional information. Dovetailing with Cameron's excavation of Calvin's historical thinking, Gordon finds that Junius (who completed the project as well as the revised 1590 edition) also relied on detailed descriptions of historical context, in this case to confirm the veracity and consistency of the biblical texts. The annotations of the 1590 version were, thus, premised on the understanding that the precise relationship between printed editions of the Old Testament and readers would continue to evolve over time, as scholars learned more about the text and its historical context.

Up to this point in the volume, while these first five essays differ in terms of specific topic and guiding questions, all are deeply grounded in historical methodology, as the work of historians, examining archival sources. Naturally, they do not present the full spectrum of approaches and issues that comprise Calvin studies. Such deeply historical thinking is complemented, challenged, and invigorated by more fully theological approaches to understanding the importance of John Calvin and his relationship to the book. To that end, in the final two essays, William Dyrness and Matthew Myer Boulton confront questions about how Calvin perceived the impact of scriptural texts on readers and lis-

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4 See below, chapter five, pp. 107 – 108.
5 See below, chapter five, p. 96.

teners. Their discussions bring the topic of "Calvin and the Book" right up to the present moment, leading us to consider the dynamics of Calvin's own interaction with Scripture, his views of faithful Christians' engagement with Scripture, and the interactions of modern readers with Calvin's writings.

In chapter six, William Dyrness explores how medieval and Renaissance concepts of drama influenced Calvin's discussions of the relationship between God and humankind. He begins with the established idea that Calvin interprets the sacred drama of Scripture as an ongoing drama played out by human beings in the physical world, beyond the confines of a cathedral or, even more specifically, the Mass. He then sets this broader point into the context of medieval Mystery Plays and Renaissance concepts of drama, arguing that in his vision of the drama of Christian faith, Calvin is breaking away from the timeless cycles of the medieval Mass and Mystery Plays, which asked the audience to witness the sacred mystery of the crucifixion reoccurring. Instead, Dyrness suggests, Calvin is influenced by Reniassance drama and humanist concepts to insist that the Christian audience should both see themselves reflected in the drama of the crucifixion that happened long ago *and* be moved by that story to carry the drama of Christian faith out into their daily lives, thus moving the divine drama forward in time rather than keeping it within a closed cycle. As Dyrness asserts, the Bible is always at the center of this human-divine drama, as envisioned by Calvin. Thus, Christians' engagement with this particular book is not only within their hearts and minds, but manifests itself physically, in believers' daily interactions with the world.

Finally, rather than drawing the volume's conversation to a firm close, in chapter seven, Matthew Myer Boulton opens the door to further discussions to be taken up by Calvin Studies scholars of all types. Further developing the theme of the interactivity and malleability of Calvin's (and Calvinists') relationships to books, Boulton challenges us to remain open to reconsidering Calvin's own interpretations of Scripture. In his close reading of Calvin's *Institutes* II.xvi.1 – 3, Boulton looks at Calvin's appreciation of the rhetorical nature and power of the words of Scripture. Similar to Dyrness, Boulton investigates how Calvin perceives the impact of the words of Scripture on its human readers and listeners. Specifically, he examines how Calvin confronts the paradox posed by the scriptural implication that God was the enemy of human beings until Christ's crucifixion saved humanity (satisfaction atonement theory). The tension here, Boulton explains, is the seeming impossibility of a God who was the enemy of humanity making the choice to send Christ as a savior. In this passage of the *Institutes*, Boulton argues, Calvin offers a solution to that conundrum, which revolves around Calvin's use of the word *quodammodo* – "in a certain way" or "so to speak". Thus, God was only "so to speak" the enemy of humanity because human beings needed to fear God to be fully convinced of their own depravity. While this reading may appear to suggest that Calvin was proposing an inter-

pretation that contradicts his scriptural exegesis in other places, Boulton argues that, instead, Calvin's insistence on the rhetorical power and necessity of de-picting God as the "enemy" of human beings may be a key to understanding Calvin's approach to satisfaction theory itself as a divine accommodation to human need and understanding. This is an exciting and provocative argument that reminds us of the complexity of Calvin studies – the seemingly inherent tensions among scholars of different fields, with different questions and ulti-mately different disciplinary goals. For some readers, Boulton's discussion may raise thought-provoking questions about whether the absolute or obvious consistency of a single author's message is inherent to the printed articulation of that message or is imposed from outside by readers and listeners. While a question like this may strike some as a distressing challenge to the work of Calvin studies, it may also be heard as an invigorating reminder of the challenge of achieving absolute certainty in many areas – a notion familiar to Calvin himself.[6]

Taken all together, these seven essays remind us of the vigor, complexity, and continued importance of Calvin Studies when the field is conceived broadly in terms of discipline, time period, and geography. They shed light on the various ways that Calvin's interactions with scriptural texts and his engagement with the printing industry shaped the transmission and reception of his teachings. Further, they reveal important dynamics of how later Reformed Christians re-ceived and engaged those teachings, as articulated in printed texts.

In our current age of reading devices, smart phones, and seemingly constant technological revolutions, printed books are often seen as restrictive, non-in-teractive media. As printed newspapers and magazines give way to "new and improved, interactive" websites, it may be easy to lose sight of the fact that interaction and change are fundamental characteristics of printed texts, as they appear in different versions, at different times and places, altered by editors and translators, to be consumed by varying audiences. The essays collected here create a conversation that pushes us to reconsider "Calvin and the Book" as an always-evolving topic of fertile, thought-provoking discussion. Despite his in-famous deathbed injunction to the Genevan pastors to "change nothing", John Calvin himself set a model for constant interaction with "the book" that led to an ongoing Reformed tradition of encountering and revisiting Christian teachings as articulated in printed texts.

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6 David Jeffrey explores the long history surrounding this issue of uncertain scriptural inter-pretation, observing: "Augustine reflects the consensus of early Christian thought about interpretation in his belief that no single fallen human perspective can be assured of complete understanding, and therefore that the conversation of readers, the witness of the body of Christ both in the here and now and also of generations past, must constitute an important control on any single effort." David L. Jeffrey, *People of the Book: Christian Identity and Literary Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 84 – 85.

Andrew Pettegree

Chapter One:
Calvin and Luther as Men of the Book

In June 1546 Calvin fell into a deep depression, and took to his bed. That Calvin should be ill was not in itself unusual. Throughout his life Calvin suffered from poor health – he had a delicate frame, pushed to the edge by incessant work. But this particular physical collapse had a proximate cause. One of his manuscripts had gone missing. Calvin, as was his wont, had dispatched the text of his commentary on Two Corinthians to a messenger to carry to Strasbourg, to be printed there by Wendelin Rihel. Rihel was a printer with whom Calvin had a long-standing relationship; nevertheless, it was a complex procedure, and a risky one, as it turned out in this case. Somewhere on the 400-kilometer journey the manuscript went missing. Calvin's reaction was extraordinary. He found he could not work. Eventually, after some months, the text turned up, but only after he had endured the sort of heartache that would all too often be associated with his writing.[1]

Calvin and Luther were both men of the book. The connection between print and the Reformation is so scored into our consciousness that we do not always recognize how profound were the changes required by the print revolution, on the part of authors, readers, and producers. This is partly because even at the time, commentators created around print a seamless narrative of modernity and success: a point made very effectively in Elizabeth Eisenstein's excellent recent book: *Divine Art, Infernal Machine.* This charts with meticulous care the hymns of acclamation that greeted every stage of the print revolution.[2] Technical excitement inspired a Gadarene rush to share in the new art. The result was often catastrophic for many of the unfortunate printers recruited to publish the new books. Fortunes were invested, and by and large lost. Many of the first printers were forced into bankruptcy by the inability to dispose of their stock.

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1 This story is beautifully told in Jean-François Gilmont, *John Calvin and the printed book*, trans. Karin Maag (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2005), pp. 3 – 4.
2 Elizabeth Eisenstein, *Divine art, infernal machine: the reception of printing in the West from first impressions to the sense of an ending* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

This reminds us that for the first seventy years of print, before the Reformation, it is quite possible to construct an alternative, more critical narrative: of rash decisions repented at leisure; of humanists, greedy to enhance their own collections, urging on printers ill-advised publishing programs; of over-supply, distribution problems, and bankruptcy.

Among the most disappointed were those who hoped to shine as authors in this new firmament. Whereas the rhetoric of print was certainly author-led, this was in the last resort an industry like any other, with investment, credit transactions, transportation costs, and extended supply chains. Scholars found they were indeed in demand, but not for the compositions they offered, with insistent optimism, to reluctant printers. Rather, they found employment as proof-readers – the one occupation in the print shop for which a philosophical education was a tangible asset.[3]

The first seventy years of the age of print was in this respect a period of cruel disappointment for those who sought to make their reputations in the world of letters. Few stars shone in this firmament: a rare exception was, of course, Erasmus, who found the way to monetize his talent. This may indeed have been a large part of the reason why he was so lionized by aspiring authors, rather than for any particular thing he wrote. Erasmus was a celebrity in an age which seldom conferred fame on the low born.

Luther and Calvin, as I have said, were both men of the book, but this was partly because they both showed a profound grasp of how the industry functioned, and what the author could most effectively contribute. Both intervened directly to create the industrial infrastructure necessary to sustain their respective movements. Both adapted their writing style to the requirements of the new book world. In the process they created in their respective cities industries of considerable size – a development that went against the grain of a previous trend towards consolidation and retrenchment.

So this paper is about book professionals: the men who printed, published, and distributed the books of Wittenberg and Geneva, but also the two celebrated authors who worked closely with them. It is a story that has not been wholly told, partly because it involves processes that are in some way foreign to us: an attention to artifact and medium, rather than simply context and text. Luther and Calvin did what was necessary to make this all work, rather against the grain of their character in both cases: Luther, a conservative academic in middle years; Calvin, by nature a scholarly aesthetic. They had a pragmatism which matched

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3 Anthony Grafton, *The Culture of Correction in Renaissance Europe* (London: British Library, 2011).

their inspiration. This adaptability is not to be underestimated, or indeed despised. Luther and Calvin were both consummate professionals.

II

How to compare two very different men? Martin Luther loved Wittenberg in a way Calvin never felt about Geneva. Luther was profoundly happy in his role as preacher and professor. But he knew that he was a big man in a small place – he knew Wittenberg was a backwater. When the indulgence controversy propelled him to a quite unexpected notoriety, Luther fretted about how difficult it was to get news in Wittenberg. Indeed, part of the reason why the church hierarchy was so slow to react was that it was so difficult to imagine anything important coming from such a place.

Luther made good use of the time afforded him. The professor transformed himself into the passionate prophet of reform. How this astonishing re-invention was accomplished is one part of our story: the other has to be how this message was fed into the bloodstream of German and European public life. Both were in their way dauntingly improbable. Luther would in time make of Wittenberg a major center of the print trade, but the true extent of this achievement has been masked by some fundamental misunderstandings about the early history of print.

Printing was introduced into Europe around 1450. It spread quickly down the Rhine valley and then, crucially, crossed the Alps into Italy. In the next thirty years a printing house was the must-have accessory for every aspirational prince, bishop, or university. By the 1480s print had reached England and Spain and, in 1482, Scandinavia. In all, by the end of the fifteenth century, over two hundred towns and cities had first-hand experience of printing.

Thus runs the conventional narrative of print. But if we look more closely we see that in many of these places which had a functioning press in the fifteenth century, printing was no longer taking place by the early years of the sixteenth century. Most printing presses failed. Few survived for more than a few years; many published not more than a handful of books. These presses were never truly economically viable.

What had happened? It is fair to say that despite the expansive humanist rhetoric that had propelled it forward, print almost failed. It did so because in many respects it was too respectful of the inherited manuscript tradition. The first printers published books aimed at the most reliable customers of the pre-print era: scholars, courtiers, and university teachers. So they reached for established best-sellers, which of course could not be best-sellers if numerous printers published the same books in too many copies. And they assumed that

the same dispersed model of production that had characterized manuscripts would work for print.

These were crucial misunderstandings. In time purchasers could be taught to accept the dull black and white books as a substitute for lavishly illustrated manuscript. But over-supply, a narrow range of titles, and the total lack of a rational distribution network were critical problems. It took thirty years and many lost fortunes to establish a solid basis for the trade. This involved the recognition of several factors specific to print and largely irrelevant in the manuscript world. Whereas a manuscript book represented a single retail transaction, print required an understanding that a complete edition would take a long time to sell out: purchasers could be dispersed throughout Europe and transportation, together with storage until an edition was exhausted, both added considerably to both cost and logistical complexity. It gradually dawned on printers that rather than continue to turn out repeat editions of the texts most popular from the medieval intellectual agenda, competing editions of identical texts spelt ruin for all concerned.

Gradually, painfully, these lessons were learned. The business consolidated. So while it was true that 200 European towns at some point had a printing press, two-thirds of all books published in the fifteenth century were in fact printed in twelve places.[4] These were all major centers of commerce, many of them close to the trade and information highway that linked the Low Countries in the north with Italy in the south. Outside this corridor was a secondary zone of dependent markets: these places received most of their books from these major centers, printing locally only for local purposes.

This geography proved remarkably enduring. If we look at the situation from the perspective of one hundred years later, at the end of the sixteenth century, only three cities had forced their way into this elite: London, Antwerp, and Wittenberg.[5] London was the capital and monopoly provider for one of Europe's rising nations. Antwerp was the commercial center of the Low Countries and a major hub of international trade. Wittenberg was not only far distant from the main trade routes, it was also within a few kilometers of a well-established printing hub, Leipzig. Leipzig was itself rather isolated on our map, but flourished as an entrepôt and clearing center for trade to lands to the East and North. Its production, and access to books published elsewhere in Europe, was quite sufficient to meet the needs of a place like Wittenberg.

The establishment of printing in Wittenberg was not therefore an economic

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4 Venice, Rome, Florence, and Milan; Augsburg, Basel, Cologne, Nuremberg, Leipzig, and Strasbourg; Paris and Lyon.
5 They replace Augsburg, Florence, and Milan in the leading twelve.

necessity, but an act of state. This was very much the same in Scotland.[6] In Scotland this was achieved in 1508; in Wittenberg 1502 represents the incunabula age. In Scotland the initiative petered out after two years, and this might easily have been the case in Wittenberg. To judge by the rapid turnover of printers in the first years, the appointment as university printer hardly brought great wealth. The assumption that printers would flourish in university towns was a hangover from the manuscript age, but actually it was in major trading centers, where merchants had deep pockets and were used to long-term credit transactions, that the industry put down roots. Wittenberg could easily, like Oxford, Cambridge, Heidelberg, or Tübingen, have given up on printing and relied on supplies from larger centers nearby. Heidelberg had no press between 1516 and 1546. This was the pattern over and over again throughout Europe, where the greater economies of scale and deeper capital resources available in the major publishing centers effectively throttled local competition.

University towns represent one case; in other small cities where printing survived, it did so largely through jobbing work for official purposes: for the state, the city, or the church. In the first era of print, work for the church was particularly important. Rather ironically, of the 3,000 single-sheet items known from the fifteenth century, around a third emanated from the indulgence trade.[7]

It is a fair assumption that this trade continued to be a mainstay of the industry into the first twenty years of the sixteenth century. I say assumption because reconstructing the print output of Germany in these years is rendered almost impossible by the decision of the VD 16, the German national bibliography, to exclude single sheet items: surely the most disastrous policy decision in the history of material bibliography. This means that Luther's 95 theses, a seminal document of German national consciousness, is not part of the German national bibliography, at least not until it was republished as a pamphlet by Adam Petri in Basel.[8]

So while we know that vast quantities of print accompanied the great

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6 Sally Mapstone, ed., *The Chepman and Myllar Prints: Scotland's First Printed Texts*. DVD. (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society and the National Library of Scotland; Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2008).

7 See Falk Eisermann, *Verzeichnis der typographischen Einblattdrucke des 15. Jahrhunderts im Heiligen Römischen Reich Deutscher Nation: VE 15* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2004). Falk Eisermann, "The Indulgence as a media event" in: Robert N. Swanson, ed., *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits. Indulgences in Late Mediaeval Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 309 – 330.

8 Josef Benzing, *Lutherbibliographie. Verzeichnis der gedruckten Schriften Martin Luthers bis zu dessen Tod* (Baden-Baden: Bibliotheca Bibliographica Aureliana, 1966), no. 87 – 89 (the pamphlet edition is Benzing, no. 89). To be read in connection with the supplement, in two volumes, by Helmut Claus (Baden-Baden: Bibliotheca Bibliographica Aureliana, 1989 and 1994), vol. X and CXLVI.

preaching tour of Raymond Peraudi in the 1490s, the print footprint of the
campaign of 1502 – 1505 is largely lost.[9] This, incidentally, was a campaign that
brought Peraudi to Wittenberg for the inauguration of Frederick the Wise's new
Castle church, an event for which he announced a generous indulgence. So we
have particular reason to be grateful to the German historian Hans Volz, who in
1966 undertook a careful reconstruction of the printed remains of the preaching
of the St Peter's Indulgence of 1515, the campaign that stirred Luther's ire.[10] This
evidence is remarkable, not only for the extent of the printing, but for its variety.
There were editions of the Bull, in both Latin and German translation. There
were two editions of the manual supplied to those charged with preaching the
indulgence. This was the document to which Luther took particular exception,
and his first communication with Albrecht of Mainz was to ask him to withdraw
it. Then there are the indulgence certificates themselves, several editions pub-
lished in at least four German cities. Interestingly, the printers engaged for this
work included several who would later take a role in publishing Luther: Melchior
Lotter of Leipzig, Silvan Otmar in Augsburg, Friedrich Peypus in Nuremberg,
and Adam Petri in Basel.

So when Luther took aim against Indulgences, he was attacking not only an
institution of crucial financial importance to the church, but a mainstay of the
printing industry. At the time this would probably not even have occurred to
him. In the immediate aftermath of the publication of the 95 theses, Luther had
more immediate concerns: that the controversy might cause offense in his own
Augustinian order, or that it might damage his beloved university and imperil
the curriculum reform to which he was so committed. His fear that the Uni-
versity of Leipzig might take this opportunity to squash its upstart local rival was
one to which he referred frequently in his correspondence at this time.

Most of all he fretted that nobody seemed to be taking much notice. It was only
at the turn of the year that Luther became aware of the first serious response, a
series of counter-theses sponsored by Johann Tetzel's Dominican order. It was
this which inspired Luther's most decisive intervention: the publication in
German of a short defense of his teaching, the *Sermon on Indulgence and Grace.*

For many this little book is the true beginning of the Reformation. Luther's
decision to address a wider public audience was a point of no return. His defense,
and a legitimate one, that he had proposed an academic debate in which he could
accept correction and withdraw propositions shown to be faulty, was now blown
out of the water. With the vernacular sermon Luther appealed above the heads of

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9 Nikolaus Paulus, "Raimund Peraudi als Ablasskommissar," *Historisches Jahrbuch* 21 (1900),
   pp. 645 – 682.
10 Hans Volz, "Der St. Peters-Ablass und das deutsche Druckgewerbe," *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* 46
   (1966), pp. 156 – 172.

his church superiors to a wider public. This was remarkable. But what was truly incredible was that Luther – an academic used to endlessly patient audiences – understood the essential features of a reading public that had not yet been discovered. The sermon was not like any sermon anyone had ever preached. It was direct, punchy, and short.[11]

This was not an age, we should remember, that valued brevity. Even official communication multiplied words with legalistic glee. A sermon in particular was an opportunity for theater: for rhetoric, exhortation, and endless repetition. It was an endurance test for speaker and audience alike.[12] Luther, in contrast, distilled his life-changing message into 1500 words. It takes only eight minutes to read out loud.

The *Sermon on Indulgence and Grace* was the first publishing sensation of the Reformation. There were sixteen editions in the first year alone: three in Wittenberg, four in Leipzig, two each in Nuremberg, Augsburg, and Basel.[13] In modern parlance, Luther had gone viral.

III

When Luther commented, many years later, that his indulgences were known throughout Germany within two weeks, he probably had this work in mind, rather than the publication of his Latin theses the previous autumn. The sermon was the first of a flurry of small works that filled his time in 1518. He replied, in Latin, to his first serious critics; and he articulated his views on indulgences and developing theology in small German tracts.

The *Sermon on Indulgence and Grace* also alerted Luther to the potency of printing. In Wittenberg itself, this new sensitivity to the power of print was not entirely comfortable to the print professionals. As his writings were printed and reprinted across German, Luther became increasingly aware that the Wittenberg industry was not equal to the challenge. At the time, Wittenberg had only one printer – Johann Rhau-Grunenberg. Installed as the university printer in 1508, Rhau-Grunenberg could just about keep abreast with the demands for publication of university theses and the works of the local professors: probably it

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11 For an English version see the excellent collection of documents relevant to the indulgence controversy, Kurt Aland, ed., *Martin Luther's 95 Theses* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1967), pp. 63 – 67.

12 Larissa Taylor, ed., *Preachers and People in the Reformations and Early Modern Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing. English Preachers and Their Audiences, 1590 – 1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

13 Benzing, no. 90 – 114.

was he who published the first broadsheet version of the 95 theses.[14] But in truth, he was never a very good printer. His works are often poorly aligned and relentlessly utilitarian. They show none of the design élan of which Germany's established centers of publication were capable, and which they were beginning to manifest in their publication of Luther's works. Luther was aware of this, and he now intervened personally to do something about it. In 1518 he entered into negotiation with Melchior Lotter of Leipzig to establish a branch office in Wittenberg. Lotter was a different proposition entirely, one of the leading figures in one of Germany's most important publication hubs.[15] He did not come to Wittenberg himself, but sent his son, Melchior Junior, along with a range of the Lotter types. The look and quality of Wittenberg books improved markedly.

This was the beginning of a development that would in due course see Wittenberg emerge as one of Germany's leading centers of publication. But this was not immediate, nor indeed easily accomplished. It would not in fact be until 1523/1524 that Wittenberg was even the leading place of publication of Luther's own works. By this time there were four other printing houses active in Wittenberg, and the publication of the New Testament translation in September of the previous year, 1522, helped consolidate Wittenberg's place in the German printing firmament.[16] The comparative eclipse of Leipzig, following Duke George's ban on the printing of Lutheran works, also helped. But we will concentrate here on the intervening years, 1519 – 1522, which saw not only the publication of many of Luther's most significant works, but the consolidation of Luther's publications as a recognizable brand. In this, the critical steps took place largely away from Wittenberg, in the major established centers of printing where his works were so extensively reprinted.

When we chart Luther's growing fame, or notoriety, around Germany, we think naturally of the growing familiarity of Luther's image. Here we think first and foremost of the magnificent series of pictorial representations designed and executed by Lucas Cranach. But Cranach rendered Luther's image primarily in the traditional medium of the panel portrait, and it would be some years before a representation of Luther appeared in a book published in Wittenberg. Here the first tentative steps were taken in Nuremberg, and then more confidently in Strasbourg. The Rhineland town did not play a leading role in the publication of

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14 Maria Grossmann, "Wittenberg Printing, Early Sixteenth Century," *Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies* 1 (1970), pp. 53 – 74. For the controversy on whether the 95 theses were printed (or even posted), see Joachim Ott and Martin Treu, ed., *Luthers Thesenanschlag – Faktum oder Fiktion* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2008).

15 The USTC lists 511 works printed in Leipzig before 1518.

16 Heimo Reinitzer, *Biblia deutsch. Luthers Bibelübersetzung ind ihre Tradition* (Wolfenbüttel: Herzog August Bibliothek, 1983).

Luther's works, but it did supply two striking and well-known images, one a title-page, and the other on the title-page verso.[17]

These played a role in promoting a Luther cult, but by no means the most important role. Images like these have become well-known through constant use, but the vast majority of Reformation *Flugschriften*, probably as much as 95 %, were completely un-illustrated. What then was the essence of "brand Luther"? I would highlight three elements. The first was the use of Luther's name. This is a critical moment, not just in the history of the Reformation, but also in the wider history of print, because until this time hopes that budding authors had invested in the new medium had been largely disappointed.

In Luther's case it was clear that he was the brand – and we can see the industry responding in the increasing prominence it gives his name on title-pages. The first efforts do not really meet the case. Typographical traditions take precedence, and the name can be lost, wrapped around two lines, preserving the symmetry of the design. But gradually the name is separated, highlighted, and given full prominence.

The second element of the branding is the city name, Wittenberg. This again is very interesting, because it shows the extent to which Luther, though in many respects already a pan-German figure, was indelibly associated with his city. This is reinforced by the recognition that many of the works that proudly announce Wittenberg on the title-page were printed elsewhere.[18] It is a moot point whether this was an attempt at deception – or was this simply announcing a work by Martin Luther of Wittenberg? We notice too that the printer's name is scarcely ever given: this is not yet an essential function of the title-page.

The third element in brand Luther is the distinctive look given by the decorative frame. This again was not initiated in Wittenberg, where the title-pages of the first Luther works were austerely utilitarian, but was something Wittenberg printers learned from the reprints in Augsburg, Leipzig, and Basel. In these places Luther's increasing fame was matched by a comparable effort to enhance the physical appearance of the book. In due course this was incorporated back into the Wittenberg tradition by Lucas Cranach, playing his most crucial role not as a painter, but as a woodblock designer.[19] These characteristic and charac-

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17 Martin Luther, *Von der Babylonischen Gefengknuß der Kirchen* (Strasbourg: Johann Schott, 1520). USTC 703376. Benzing 713. VD16 L 4195. Michael Stifel, *Von der Christförmigen, rechtgegründten leer Doctoris Martini Luthers* (Strasbourg: Johann Schott, 1522). USTC 617295. VD 16 S 9020.

18 As, for instance, Martin Luther, *Ein underricht der beychtkünder über die verbotten buecher* (Augsburg: Melchior Ramminger, 1521) USTC 647330. Benzing 839. VD 16 L 6857.

19 See here the ground-breaking study Jutta Strehle, *Cranach im Detail: Buchschmuck Lucas Cranachs des Älteren und seiner Werkstatt* (Wittenberg: Drei Kastanien Verlag, 1994).