

THE BUSINESS OF THE GOSPEL:
THE PRINTING PRESS AND THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

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Pre-Industrial Europe (Hist 56)

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Second Draft 4 / 13 / 96

Rarely has one invention had a more decisive influence than that of printing on the Reformation...by a stroke of magic he [Luther] found himself addressing the whole world.¹

Many would argue that the Protestant Reformation began in 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his "Ninety-Five Theses" on the door of the Augustinian chapel at Wittenberg. Still others would assert that the printing press was the primary cause of the Reformation. After reading the work of Elizabeth Eisenstein and Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, I am convinced that the intersection between the printing press and the Reformation cannot be divided into a simple cause and effect relationship. Febvre and Martin vigorously oppose reviving "the ridiculous thesis that the Reformation was the child of the printing press"² and Eisenstein argues that Luther's theology was not unusual in itself, only in its use of the printing press.³ Yet all the authors agree that the printers' role as secular missionaries pursuing profit has been either underestimated or ignored in Reformation history.⁴ I do not consider this a contradiction, but rather representative of the complex relationship between the press, the Reformation, Capitalism, and Nationalism. Eisenstein has described this as "a distinctive amalgam which resulted from collaboration between diverse pressure groups".⁵ In this paper I will seek to show how the "stroke of magic" that spread Luther's ideas was a profound communications shift that drew on cultural and economic changes that preceded him.

¹Gordon Rupp, Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms, 1521 (Chicago 1951) p. 54 cited in Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) pp. 309-10.

²Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) p. 288.

³Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 306.

⁴Eisenstein laments that a crucial connection is missed when "the large number of vernacular translations [of the Bible] is not related to new profit-driven book producers." in The Printing Press as an Agent of Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 370.

⁵Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 406.

At the risk of over-generalizing, I feel compelled to briefly describe the context for the invention of the press and the process of the Reformation. Europe was in the midst of political and religious tension when Gutenberg printed the first book (the bible of course) using moveable type in 1453. Rome was the political and religious center of power and the Pope maintained a precarious authority over the Kings in the "Res Publica Christiana." Yet increased trade gave rise to cities and a merchant class. This bourgeoisie not only financed an aesthetic called humanism that sought to re-invent the glories of pagan Greece and Rome, but also began to agitate for their access to political power. The economy and culture of Europe were in a state of transformation, yet the social, political, and religious structure of the Middle Ages tenaciously persisted.

From Script to Print

The press entered "a distinctive literary culture based on hand copying" that published new books by reading them aloud.⁶ Though monks are often stereotyped as the primary producers of texts, as early as 1100 A.D. hand copying began to shift from monastic scribes to paid lay stationers.⁷ Thus, long before the shift from script to print, a private and for profit scribe industry was in place. With the arrival of the printing press, this industry could increase productivity and render hand copying obsolete. However, Johannes Trithemius, wrote in *De Laude Scriptorum* that "monks should not stop copying because of the invention of printing."⁸ The Abbot of Sponheim believed that hand copying encouraged diligence devotion, and knowledge of scripture and briefly fought "this intrusion of a capitalist enterprise into a consecrated space" that the press

⁶Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Modern Europe* (Cambridge 1983) p. 7.

⁷Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Modern Europe* (Cambridge 1983) p. 10.

⁸Quoted in Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Modern Europe* (Cambridge 1983) p. 10.

presented.⁹ However, he ultimately endorsed the communications shift by sending *De Laude* to the print shop in 1494.¹⁰

The Church did not oppose the printing press from the beginning much less try to contain it. On the contrary, during the anti-Turkish crusade of Western Christendom, Church officials had "already hailed the new technology as a gift from God--as a providential invention which proved Western superiority over ignorant infidel forces."¹¹ Indeed, the press offered little threat because "the immediate effect of printing was merely to further increase the circulation of those works which had already enjoyed success in manuscript" and these were mostly moral tales, lives of saints, scholastic theology, and collections of sermons.¹² The press provided a new technology that the Church "used printing for proselytizing" and this business meant that "Catholic firms made profits by serving the Roman Church."¹³

The press allowed information to be reproduced relatively quickly and cheaply in the form of "occasionels" and "placards." "Occasionels" were often polemical and served as propaganda by utilizing "motifs from carnival culture to bolster their persuasiveness."¹⁴ Placards were "a print piece in the form of a broadsheet designed to be read, handled or posted."¹⁵ This mass production of posters and handbills was significant in that "the first literature of information, the ancestor of the modern newspaper, was developing."¹⁶

The shift from script to print took place in an atmosphere of tension. The Church sought to maintain power over states experiencing a rising intellectual and cultural

⁹Trithemius quoted from *De Laude Scriptorum* in Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Modern Europe* (Cambridge 1983) p. 10.

¹⁰Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Modern Europe* (Cambridge 1983) pp. 10, 11.

¹¹Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 303.

¹²Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book* (London 1976) p. 249.

¹³Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Modern Europe* (Cambridge 1983) p. 156.

¹⁴Roger Chartier, *The Culture of Print* (Princeton 1987) p. 3.

¹⁵Roger Chartier, *The Culture of Print* (Princeton 1987) p. 4.

¹⁶Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book* (London 1976) p. 289.

movement among their urban elite. Printing simply replaced a largely secularized script industry to reproduce books which had been popular provide for widely and rapidly distributed information. When scholars of the Gospel began to work for the printing business, however, this “intrusion” on a “consecrated space” meant that “conflict over new questions pertaining to priestly prerogatives and sacred studies could not have been postponed indefinitely.”¹⁷

A typical print shop was increasingly run by men with little, if any, connection to the Church and "the very nature of his business provided the merchant-publisher with a broadly based liberal education."¹⁸ The scholar printer was part of an intellectual community. His work provided "an incomparable power for both transformation and propagation" by uniting thinkers who suddenly found themselves "immediately transmitting results...speedily and conveniently."¹⁹ The printer, however, was also pre-occupied with profit and consequently looked to expand his markets beyond the intellectual elite. He printed devotional images with woodcuts or engravings to appeal to the illiterate and sought to popularize religion through Books of Hours or books of piety written in the local vernacular instead of Latin. Thus, in serving his various clients, the editing power of the scholar printer threatened "the traditional mediating role of the priesthood."²⁰

The Medium is the Message²¹

Luther’s ideas were not new. Numerous revivals, such as Pietism and Millenarianism, had already attempted to reform a corrupt Church. Nor was the political

¹⁷Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Revolution in Modern Europe (Cambridge 1983) p. 183.

¹⁸Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Revolution in Modern Europe (Cambridge 1983) p. 177.

¹⁹Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) p. 10.

²⁰Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 320.

²¹Marshall McLuhan has written a book called The Medium is the Message that posits printing as “a ditto device” and “the first uniformly repeatable commodity.” Though provocative, the text offered heavy graphics and minimal historical analysis. Yet I found the title to be catchy...give or take a vowel.

tension of the Fifteenth century new. The “Res Publica Christiana” had suffered terribly in the Investiture Struggle, a Civil War which pitted the Emperor against the Pope, and had endured The Great Schism. Perhaps most importantly, the work of grammarians such as Erasmus and L efevre d’ Etaples had opened up channels of critique against the church based on scripture long before Luther.

Therefore, when periodizing the Protestant Reformation, it is crucial to understand that “the Ninety-Five Theses debate in itself wasn’t revolutionary.”²² In fact, it was quite normal for professors of theology to hold disputations over an issue such as indulgences and “church doors were the customary place for medieval publicity.”²³ Luther’s message was not new. His effective use of the new communications medium of the printing press, however, was unprecedented.

A Sixteenth Century Lutheran Chronicler wrote of the distributed copies of Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses that “it almost appeared as if the angels themselves had been their messengers and brought them before the eyes of the people.”²⁴ Obviously, these “messengers” were printers, who ensured that the Theses were “translated into German and summarized, were printed as flysheets and distributed throughout Germany...within fifteen days”²⁵ and “throughout Europe in a month.”²⁶ Luther wrote “To the Christian Nobility of the Christian Nation” in German “for it was intended for the widest possible audience.”²⁷ In three weeks, it had sold four thousand copies.²⁸ It is also estimated that Luther’s thirty publications sold more than 300,000 copies between 1517

²²G.R. Elton, Reformation Europe (Cambridge 1972) p.15 cited in Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 306.

²³G.R. Elton, Reformation Europe (Cambridge 1972) p.15 cited in Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 306.

²⁴Friedrich Myconius, Historia Reformationis (New York 1964) cited in Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) pp. 306-7.

²⁵Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) p. 290.

²⁶Maurice Gravier, Luther et l’Opinion Publique (Paris 1942) cited in Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 310.

²⁷Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) p. 291.

²⁸Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) p. 291.

and 1520.²⁹ Finally, Luther's Bible translation was, by modern standards, a bestseller. The one million copies printed in the first half of the Sixteenth Century placed "for the first time a truly mass readership and a popular literature within everybody's reach."³⁰

The medium of Luther's message did not just publicize his ideas, but gave them a life over which he eventually lost control. He had never intended to destroy the Catholic Church, on the contrary, he wished to save it through Reformation. But the medium through which his message was sent triggered the unintended consequences of fragmentation of the "Res Publica Christiana" and the secularization of a newly literate public. The press supplied enough bibles to allow for worship outside the church and "for the first time in human history a great reading public judged the validity of revolutionary ideas through a mass medium which used the vernacular language."³¹ Thus, the bible, as a commodity in the new publishing industry of mass-production, gives new meaning to Luther's description of printing as "God's highest and extremist act of grace, whereby the business of the Gospel is driven forward."³²

"Protestant" Printers and Catholic Censorship

While Murner and Erasmus didn't sell, "Luther...made the fortunes of his printers."³³ Profit-hungry printers, regardless of their personal theological stance, became missionaries of sorts. "Hawkers undertook the task of importing these [Lutheran tracts] into those states where they were forbidden and of distributing them in rural areas."³⁴ Therefore, Protestant doctrine "bypassed the mediation of priests and the authority of the Pope only to become dependent on the efficacy of Bible printers and

²⁹Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 303.

³⁰Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) p. 295.

³¹A.G. Dickens, The Counter Reformation (London 1969) cited in Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 303.

³²Luther's remarks cited by M. H. Black, The Printed Bible (Cambridge 1963) in Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 304.

³³Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) p. 292.

³⁴Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) p. 293.

Bible salesman.” This irrevocably “linked spiritual aspirations to an expanding capitalist enterprise.”³⁵ This interdependence between Protestants and printers offers “yet another example of the ways in which religious conviction and economic self-interest can re-enforce each other powerfully.”³⁶

While the Protestants usually sought to exploit the new medium of the printing press and consequently gained strength from the capitalist industry, the Counter Reformation Church tried to force free enterprise to serve a missionary purpose through censorship. In France during 1521, the Parlement condemned Luther and placed an embargo on all theological writing not approved by the faculty of theology at the University of Paris.³⁷ In 1531, the faculty began searching shops and seizing any books containing “false doctrine.”³⁸ Moreover, these attempts to control the printing industry drove the heretical book trade underground, pushed printers into Protestant states, and ultimately “provided free publicity...and guided Protestant printers toward authors who could be advertised as forbidden fruit.”³⁹

Anti-Catholic books were hot sellers. Secret presses churned out heretical tracts without imprints or with false ones and some were even disguised as alphabets, almanacs, or as popular literature using “innocuous titles.”⁴⁰ Poster warfare broke out in the streets as notices “were posted clandestinely at night and attacked mass or the Pope.” In Meaux, France in 1528, someone even posted a faked Papal Bull which “permitted and enjoined the reading, re-reading, and dissemination of Luther’s works.”⁴¹ The bold heresy even

³⁵Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Revolution in Modern Europe (Cambridge 1983) p. 167.

³⁶Robert Kingdon, Christopher Plantin and his Backers (Geneva 1963) cited in Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 445.

³⁷Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) pp. 296-97.

³⁸Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) p. 305.

³⁹Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Revolution in Modern Europe (Cambridge 1983) p. 175.

⁴⁰Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) p. 311.

⁴¹Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) pp.190, 290-1

approached the absurd when, in order “to ridicule the Pope and the Monks, pamphlets entitled Pope Donkey and Cow Monk were produced.”⁴²

The King of France encouraged vernacular translations and tolerated the poster war heresy because “the exact demarcation between heresy and orthodoxy was still blurred.”⁴³ A system of Royal Patronage protected condemned writers such as Erasmus and d’ Etaples not simply because the King enjoyed their work, but also because he “wanted to see the fervour of the theologians and magistrates somewhat moderated.”⁴⁴ This toleration, however, was violently replaced by repression in 1534. After the “affaire des placards,” in which heretical posters were found in the King’s apartments, Francis I immediately “forbade any book to be printed within the Kingdom on pain of death by hanging.”⁴⁵ Though impossible to enforce, this ban expressed the Monarchy’s grave concern with heresy. Six days later, as if to prove his point, the King led a procession through Paris in which “six heretics were burned at the stake” along with “three large stacks of books found in their possession.”⁴⁶ These books “provided the sole tangible proof of a suspect’s guilt, materializing as it were his private heretical opinions.”⁴⁷ It does not appear, however, that a printer needed to actually be a heretic to understand the material rewards that heretical books offered. Indeed, in 1545 when the Parlement ratified a long list of banned books, University printers objected for fear of bankruptcy.⁴⁸

Standardization

Although the Church tried to contain the printing industry, like the above mentioned example of Johannes Trithemius, it could not avoid using the new technology. “Even the censorship edicts issued by archbishops and popes from the 1480’s down

⁴²Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) pp.190, 290-1.

⁴³Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) p. 307.

⁴⁴Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) p. 306.

⁴⁵Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) p. 307.

⁴⁶Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) p. 307.

⁴⁷Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) p. 307.

⁴⁸Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) p. 310.

through 1515 hail the invention as divinely inspired and elaborate on its advantages before going on to note the need to curtail its abuses.” Friars used printing to address worldly men rather than just other monks by publishing collections of sermons. Yet the necessary standardization wrought by printing forced the church to define itself and “pedantic handbooks for preachers set forth rigid rules governing papal oratory.” Books began to intervene between sinner and priest and slowly “the contrast between the simplicity of Christ’s own teachings and the complex rigmarole of officially approved doctrine became sharper and more dismaying.”⁴⁹

“The invention of the printing press made it possible for the first time in Christian history to insist upon uniformity in worship....all spontaneous growth and change and adaptation of the liturgy was prevented, and the worship of the Roman Catholic Church fossilized.”⁵⁰ At the Council of Trent, 1545-63, the Catholic Officials endorsed the medieval Latin version of the bible to counter vernacular translations and restricted lay reading and book publishing with the Index and Imprimatur.⁵¹ The Catholic Church unsuccessfully tried to regulate the free market of books created by the press. Catholics, however, were not alone in this effort. Protestants as well “banned the publication of defamatory works”⁵² and “militant Calvinists were just as willing as Dominican inquisitors to resort to coercion and the stake.”⁵³

The Catholic Church sought to re-institute the priest, and ultimately the Pope, as the intermediary between the people and the word. Reginald Pole, a Catholic Cardinal, warned Londoners that “you should nott be your owne masters” and that “household

⁴⁹Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) pp. 315-318.

⁵⁰J. Daniélou Historical Theology (London 1967) cited in Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 313.

⁵¹Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Revolution in Modern Europe (Cambridge 1983) p. 157.

⁵²Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) p. 293.

⁵³Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Revolution in Modern Europe (Cambridge 1983) p. 173.

religion was a seed-bed of subversion.”⁵⁴ This was in high contrast to a marginal note in a Protestant bible which asserted that “Masters in their houses ought to be as preachers to their families.”⁵⁵ This difference was not merely a theological issue because “since the Reformation family had become the...most essential government in the Church....the Master was both King and priest in his household.”⁵⁶ Indeed, political independence from Rome was a prime motivator for the German Royalty’s quick embrace of Luther’s writings.⁵⁷

Literacy and Nationalism

Protestant cooperation with the printing industry meant that “a return to early Christian Church traditions somehow served to usher in modern times”⁵⁸ of the Nation-State through capitalist enterprise. For Luther, this was surely an unintended consequence. One cannot be so sure, however, about the German Princes that protected him from Rome. These Princes’ urge to free themselves from taxation meant that they hardly shared Luther’s interest in “saving” the Catholic Church. The massive literacy that Luther’s Bible encouraged, spun out of Protestant control as the populace began to read secular works. Men in villages became involved in religion and politics, thus polarized society along gender lines and reshaping the family as an independent political unit.

This is not to say that the press single-handedly overturned centuries of cultural and economic tradition. Rather, it is one of the elements of what Eisenstein has called “a

⁵⁴J. W. Blench *Preaching in England in the late Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Oxford 1964) cited in Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 426.

⁵⁵Christopher Hill *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (New York 1967) cited in Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 424.

⁵⁶Keith Thomas *Women and Civil War Sects* (London 1971) cited in Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 424.

⁵⁷Eager to rid itself of the financial burden of Rome, German princes kidnapped Luther from the Diet of Worms in 1521, likely saving him from being executed as a heretic. Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book* (London 1976) p. 290.

⁵⁸Roger Chartier, *The Culture of Print* (Princeton 1987) p. 2.

distinctive amalgam”⁵⁹ (including the Protestant Reformation and Capitalism) that coalesce in the formation of Nationalism in Europe. “Vernacular demystified the Orthodox Latin translation of the bible...and frequently became the starting point for the development of national languages.”⁶⁰ The press ensured that “spelling became fixed” and began “a process of unification and consolidation which established fairly large territories” and facilitated the rise of centralized National monarchies.⁶¹ Thus, individual worship challenged communal mass and the death of Latin gave rise to linguistic barriers that widened the fissures in the “Res Publica Christiana” that the wars of religion had started.

The Printing Press introduced “a new means of communicating ideas within a society that was essentially aristocratic.”⁶² This new medium produced books and texts that “crossed social boundaries and drew readers from very different social and economic levels.”⁶³ Despite the Catholic Church’s efforts to contain it, with “the virulence of the press...an elite society gave way to a mass society.”⁶⁴ Nationalism and mass literacy rose together because “the two processes have been linked ever since Europeans ceased to speak the same language when citing their scriptures or saying their prayers.”⁶⁵

Conclusion: The Business of the Gospel

The existence of a relationship between the Protestant Reformation and the printing press cannot be denied. However, I believe this relationship to be a dialectical one rather than cause and effect. Just as Luther’s tracts only gained wide reach through the medium of the press, the printing industry owed much of its success to the

⁵⁹Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 406.

⁶⁰Hans Kohn, Nationalism: Its Meaning and History (New York 1955) cited in Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 359.

⁶¹Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) p. 319.

⁶²Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) p. 12.

⁶³Roger Chartier, The Culture of Print (Princeton 1987) p. 4.

⁶⁴Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, The Coming of the Book (London 1976) p. 11.

⁶⁵Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 363.

Reformation. Luther neither needed to coerce nor convert printers to publish his works. The gospel touched the hearts of these businessmen by way of their wallets.

Luther's revolution was aided by enterprising "messengers" who translated his "Ninety-Five Thesis" out of its original form of esoteric Latin into German. This act added meat to Luther's popular theology by making manifest the material that could eventually replace "the mediating role of the priesthood."⁶⁶ Catholic officials tried to control this process through censorship, but instead gave free publicity to the Protestants and alienated themselves from the printers. When the Church did engage with print, it was forced to standardize its theology and lost the flexibility that had allowed the "Res Publica Christiana" to hold Europe together.

My research has shown that both the printing press and the Reformation helped to create a profound communications shift in the Fifteenth Century. I fear, however, that this conclusion is a bit of an anti-climax. Resisting a simple and snappy explanation of cause and effect, I am only left with more questions. While Eisenstein, Febvre, and Martin credit printers for helping spread Protestantism, how can we be sure that rural communities changed their traditional beliefs at all? Scholars such as George Huppert have shown that the peasantry's concerns were "Worldly" as early as the Fourteenth Century and they didn't pay much attention to the theological debates of urban intellectuals.⁶⁷ Also, since most peasants were illiterate, how fast did the conversion of the peasantry take place? And finally, did the influence of capitalism really incorporate rural culture into the quasi-democratic Nation-States based in the cities or did it merely serve to polarize Europe even more? These are critical questions that these paper has inadvertently posed, yet my research has failed to answer. What I have found, however, is that the Reformation is better understood when related to the "distinctive amalgam" in which Protestants, Capitalists, and Catholics collaborated in "the business of the Gospel."

⁶⁶Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 320.

⁶⁷Huppert, George. After the Black Death: A Social History of Early Modern Europe, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986. p. 147.