

**The Protestant Reformation and Catholic Publishing:  
A Framework for Contemporary Understanding**

Karen Scialabba  
Fordham University  
Graduate School of Religion and Religious Education  
Bronx, New York  
Fall, 2005

## Abstract

An understanding of how media “works” in a society, an understanding of the difference that communications media make in our lives, and an understanding of the power that belongs to the group that controls the technology – opens our eyes to the various strategies and perspectives of information conveyance all around us. So ubiquitous is this information, that without awareness, we are targets of an overwhelming barrage of messages from individuals and groups who use communication technologies to tell us what they think we “ought to know.” Drawing from the perspective of an interdisciplinary exploration of the sociocultural impact of the printing press and its effects on Catholic worship and education, this paper explores the educational mission of Catholic publishing during the Reformation via an analytical media lens for the following reasons: First, to view some of the background historical reasons why the Roman Church perceived the need for uniformity in worship. Second, to discuss how the Roman Church used media during the Reformation to expand their outreach to the public and to define and shape the issues that were being discussed; and third – and most importantly – to create an outlook of understanding relevant to the educational mission of Catholic publishing today

### The Protestant Reformation and Catholic Publishing: A Framework for Contemporary Understanding

For many people, problems with pervasive media began in Germany late in the fifteenth century with Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press. Along with Gutenberg’s invention came the suggestion that the printing press caused the Protestant Reformation by making Bibles available for a larger audience. When Luther said, “Read the Bible for yourselves” – suddenly, everyone *could* read the Bible for themselves because the printing press made Bibles available for everyone (Levinson 1997, xii). But that notion only represents part of the story. And for those unaware of how media “works” in a society, saying that the printing press imposed the Protestant Reformation on European culture is similar to saying that video recorders “impose” family memories on individuals who film their families. As forms of media, the printing press – and the video recorder – are technologies through which people access, share, and recall information that help them to consider, evaluate, and shape their understandings. The preconditions that serve as the context for these understandings come from human patterns already formed and present (1997, xii). The technology serves as a way of presenting these patterns in a fresh, new light – and in a new framework of understanding (McLuhan 1962, 158).

Truth be told, there are not many media theories that analyze the historical consequences of the communications shift of the fifteen century (Eisenstein 1997, x). The following sections discuss two theories that challenge us to rethink some of the prevailing explanations regarding the educational mission of Catholic publishing as perceived by today’s standards. The first media theory is taught in the communications departments of many respected universities; the second theory builds on the first, but assumes a feminist perspective. These examples make evident the fact that from the earliest of times, new technologies in communication have always been part of an interactive system with

public opinion: news processes inform public opinion and public opinion informs the news (Glasser and Salmon 1995, xxiii). In other words, communications technologies influence how people experience and reflect upon their culture.

What remains constant throughout both of these theories is that those who control the technologies of communication hold the political and social power of the world. When only a few have the power to exclude or distort the information that makes up the context for understanding – and if only these few have the power to decide that other views are “only minority views, less important, extremist, or unpatriotic,” (Allen 1968, 10) -- then the public cannot make informed decisions – and ideas will ultimately be controlled in favor of the status quo (1968, 10). Without ways of correcting these perceptions, the context will continue to favor those who control the technology.

The purpose of this paper is to create an outlook of understanding relevant to the educational mission of Catholic publishing today by exploring the influence that the Protestant Reformation had on print and considering how this influence ultimately impacted Catholic publishing. Using an analytical media lens, this paper: (1) considers some of the background historical reasons why the Roman Church perceived the need for uniformity in Catholic worship and education in order to pursue their authentic voice amidst an explosion of knowledge, political thought, and religious controversy; and (2) examines how the Roman Church used media to expand their outreach to the public and to define and shape the issues that were being discussed.

The first theory looks at technology as a source of power responsible for presenting the context of the fifteenth century within a new framework of understanding. It makes a hypothesis that a chain of historical events – and a new technology – collided in an explosion of intellectual and political thought, ultimately changing the assumptions of a people. It explains how the disseminators of information – that is, the fifteenth century printers -- “rode the wave” in re-organizing the way that people viewed the world politically and socially. The second theory makes a hypothesis based on the fact that those who control the communication technology use it as a *source* of power with which to build a “doctrinal” system that tells people how they “should” behave, how they “should” worship, and what rules they “should” obey. It presents the view that any one in control of a communication technology has the right to tell the whole public – even its minority base -- “what it needs to know” – but warns us that true communication only exists when all persons see the public cultural context as somehow reflective of the identity of each individual – no matter how small.

### Communication Effects and a “Synchrony” of Events

According to Media Expert, Paul Levinson, neither Gutenberg nor the other early printers ever intended a Protestant Reformation to result from the use of their invention. There was no possible way that they could have foreseen such “self-escalating catalytic reactions” (1997, 24). It was, he says, a “synchrony of events” (1997, 24) that defined the conditions of European culture before and after the printing press was invented; and it all began with two preconditions already set in place -- the public’s frustration with monopolies on knowledge and Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press. The conditions afterwards were shaped by a series of reactionary events: First, came Luther’s ninety-five theses that contained an attack on papal abuses and the sale of indulgences by

Catholic Church officials; second, was Luther's resolute message to the public – "read the Bible for yourself" (1997, 24); and third, was the fact that Bibles were readily available for the general public (1997, 24). And with that, says Levinson, all of the ingredients for change were in place. Luther's message emerged onto the scene of a supportive environment; the printing press served as the technology to advance his cause.

A deeper look into the context of the times reveals that the Protestant Reformation in Germany was actually a continuance of the Renaissance humanist movement (a term that applies to the predominant social philosophy and intellectual and literary currents of the period from 1400 to 1650) that had begun in Italy (Elias 2002, 86). Dissatisfaction with the Church was found on all levels of European society at that time and the influence of Renaissance humanism on the Reformers impacted their view of education in several ways: (1) it deepened their commitment to return to the original Scriptures and to the Fathers of the early Church as a source for education; (2) it expressed their shared "felt need" for the kind of education that the Renaissance scholars had advocated; (3) it favored the study of history to reclaim what they considered original teachings of Christianity from history; preaching the gospel; and using music as a means of evoking inspirational religious sentiment (2002, 86).

The Roman Church at that time was perceived to have grown more and more stern and formal in its organization (Kreis 2002). Throughout the population, there was a general feeling that something absolutely essential was missing from the Church; it was lacking a sense of the immediate; the personal; the spiritual. Many Christians found that the Church's emphasis on rituals were unhelpful in their quest for personal salvation. The notion that salvation could be won through good words and fasting, chastity, abstinence, and asceticism didn't offer them a profound sense of assurance that they would, indeed, be saved (Kreis 2002). Even the sacraments seemed to lack personal meaning; the symbolism no longer resonated with the people of Europe (Kreis 2002). Key differences between the Reformers and the Roman Church were affecting the day to day context of people's lives who were seeking a more personal understanding of their faith. These differences were in the important theological areas of free will, law and the gospel, and sin and grace (Elias 2002, 86).

The Reformation was dominated by the thoughts of Martin Luther. As a young man, in 1508, a faculty member of the Wittenberg University, Luther was more interested in preaching a religion of piety than one of philosophy or theology. His studies were devoted to the discovery of God and he sought understanding in areas that better served the sensibility of the pilgrim than the humanist scholar. It was on a trip to Rome on official business that Luther first became disturbed by the immoral and cynical view of life held by many priests and cardinals. Disgusted, Luther did not at this time publicly express his anger or follow through with any form of action. In 1512, he returned to Wittenberg to teach – concentrating mainly on the Psalms and the Epistles of St. Paul – still not publicly mentioning his disillusionment with the Church. But in 1517, when Luther became aware that Albert of Hohenzollern was offered the position of archbishop of Mainz for a certain "required fee" to be given to Pope Leo X, a "storm broke" (Kreis 2002). Luther became infuriated. On October 31, All Saints Day – a day that found the Castle Church of Wittenberg, Germany crowded with many, many people who had come to honor the consecration of the Church – Luther publicly documented his outrage (Kreis 2002). He nailed a copy of the *Ninety-five Theses* to the door of the Castle Church – with

a promise that he would openly dispute each of the statements if challenged. Word of what Luther had done spread like wildfire amongst the public who had gathered. But it was when a translation of his Latin text was sent to the university press that his message grew beyond his wildest belief (Kreis 2002). The technology of the printing press changed everything. The printing of Luther's *Ninety-five Theses* gave the literate public a direct and almost immediate access to the theological context of the Roman Church – that is, the context as Luther saw it.

Overall, the great changes of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century had led to intensifying effects of secularization. People were filled with the sense that one could determine his or her own history (Kreis 2002). And since the Pope and the Bishops were viewed more like kings and princes than the spiritual guides of men and women (Kreis 2002) (because of their overwhelming wealth), the general perception was that the first thing that needed to be done to change the course of history was to balance the unequal distribution of wealth between the Church and the laity (Kreis 2002). It was inevitable. The changing social milieu no longer discouraged the individual who chose to challenge authority or tradition (Kreis 2002).

With the printing press now making information available to average people – minus the earlier prerequisites of status or nobility – wisdom began to bubble up from within a variety of contexts and from a variety of sources (Levinson 1997, 21-22). The literate public had no idea of what was happening to the authority of the Church or what events were weakening its status –but perhaps the Roman Church had a clue. H.G. Haile, author of *Luther: An Experiment in Biography* (1980) shares an article taken from a satirical circular, dated 1546, entitled “News from the Devil.” In this circular, the Pope expresses his frustration over yet another one of Luther's works being reprinted again.

I certainly fear we shan't succeed, even though I and all of my cardinals Bishops, abbots, their canons, and all our clerics have it purchased throughout Germany, and burned, in the hope that not one copy might remain by which printers' type could be set (1980, 174).

Metaphorically speaking, the train had left the station. Books and pamphlets gradually became the focus of public opinion and the printing press gradually seemed to replace the Church as the primary location of public symbolic connection (Soukup, Buckley, Robinson 2001, 368). After Luther, other ideological thinkers like Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin published their own points of view and before long new Churches sprung up representing principles that differed from both the Roman Catholic and Lutheran point of view (1997, 24-25). As more and more ordinary people became part of the new network of information provided by the printing press, the Church lost its central hold on knowledge and information. In the end, Levinson says, the “remarkable synchrony” (1997, 27) of events surrounding Luther's purposeful message merged with ubiquitous aspects of media to forever change the consciousness and lifestyle of a people (1997, 27).

Communication technologies have far-reaching effects on the cultures with which they interact (Soukup, Buckley, Robinson 2001, 366). The technology of the printing press during the time of the Reformation was no exception. While the initial effect of the printing press was to make information available to average people, a secondary effect was that it stimulated the literacy of the public. Although most of the earliest books dealt

with religious subjects, the public people began to demand books on every kind of topic (Kreis 2002). Printers “rode the wave” and responded accordingly. They brought many new authors to the forefront of the public sphere; ultimately affording them the status of becoming noted experts in their fields. According to Elizabeth Eisenstein, author of *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, printers were not only early capitalists, they were innovators who acted as “press agents” for authors and “cultural impresarios of a new kind” (1979, 23).

A third effect of the printing press was that it allowed information to become commodified. “Buying” information via books and pamphlets became akin to “buying” forms of power in the culture. Although Levinson claims that capitalism did not enslave the public (as Marxists have declared), he asserts that capitalism did serve as a channel through which one could reshape the nature of public discourse: He explains:

Knowledge has always been power, as witness the role that monopolies of Knowledge amongst priests and others have played throughout the millennia. But knowledge first became a commodity in mass culture, to be bought, sold, and otherwise exchanged in the aftermath of the printing press (1997, 34).

In this culture – a culture that Levinson calls a “hot-house of information” (1997, 24) — a new understanding of “knowledge, social concerns, and connection with the world” (Soukup, Buckley, Robinson 2001, 370) was being shaped and influenced by the way it was presented in the media. The work of the printers shifted the internal communication infrastructure and broke up the monopoly on information held by the Church. While past contexts of information were all about evaluation and control, new contexts of information focused on the raising of issues and the expansion of information (2001, 370).

Finally, a fourth effect of the printing press was the facilitation of the dissemination and preservation of knowledge in a standardized form. With all scholars now able to work from the same text, progress not only occurred at a faster rate; it was more reliable. This was an important factor in the advancement of science, technology, and scholarship because the spread of new ideas could now be met with greater impact (Kreis 2002). As people began to have a wider access to all of the new cultural knowledge, new opportunities and new ways of life began to emerge, forever changing the consciousness and lifestyle of a people.

In the final analysis, the communication network provided by the printers and encouraged by the public helped the Protestant Reformation come about by creating a new environment that put print at the center of culture. Print allowed information, culture, and knowledge to be popularized and expanded; print permitted notable authors other than clergy to become recognized as authorities in their own right; print made literacy a necessity of urban existence; and ultimately, print fractured the sole and exclusive authority of the Roman Catholic Church (Levinson 1997, xii, 23).

### Communication as the Mainstream Basis of Information

Media scholars Dana Densmore and Donna Allen, founders of the Women’s Institute

for Freedom of the Press,\* (a nonprofit research, education, and publishing organization seeking to democratize the communications media) expand on Levinson's view of the Reformation as a "synchrony of events" but focus more specifically on the notion that communication only exists if all persons see some kind of a reflection of the identity of each individual in the public cultural context – no matter how small. Taken from within the perspective of a scholarly, interdisciplinary exploration of the sociocultural impact of print and publishing, their view is that those with those who control the technology – and thus have the greatest outreach – have the greatest political power in a society. When the inequality is extreme, and when the input of other citizens is dramatically inhibited, then the "very heart of political communication" (Allen 1991, 3) is stifled or lost. Even though reaching everyone may be impossible for some groups, say Densmore and Allen, equal access *to make the attempt to reach everyone* is critical to the public discourse and essential for health and safety reasons, for economic and political understanding, and for mutual support and outreach. Their analysis represents feminist thought and their arguments are specifically constructed to present a political re-evaluation of mass media in American society (1977).

Before the invention of the printing press, organized religion served as mass media (1977) and, naturally, projected the interests that reflected the values of the religion and its own self-interest upon their audiences. It was right for them to do this, say Densmore and Allen, just as it is "the right for all media owners to provide the "information they think is important for others to have, reflecting their [economic] class and sex [gender] and acting, necessarily, in their own self-interest" (1977). Serving as an advocate of its own "culture," organized religion provided the public with what was discerned as an appropriate "information basis" (1977) upon which the public could make judgments.

Likewise, when the printers became the dominant disseminators of information during the Reformation, the "media content" that they shared with the public projected the interests that reflected that values of their gender, economic class, and self-interests. Just like the Church, printers had the right to select, repeat, and circulate the information of their choice; the information they thought if was important for others to have. But while it is true that value judgments were (and are) left up to the receivers of the information (as most media analysts agree), the effects of circulation can and do make a difference (1977). Donna Allen, Ph.D. uses the term "Social Darwinism" (1991, 14) to explain the link:

Those who owned mass media said they were in that influential position not because of their wealth but because they had proved by surviving and flourishing, that they were the best able to judge not only what the public needed to know ... but what the issues were, who was qualified to be heard on those issues, what was 'news,' and, in fact, how 'news' should be defined. they also said that the flourishing of certain *ideas* proved those ideas to be 'fittest.' Put another way, because the media's ideas survived (of course,

---

\* The Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press is dedicated to expanding the ability to communicate and to finding ways to enable each person to speak for himself or herself instead of being the passive recipients of information chosen by the few and distributed one-way. This analysis produces a new philosophy of communication, one that is gentle and peaceful, respectful of all people, and politically equal; three requirements for an analysis to be feminist.

widely and frequently repeated and largely unchallenged), it was said that this affirmed that the media had indeed disseminated the ‘fittest’ ones (1991, 14).

Data about the exact sentiments of people at this time are scarce, but history shows that the printing press created a new environment by presenting cultural conditions that re-arranged previously accepted patterns and understandings (Massa 2003, 130-131). People yearned to become productively and profitably engaged in the new culture surrounding their lives and they recognized that literacy provided them with the intellectual “tools, the skill and wherewithal to receive and process the information that flowed from the press” (Levinson 1997, 31). Meanwhile, in terms of access to the new technology and greatest reach of the public, the printers were in control. And because the printers were far more directly connected to the ideologies of Protestantism than to the ideologies of the Roman Church, the number of books favoring the values of printers rose as literacy flourished (Levinson 1997, 31). Naturally, the reading materials from the Church eventually died off. Elizabeth Eisenstein, author of *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1979) quotes Louise Holborn, author of *Printing and Growth of a Protestant Movement in Early Germany* (1942), to emphasize the point that circulation of Catholic books were low because, in most cases, printers were biased against the Catholic faith. Louise Holborn says:

Scholars complained that the whole book market was devoted to books by Luther and his follower and that nobody wished to print anything for the Pope or any material which would offend Luther ... Catholic polemicists and authors had a difficult time finding printers and publishers for their manuscripts ... Georg Witzel from Mainz, a Catholic convert from Lutheranism, complained that the printer had kept his manuscript for a whole year with promises. ‘If I were a Lutheran,’ he said, ‘there would be no difficulty, but as a Catholic I am writing in vain’ (Eisenstein 1979, 354).

Ultimately, print and its impact on the surrounding culture of the Reformation not only mediated the religious outlook of the public; it directly and indirectly set the agenda as to which issues were to be considered most important (Soukup, Buckley, and Robinson 2001, 368).

With the public sphere now dominated by information that benefited the values of the printers, the “information basis” through which people made judgments favored a Protestant outlook and sensibility (Densmore and Allen 1977). In the end, say Densmore and Allen, what becomes clear is that political power comes from the group that has the greatest control of the communication technologies. By reaching the largest number of people in a population and controlling the information basis upon which people make judgments (which, naturally, will reflect the mission and vision of their value system), the group controlling the communication technology gains the most political power (1977).

When the printers grasped the power and potential of the emerging technology, they also grasped the political influence that came with an ability to reach the public quickly and comprehensively (1977). Consequently, for the first time in history, the business economy and the Church, as two separate spheres with two distinct value systems that

until now had only interacted in certain defined ways, were now interacting on the same “playing field.” Mark Edwards, author of *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (1994) explains the impact of this upon the Church:

[The] printing press played far more than just an assisting role in this many-sided contest over authority. It broadcast the subversive messages with a rapidity that had been impossible before its invention. More than that, it allowed the central ideological leader, Martin Luther to reach the ‘opinion leaders’ of the movement quickly, kept them all in touch with each other and with each other’s experiences and ideas, and allowed them to ‘broadcast’ their (relatively coordinated) program to a much larger and more geographically diverse audience than has ever been possible before. Yet, paradoxically, printing also undermined central authority because it encouraged the recipients of the printed message to think for themselves about the issues in dispute, and it provided the means – printed Bibles especially by which each person could become his or her own theologian (1994, 7).

In any event, irregardless of whether or not the printing press helped – or caused – the Protestant Reformation, media studies give evidence to the fact that people will always negotiate meanings from within their own perspectives. Undeniably, print – and the nature of public opinion surrounding print – was changing the theological context in which people lived (Soukup, Buckley, and Robinson 2001, 366). Janice Peck, a researcher conversant on the social meanings and political implications of mediated popular culture, explains that a change in the dominant social medium changes a community’s experience of religion. She says:

Religion is explicitly concerned with both ontological and experiential dimension of existence with being and meaning. Religion provides meaning for individual existence by grounding it in a larger, cosmic framework of significance (Peck 1993, 32).

Meanwhile, with the full authority and the presence of the Church in the public realm diminished, many people considered the Church as no longer relevant to their lives and no longer the sole source of truth (Hoover and Lundby 1997, 178-179; Levinson 1997, 31). The Catholic Church responded to this situation by directly opposing Protestantism. Doctrinally, they situated their distinctive faith and practice in relation to Protestant Churches – mainly in the areas of theology and education. They articulated defined, and defended the directives and mandates for the Roman Catholic faith in a series of discontinuous sessions of the Council of Trent (1545-1563). Overall, their goals were to reinforce Catholic doctrine, reform corruption from within the Church, identify errors in Protestant interpretation, standardize the Mass throughout the Church, and strengthen Catholic education (Elias 2002, 97; Kirsch 2004). Further, decisions made at Trent were made within the context of controlling the new forces of Gutenberg’s invention (Eisenstein 1979, 355).

While many may believe that the “long war between the Roman Church and the printing press” (1979, 355) continues today, the following section explains the first steps of the Roman Catholic Church to counter these forces.

### Catholic Publishing: A Promoter of Uniformity in Worship and Education

With hopes that religious uniformity in education would become a strengthening and unifying factor for the Catholic Church, the Council determined that a synthesis of guiding principles and a systematic approach to education was needed for defending the faith against the “false doctrines of the day” (Elias 2002, 99). The founder of the Jesuits, Ignatius Loyola, strongly supported this undertaking and made “combating the religious heresies of Protestantism (2002, 99) the mission of his Jesuit ministry. It was during this period of reform that the word “mission” began to be used in its current context. At first, it meant “carrying out whatever the pope requested” – later on it included the notion of being “sent” – not just “beyond one’s local area; [it was] also directed towards non-Christians, non-Catholics, and Catholic Christians as well” (Bevans and Schroeder 2004, 173-174).

Determining that an effective, educated, and involved clergy was of premier importance in making the Catholic context relevant, the Jesuits eventually made the education of the laity and the common clergy one of their most important goals (2002, 99-100; Kirsch 2004, 1). The Jesuits were aspiring towards a renewal that would “lift the level of the masses of Christians more nearly to New Testament standards” (2004, 173).

Meanwhile, the Council, concerned that the authority of the medieval clergy was being undercut by “lay erudition on the part of a scholarly elite” and by “lay Bible-reading among the public at large,” (Eisenstein 1979, 355) continued to investigate ways in which they could capitalize on opportunities to create synergy with clergy and laity. In 1560, they established the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) for the purpose of preparing lay men and women to teach the catechism to children and adults. Their goal was to provide clear markers for the instruction of faith and to produce teaching materials suited for sharing the Catholic tradition. By 1566, the first catechism – *Catechismus Romanus* – (also known as the Catechism of the Council of Trent) was issued. This manual of religious instruction for the clergy dealt with the Apostles’ Creed, the Seven Sacraments, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer. It offered directives and suggestions for its appropriate use in sermons and amongst different age groups and social conditions. Eventually, other catechisms followed; each focusing on the concerns and theological contexts of different “audiences.” Peter Canisius published a compendium of Catholic teachings for colleges, for those not well-educated, and for those who came from German-speaking countries. Jesuit Robert Bellarmine wrote a catechism (in 1597) that divided doctrine according to faith, hope, and charity. Finally, in 1885, the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore created a catechism that seemed the best expression of the faith of the Catholic Church. It became the standard text for religious education in the United States for one hundred years (Elias 2002, 98).

Still the Council determined that the Protestant hold on print was having an overriding and negative effect on the Catholic worldview (Sweet 1993, 5). Even though Pope St. Pius V had recommended to bishops that a CCD be established in every parish (Glancey, M.C. 2003), education and standardized religious education texts alone could not

compete with the width and breadth of ideas coming from the newly invented printing press. More than just telling people what to think, print was impacting public and private morality through the nature of public opinion (Soukup, Buckley, and Robinson 2001, 366). In 1546, the Council of Trent, in an attempt to supervise the press, concluded that henceforth books on religious subjects would require an “imprimatur” (In Latin, “It may be printed”) from the Church. A commission was appointed (in 1562) to draft an *Index of Forbidden Books* which would ban authors and writings considered dangerous to Catholic faith and morality (Elias 2002, 98; Mayl 1998). Although this Index was never completed, a Tridentine index, called the *Index librorum prohibitorum*, was initiated by Pope Pius IV and published in 1564 in Rome. The lists in this index formed the basis of all subsequent indexes. Its rules became the guide for future censors and compilers in the twentieth and twenty-first century (Mayl 1998). Overall, the post-Tridentine papacy did more than just limit the printed word. Policies framed at Trent were to keep people in check too. Elizabeth Eisenstein, author of *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* explains further:

Catholic policies framed at Trent were aimed at holding these new functions [the new medium of print] in check. By rejecting vernacular versions of the Bible, by stressing lay obedience and imposing restrictions on lay reading, by Developing new machinery such as the Index of Forbidden Books and the Imprimatur to channel the flow of literature along narrowly prescribed lines, The post-Tridentine papacy proved to be anything but accommodating (1979, 355).

Media studies shed light on the fact that new communication technologies have a kaleidoscopic effect on societies. Eventually, the Catholic hierarchy caught on to the fact that if the printing press could be the perfect tool of evangelization for the Protestants – it could work for them too.

### Catholic and Protestant Publishing in America: Two Different Perspectives

Across an ocean and twenty-five years after Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press, the printing press came to the New World – a land that had only been discovered fifty years earlier. According to publishing historian John Tebbel, this transition to America first – before other important cities in Europe – was the result of the Catholic Church discerning that print would be a perfect means of evangelization – particularly in areas of mission work (Tebbel 1987, 3). The first press was established in 1539 in Mexico City, by an Italian from Brescia named Giovanni Paoli, who is credited for creating the kind of “cottage industry” (Tebbel 1987, 4) of printing and publishing that prevailed in North America for the next two hundred and fifty years (1987, 4).

Later in the early seventeenth century, when the British established their colonies in North America, Protestants bought a press for their own use in order to indoctrinate Indians into the faith (1987, 4) and purposefully nurture the growth of a culture centered around literacy and the printed word (Nord 2004, 14). A project known as the Indian language publishing project (Nord 2004, 19) best characterizes the commitment of the New England Protestants to evangelical literacy. In a pioneering effort, they created a

new form of corporate organization united and managed around the vision and mission of the Protestant faith. Following the doctrines of *sola scriptura* (an absolute right of private judgment in the interpretation of the Scriptures) and the priesthood of all believers (the teaching that all believers are priests, no matter what their vocation in life), the Protestants – using The Cambridge Press of Harvard College (the only print shop in New England) -- set out (with the help of several Indian converts) to translate the Bible, a catechism, several tracts and devotional books, and an Indian primer into the vernacular of the Indian people (2004, 20-21). New England minister, John Eliot, a savvy organizational entrepreneur, skillfully directed this immensely difficult and complex undertaking. He was convinced that it was possible – through the technology of print and the grace of God – to build a covenanted community of faith by placing printed messages about God in the hands of every single person in America – including the native Indians of Massachusetts (2004, 21; Sweet 1993, 93). Financially subsidized by religiously and/or politically motivated collaborators – and never by commercial enterprise -- the project itself was largely a failure. Few Indians converted to Christianity (2004, 22). But the model of this mission endured over time as “the first great corporate philanthropic enterprise of colonial new England” (2004, 20-21). Complete “with its corporate organization, its commitment to literacy and evangelical publishing, and even its devotion to particular books” (2004, 22), the publishing project never sacrificed its core mission – “Christians must be readers” (2004, 20) -- to give in to interests of financial gain.

As for Catholics, print in the colonial era was viewed as useful only for political purposes. Not an oral culture focused on literacy, books, and preaching, like the Protestants, the Catholic philosophy focuses more on the visual and/or aesthetic dimensions of symbolic communication. These differences can be observed by considering the various visual, ritualistic, and tactile expressions of faith (such as the sacraments, architecture, rosary beads, ritual, hierarchy, and the Catholic devotion to Mary) that purposefully brings people emotionally and intellectually into a “mystery” in which words are insufficient (Viladesau 2000, 3). “How can mystery be translated into the vernacular?” was the Catholic sentiment of the times (2000, 2). Not surprisingly, Catholics viewed print suspiciously; as a potential problem; even “a source of revolution” (Tebbel 1987, 3). Their intent was to keep it “out of the hands of dissenters” (1987, 3) by controlling it and/or “employing it as a means of indoctrination” (1987, 3).

In the end, what becomes clear is that misunderstandings, personality clashes, conflicts, and disaffection between the ministries of Protestants and Catholics are usually less focused on theology and more on nuanced aspects of aesthetics and style (Viladesau 2000, 3). Because Catholics place their emphasis on the visual; seeing all of creation as a metaphor of God – God’s immanence -- they tend to allow more leeway in visual expressions of religious faith. Protestants, with their propensity towards emphasizing the separateness of God from the world -- God’s transcendence -- are predisposed towards allowing more latitude in written and oral expressions of faith (they would never see the need for a List of Forbidden Books). While both see value in catechisms and both represent “different performances of the same Christian classic” (2000, 3), concrete religious decisions always stem from the two different emphases of each tradition and account for observed cultural differences and nuanced differences of perspectives. Whose criteria should be irrefutable? Neither. Context has different meanings in different

communities. On the one hand, context can be described, applied, encoded and received as a form of information. On the other hand, context is relevant only to particular settings and particular forms of understanding – such as the concept of “mystery” in the Roman Catholic faith. The historical backgrounds inherent within each faith system not only reveals the “how and why” of contextual meaning; it determines the degree of relevance and level of symbolic meaning that it has for a particular community.

### Religious Publishing: Commerce and Censorship

While colonial printing in South America remained under the control of the Catholics who used it for religious purposes, secular publishing soon became a popular “sidecar” of the Church-controlled press in North America. Ultimately, as secular print became more and more dominant in the American marketplace, the economic motives of printers became problematic (1987, 4). Printers now were dealing with many of the inherent ambiguities that existed between their role as printer/craftpersons producing materials on behalf of the Church in the colonies and their own interests as businesspersons selling secular print in the American marketplace. As they tried to satisfy the demands of both of these markets, it became clear that the printer was now part of the value chain of this early publishing enterprise. The printer was the person who made “publish” or decline” decisions and the printer was the person who sold materials directly and indirectly to the public. The various combinations in which printers represented and carried out their business functions – “printer-bookseller; publisher-bookseller; printer-publisher-bookseller” – (1987, 4) made the trade more and more confusing and difficult to define. Further, as the materials that were being printed moved beyond the control of the Church and the colonies, the printer’s motives were met with suspicion in the colonies (1987, 4). If printers were fully responsible for three different roles – printer, bookseller, and publisher – would they use their power in subversive ways? Could a free press be detrimental to law and order?

In the end, printers were forced to obtain special permission and licenses from England (1987, 4) and operate under conditions of censorship so that economic, religious, and political interests of England and the colonies were safeguarded. This situation remained unchanged until shortly before the Revolution (1987, 5). It was not until late in the nineteenth century that the two terrains of printing and publishing were fully separated, although today there are still a few publishing houses that have held on to their own bookstores (1987, 4).

By the 1700’s publishing still was not the business that we know it to be today – but it represented a modest start. Works consisting of “theology, social science, and essays and treatises loosely considered as “literature” (1987, 7) were published in paperback format. And sermons were published in the cheapest way possible – mainly on single pieces of paper. Publishers even seemed to understand that the book cover was an ideal marketing tool; they used a “skyline” on their covers – that is, a single phrase or statement that contained a relevant sales message (1987, 4). All of the groundwork was in place for the modern publishing organization that we see today. But it would still be another one hundred years until publishing would begin to resemble its modern foundation.

According to John Tebbel, all that was needed at this point was freedom from restrictions so that books could become the “free forum in an open society that they were destined to

be” (1987, 7). But, apparently, many of the prohibitions of censorship still hold true today. John Tebbel explains why Church and state have historically taken a critical stance on many forms of public expression:

Censorship always takes two forms, which are sometimes intermingled. One is the continuous effort of governments of every kind to prevent the press from disclosing what they want to conceal, or from criticizing them in a way which may threaten their power. The other is the constant effort to prevent or control publication of material which offends the ruling class. Here Church and state combine to achieve the end. Nearly all censorship laws have been and are today, church-inspired, the result of direct pressure on legislative bodies (1972, 176).

### Catholic Publishing: A Communication System that Speaks for Itself

Catholic publishing began slowly in the early years of the American Revolution. The persecution of Catholics in most of the Protestant-controlled states in the English colonies of America meant also that they were “hedged in by a variety of discriminatory statutes” (Tebbel 1972, 187) that were specifically intended to stifle any movement towards a development of the faith. Only Maryland and Pennsylvania were tolerant of Catholics; Maryland by law; Pennsylvania through the leniency of Protestant judges who made decisions not to seriously enforce the anti-Catholic laws on the books. It seems obvious that there was interest in keeping Catholics as an uniformed, politically uninterested group. Publishing historian John Tebbel explains:

Before the Revolution, the only Catholic books to be printed, all of them in Philadelphia, were missals, hymnals, sacramentaries, and basic similar documents. Everything else – that is, biographical, historical, theological, devotional, and controversial books – had to be imported. Since this was an expensive proposition, the spread of the Church was not rapid (1972, 187).

In 1784, the first Catholic publisher, Christopher Talbot (originally from Ireland) opened for business; closely followed by Thomas Lloyd in 1789. Responsible for publishing the first Catholic best seller, Lloyd’s prestige as a former member of the Continental Army (wounded in the Battle of Brandywine), who happened to be an English Catholic -- helped to positively boost the image of the Catholic Church in the colonies. Further, Lloyd’s role in identifying and producing a best-selling book created a general awareness amongst Catholics of the far-reaching effects of the potential of publishing as a means of allowing Catholics to speak in an authentic voice.

Matthew Carey (originally from Ireland), was the leading Catholic publisher of the century. He is best known for creating a Catholic audience – a Catholic reading public. He sold books extensively to Catholic schools, and imported and published important Catholic books from Europe. As an enthusiastic and passionate leader of the faith, he was well known for his generous support of other publishing organizations. He faithfully subscribed to all Catholic publications (1972, 187-190) and produced a twenty-page

publication documenting the distinctive history of Catholicism in America that is still valued by historians to this day (1972, 1989).

In the late 1800's, Catholic book publishing expanded enormously as Catholic publishers realized the powerful persuasive association between the scale of communication and their own conscious influence as educators – and extracurricular educators of the faith – seeking to intensify common discourse. These early pioneers of the business, whose contributions continue today, are: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, Sadlier, Benziger Brothers, Inc., and Paulist Press.

### Final Thoughts

In the final analysis, a media lens provides a suitable and relevant historical view of how the Catholic Church attempted to overcome barriers to their participation in the world of print. An awareness of this segment of Catholic heritage -- which many historians overlook – will help religious educators to relate to the rationale behind the current context of Catholic publishing today. Was the Catholic Church trying to insulate itself from the broader culture in the fifteen century? Or, was it simply responding to a perceived loss of Catholic identity? The answer seems clear. As the major disseminators of information about Catholic doctrine, the hierarchy at the Council of Trent used its power to give people the information they thought was important for them to know. Their goal was to offer forms of central organizing wisdom, from within the deluge of political and intellectual thought coming from the printing press. They were not interested in presenting a representation that mirrored society, nor were they interested in helping people become the best judge of their own interests. Their views represented an “owners” view – the view of the Roman Catholic Church. Catholic publishers, as the controllers of the communication technology, eventually gained equal footing. They used the communication technology as a source of power to build their own doctrinal system of “proper” thought. But note this corollary fact – in their view, what people “ought to know” is how the Catholic tradition works when it is resurrected with fresh interpretation from within the culture. Ultimately, the media lens of the fifteen century fits our twenty-first century context. When a new communication technology enters a society – whether it is the printing press, the Internet, or even the cell phone -- it is inevitable that people will use this technology to access, share, and recall information that helps them to consider, evaluate, share, and shape their understanding in order to move forward with relevance.

## REFERENCES

- Allen, Donna. 1968. Up against the media. *The Liberated Voice*. Syracuse, NY. July 10.
- . 1991. Media without democracy and what do about it. *The WIFP Booklet Series: Looking Toward a Radical Restructuring of the Communications Media*. Washington DC: Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press. Booklet No. 3.
- Bevans, Stephen B. and Roger P. Schroeder. 2004. *Constants in context: A theology of mission for today*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Densmore, Dana and Donna Allen. 1977. A feminist analysis of mass media. In *Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press*. [database online]. Under "Part 5. The Disseminators of Information as a Causal Factor in History." <http://www.wifp.org/radicalfeministanalysis.html>. 21 July 2005. With permission from Martha Allen, Ph.D.
- Edwards, Mark. 1994. *Printing, propaganda, and Martin Luther*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Elias, John L. 2002. *A history of Christian education: Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox perspectives*. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company.
- Glasser, Theodore L. and Charles T. Salmon. 1995. *Public opinion and the communication of consent*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Haile, H. G. 1980. *Luther: An experiment in biography*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Hoover, Stewart M. and Knut Lundby. 1997. *Rethinking media, religion, and culture*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Kirsch, J.P. 2004. Council of Trent. In *Catholic Encyclopedia* [database online]. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15030c.htm>. 14 July 2005.
- Kreis, Steven. 2002. Lecture four: The impact of Luther and the radical reformation. In *The History Guide: Lectures on Early Modern European History* [database online]. <http://www.historyguide.org/earlymod/lecture4c.html>. 27 August 2005.
- Levinson, Paul. 1997. *The soft edge: A natural history and future of the information Revolution*. London: Routledge.
- Massa, Mark S. 2003. *Anti-Catholicism in America: The last acceptable prejudice*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company.
- Mayl, Paul Halsall. 1998. Index librorum prohibitorum. In *Internet Modern History Sourcebook*. [database online]. Under "Index librorum prohibitorum, 1557-1966," <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/indexlibrorum.html>. 13 July 2005.
- McLuhan, Marshall. 1962. *The Gutenberg galaxy: the making of typographic man*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Nord, David Paul. 2004. *Faith in reading: Religious publishing and the birth of mass Media in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Peck, Janice. 1995. *The gods of televangelism: The crisis of meaning and the appeal of religious television*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton.
- Soukup, Paul A., Francis J. Buckley, and David C. Robinson. 2001. The influence of information technologies on theology. *Theological Studies*. Vol. 62.
- Sweet, Leonard I. 1993. *Communication and change in American religious history*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Tebbel, John. 1987. *Between covers: The rise and transformation of American book*

*publishing*. New York: Oxford University Press.

---. 1972. *A history of book publishing in the United States. Volume I. The creation of an industry: 1630-1865*. New York: R. R. Bowker Co.

Viladesau, Richard. 2000. *Theology and the arts: Encountering God through music, art, and rhetoric*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.