

Renaud Adam, Rosa De Marco, and Malcolm Walsby (eds.), ***Books and Prints at the Heart of the Catholic Reformation in the Low Countries (16th-17th Centuries)*** (Leiden: Brill, 2022, 301 pp., ISBN 9789004504370).

This study, which emerged from a 2017 conference at the University of Liège, aims to correct an important historiographical misconception about the first age of print: that Protestants capitalised on the first mass media phenomenon, the printing press, and that the Catholic Church was left behind by this innovation. This perception has been challenged before. In 2005, Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia addressed it in a new chapter, ‘The Catholic Book’, for the second edition of his ground-breaking and widely-read book *The World of Catholic Renewal 1540-1770*. In 2013, Andrew Pettegree similarly disputed this outdated narrative in his contribution ‘Catholic Pamphleteering’ to *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation*. Even more recently, Natalia Maillard Álvarez issued an additional challenge with her volume *Books in the Catholic World during the Early Modern Period* (2014).

Nevertheless, it is certainly the case that Catholic book culture is a profoundly understudied phenomenon, especially as book history has never been more popular. This volume sheds new light on the relationship between Catholicism and books by giving attention to the importance of books and print in the Spanish Habsburg Low Countries during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a period of Catholic reform and renewal. As such, it represents an important contribution by some of the most prominent scholars in the field, and significantly advances our understanding of the importance of the Catholic book to readers and creators.

The introduction lays out a structure for the volume that follows the creation of the Catholic book itself: beginning with the process of book production (Part 1), following authors and other creative agents (Part 2), and evaluating the book as a product and devotional object (Part 3). Clocking in at only five pages, it is hard not to feel that the editors have missed an opportunity with their introduction to provide a more comprehensive review of the existing literature or present stronger thematic guidance for the content that follows. While the concept of the ‘Catholic book’ is referenced throughout, its precise definition and parameters remain elusive, although all chapters reference some form of book produced by Catholics, for a Catholic audience, or both.

An additional element missing in the introduction is a stronger sense of chronology. The title identifies the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the subject of the book, two turbulent centuries that saw civil

war, European-wide warfare, reconquest, territorial loss and gain, and radical changes in the Catholic Church in the Habsburg Low Countries. The chapters that follow do an outstanding job of documenting these changes through scientific, theological, and political print. For example, Paul Arblaster's piece shows how newspapers, pledges and confraternities provided moral justification to the violent Habsburg response to the Bohemian uprising after it began in 1618. While putting chapters together thematically does highlight their similarities, a stronger sense of their chronology in the introduction could have offered a stronger competing narrative of the development of the Catholic Reformation in the Southern Netherlands. Overall, the volume suggests that the book industry did indeed support Catholic political and religious strategy, and benefitted in turn from ecclesiastical support. Each chapter represents a comprehensive and successful repudiation of the outmoded perception that early modern Catholic reform took place outside of a confessional book culture.

The first part, 'Book Production and Book Business', documents book production and bookselling in the Catholic Low Countries. The section is off to a rousing start with Heleen Wyffels' thorough and insightful study of female owner-managers of printing houses in sixteenth-century Antwerp. Wyffels rightly challenges book historians to reconsider the importance of women in consolidating wealth and power in early modern printshops. In this section, Renaud Adam also presents an intriguing snapshot of Brussels as a Catholic print centre during the turn of the seventeenth century, under the rule of Archduke Albert and Archduchess Isabella. Adam's integration of quantitative bibliographical research with case studies is particularly effective. The next two chapters by Dirk Imhof and Renaud Milazzo both bring Plantin Press, Antwerp's most famous printing firm, into sharper focus. As the centre of Catholic liturgical printing in northern Europe during the handpress period, it is only appropriate that Plantin and his successors should be at the heart of the heart of the Catholic Reformation in the Low Countries.

Part 2, 'Publishing Enterprises', transitions to focusing on authors and other agents of book production. Although this is a more thematically disjointed section than the previous, each chapter presents a valuable case study. Ruth Sargent Noyes explores science and material culture by looking at 'parallactic print' and astrolabes, arguing that conceptual paradigmatic shifts in science had direct cultural, theological and rhetorical repercussions. In an entertaining and astute chapter that dives into the history of emotions, Johan Verberckmoes discusses *hilaritas*, holy laughter, in its printed incarnations. The diversity of subjects in this section effectively demonstrates how many different Catholic agents, whether they be authors, censors, rulers or publishers, participated in the cultural legacy of Catholic books.

Finally, part 3, 'Prints and Iconography', focuses on the works themselves. The final two chapters in this section analyse image-based paratextual elements, printer's devices and frontispieces. Rosa De Marco

depicts the fascinating relationship between printer's devices and emblematic images, demonstrating that the title pages of books bring together religious symbols, typography, and cultural reference points. Annelise Lemmens then analyses frontispieces from seventeenth-century Antwerp, describing how they mediated religious and cultural understandings of books both as devotional objects and repositories of meaning. Although these two pieces are the first and second of the section respectively, together they act and feel like a fitting conclusion to the volume, and perhaps would have functioned better in that order.

Overall, the volume could have benefitted from more thorough proofreading or the services of a professional copyeditor. The instances of incomplete sentences, missing punctuation and abruptly unfinished footnotes in multiple chapters are sometimes distracting. On some occasions, large untranslated block quotes provide a barrier to those without French, Dutch or Latin reading knowledge and make these chapters more difficult to utilise in teaching. Some authors do provide translated block quotes with the original language in the footnote, and some provide translations in the footnote, which raises the question of why a consistent policy was not implemented throughout. While these editorial inconsistencies are relatively minor, they impact the readability and accessibility of such valuable research. Despite the issues raised here, this is altogether a readable, richly detailed, and fascinating book, that thoroughly demonstrates that the study of Catholic books in the first age of print is worth doing, and will flourish in the long term.

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