Chapter 1

Books and Prints at the Heart of the Catholic Reformation in the Low Countries (16th - 17th centuries)

Renaud Adam, Rosa De Marco and Malcolm Walsby

The use and the impact of the printing press in promoting the Catholic Reformation in the early modern Habsburg Low Countries has not received the attention it deserves. In contrast, the use of books and prints by Protestants - often considered as the first phenomenon of mass media in history - has been widely studied and has generated a rich and plentiful bibliography.[[1]](#footnote-1) Yet the Spanish monarchy and local authorities, the Catholic Church, the universities of Douai and Louvain, and the new religious orders within these territories seized the opportunities offered by printers and booksellers to strengthen their missions: to restore Spanish authority, ensure dissemination of the decrees of the Council of Trent, fight all kinds of heresy, and contribute to pastoral and pedagogical activities. Though there are studies on a few core figures, such as Christopher Plantin or the Verdussen family,[[2]](#footnote-2) or a few important publishing enterprises, such as the Plantin *Biblia Regia* or the *Imago Primi Saeculi* by Moretus, many other less well-known cases are still as yet unstudied.[[3]](#footnote-3) The main target of this book is to shed light on the extent, dynamism and underlying mechanisms of the processes set up to support Catholic Reform. The thirteen essays gathered in this volume offer an interdisciplinary approach to understand the complexity of the phenomenon through religious history, book history, art history and cultural history. Each part focuses on specific fields: book production and dissemination, the actors of the Counter-Reformation and their networks, and prints and iconography.

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The first part of the volume focuses on Catholic book production and bookselling in the Low Countries. While such publications are well documented for the fifteenth and the sixteenth century and studies on publishers’ editorial policies are flourishing, there is still a severe lack of data regarding some aspects of book production.[[4]](#footnote-4) Some of the social facets of the book world have been neglected (such as the key role played by widows); and dissemination, circulation and bookselling need to be further investigated. Four chapters dealing with these matters intend to fill some of these historiographical gaps. Heleen Wyffels explores the contribution of women to the production of Catholic books and images in Antwerp during the sixteenth century. This case is an opportunity to study the options available to printers’ widows and provides quantitative analysis of widows’ printing houses. Renaud Adam reconsiders the case of Brussels under the reign of Archduke Albert and Archduchess Isabella (1598-1633). The history of this printing centre during the seventeenth century has been unjustly ignored by scholars for many years, which has affected our vision of the role played by Brussels printers in the dissemination of the Counter-Reformation. Dirk Imhof examines the publishing history of Petrus Canisius’s *Manuale catholicorum*, printed by the Plantin Press. This prayer book, essential to the Counter-Reformation, quickly became an extremely successful text with numerous editions. Imhof’s chapter documents the publication of this work from the first edition to the middle of the seventeenth century. He discusses the evolution of its illustration and investigates the sale of a selection of editions. Renaud Milazzo looks at the issue of the international emblem book trade at the beginning of the seventeenth century through the prism of the Plantin company’s archives.

The second part is dedicated to the actors of the Counter-Reformation and their networks (both within and beyond the Low Countries) through the study of some relevant publishing enterprises. Four chapters focus on authors who, through their writings, participated in the struggle led by the Habsburgs against all forms of heresy. Alexander Soetaert examines how the Catholic Party appropriated *La déclaration et réfutation des fausses suppositions*, written by Matthieu de Launoy and Henri Pennetier (both former Huguenot ministers who had converted to Catholicism). First published in Paris in 1577, it was reissued four times in the Low Countries. This editorial history enables him to reassess the role played by the Walloon provinces in the exchange of news and books between France and the Low Countries. Exploring the nature of a network of scientists by examining the relationship between the Jesuit astronomer-mathematician Christoph Clavius, from Rome, and the young Jesuit Odo van Maelcote, from Liège, Ruth S. Noyes Noyes studies Catholic Reformation confessionalised science and the material culture of the converting [im]prints in the Low Countries *ca* 1600. Paul Arblaster examines two aspects of the Habsburg response to the Bohemian crisis of 1618-1620 in Antwerp: the licensing of the city’s first newspaper and the establishment of a confraternity to support the maintenance of the legitimate authority of the Catholic princes. He studies how and why rhetoric and imagery of crusades were deployed, and argues that its use was limited by concerns about the institutional and fiscal implications that ‘crusading’ still bore within the Habsburg monarchy more broadly. Johan Verberckmoes’s contribution challenges the instrumental uses of humour during the rule of the Archdukes in the first decades of the seventeenth century. He analyses the rediscovery of *hilaritas* in the production of contemporary biographies and news on the Archdukes, as well as contemporary advice on laughter in books and prints.

It is well known that images were used as didactic vehicle for spreading Lutheran theses. From the end of the fifteenth century, images were employed to criticise the perceived excesses and moral abuses of the Roman Church and the use of sacred imagery, often in a grotesque and satirical way that met with great success among all levels of society.[[5]](#footnote-5) To appeal to the souls and show evidence of dogmas through the pedagogical power of images, Catholic reaction to the Reformers’ attacks became a theological legitimisation of the sacred image, emphasising the necessary discernment between image and idol, and reaching a wide audience thanks to an ambition publication strategy.[[6]](#footnote-6) The third part of the book explores the production, use and impact of illustrated books and broadsheets in the Catholic campaign against the Protestant reformers. Images enabled Catholic authors to challenge their opponents. Jerome Nadal’s *Evangelicae historiae imagines* (Antwerp, 1593), or Jan David’s *Veridicus christianus* (Antwerp, 1601) were the best-known and most influential illustrated books of catechetical and polemical literature.[[7]](#footnote-7) However, the scope of their content is still far from fully understood, as Valentine Langlais demonstrates in her essay. She focuses on the Nadal’s visual strategy to explain the scriptural and ritual roots of the sacrament of the Eucharist. Prints were also a very effective way of magnifying the promotion and political support of the Catholic conquest, namely during public events such as thesis defences currently the subject of much new research in France.[[8]](#footnote-8) Gwendoline de Mûelenaere suggests that printed thesis dedicated to Archduke Leopold-William, governor of the Spanish Low Countries from 1647 to 1656, used allegorical expressions of Christian virtues to affirm and frame his princely authority and Roman Catholic aspirations. Two other contributions explore particular visual and verbal elements in the paratext. These have a commercial and aesthetic value, arousing the interest of the reader through their enigmatic word-image amalgam and in particular in the choices of decorated title-pages or frontispieces and the publishers’ devices. The analysis of a series of frontispieces produced in Antwerp at the turn of the seventeenth century allows Annelyse Lemmens to show how this ornamental element could guide the reader and both change the perception of the book as a material object and emphasise its significance. Building on recent studies on the publisher’s device as a complex medium sharing strong links with emblematic expression,[[9]](#footnote-9) Rosa De Marco focuses on devices (end sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries) from the Southern Low Countries, a territory where device indexing projects are still lacking.

The contributions collected in this book allow us to rethink the state of Catholic book culture, the industry and its actors in the early modern Low Countries within an interdisciplinary framework. They provide a new understanding of book production under the Archdukes by focusing on the social aspects of book world, on the nature of the trade and the international dissemination of books and prints, as well as on the role played by the Walloon provinces. It reassesses the role of Antwerp in relation to other typographical centres and improves our understanding of the visual culture of the book. It also challenges our knowledge of the relationship of books and prints with the Jesuits and other religious orders. As a whole, these essays highlight the efficacious manner in which the handpress book industry was able to support the Catholic strategy in the Spanish Low Countries and underline the mutually beneficial relationship between proponents of the Counter-Reformation and the typographic world. As such, they represent an important contribution to our understanding of sociocultural and socioeconomic realities of the Catholic Low Countries.

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1. Among the rich and plentiful bibliography on the subject, see Mark Ulin Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda and Luther* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Ilja M. Veldman, *Images for the Eye and Soul. Function and Meaning in Netherlandish Prints (1450-1650)* (Leiden: Primavera Pers, 2006); Andrew Pettegree, *Brand Luther 1517. Printing, and the Making of the Reformation* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Leon Voet, *The Golden Compasses: A History and Evaluation of the Printing and Publishing Activities of the ‘Officina Plantiniana’ at Antwerp* (2 vols., Amsterdam-London-New York: Vangendt, 1969-1972); Stijn Van Rossem, *Het Gevecht met de Boeken. De uitgeversstrategieën van de familie Verdussen* (Antwerp, unpublished PhD, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Frederico Pérez Castro, Leon Voet, *La Biblia Políglota de Amberes* (Madrid: Fundación universitaria española, 1973); John W. O’Malley, *Art, Controversy, and the Jesuits: The* *‘Imago Primi Saeculi’* *(1640)* (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. NB; USTC; Andrew Pettegree, ‘Printing in the Low Countries in the Early Sixteenth Century’, in *The Book Triumphant. Print in Transition in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, eds. Graham Kemp, Malcolm Walsby (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 3-25; Chiara Ruzzier, Xavier Hermand, Ezio Ornato, *Les stratégies éditoriales à l’époque de l’incunable: le cas des anciens Pays-Bas* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012); Renaud Adam, *Vivre et imprimer dans les Pays-Bas méridionaux (des origines à la Réforme)* (2 vols.; Turnhout: Brepols, 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Veldman, *Images for the Eye and Soul*, *passim*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ralph Dekoninck, ‘*Ad Imaginem’. Statuts, fonctions et usages de l'image dans la littérature spirituelle jésuite du XVIIe siècle* (Genève: Droz, 2005); Walter S. Melion, *The Meditative Art: Studies in the Northern Devotional Print, 1550–1625* (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ralph Dekoninck, Agnès Guiderdoni-Bruslé, M. van Vaeck (eds.). *Emblemata Sacra. Rhétorique et herméneutique du discours sacré dans la littérature en images* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007); Walter S. Melion, *Annotations and Meditations on the Liturgical Gospels* (3 vols., Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2003-2014); Imhof 2014, Melion 2003-2014, Dekoninck, Guiderdoni, Vaeck 2007); Dirk Imhof, *Jan Moretus and the Continuation of the Plantin Press: A Bibliography of the Works Published and Printed by Jan Moretus I in Antwerp (1589-1610)*, (2 vols., Leiden: Brill, Hes & De Graaf., 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Véronique Meyer, *L'illustration des thèses à Paris dans la seconde moitié du XVIIe siècle: peintres, graveurs, éditeurs* (Paris: Commission des travaux historiques, 2002); Id., , *Pour la plus grande gloire du roi. Louis XIV en thèses* (Rennes: PUR, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Michaela Scheibe, Anja Wolkenhauer (eds.), *Signa Vides. Researching and Recording Printers' Devices* (London: Consortium of European Research Libraries, 2015); Bernhard F. Scholz, Anja Wolkenhauer (eds.), *Typographorum Emblemata The Printer’s Mark in the Context of Early Modern Culture* (Berlin: De Gruyter Saur, 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)