

**Video on impact on Reformation**  
**“Reformation500 The Printing Press”**  
By Concordia Seminary



# SPREADING THE WORD

How Johan Gutenberg's Printing Press Spread Ideas to the Masses

By Steven Wishnia



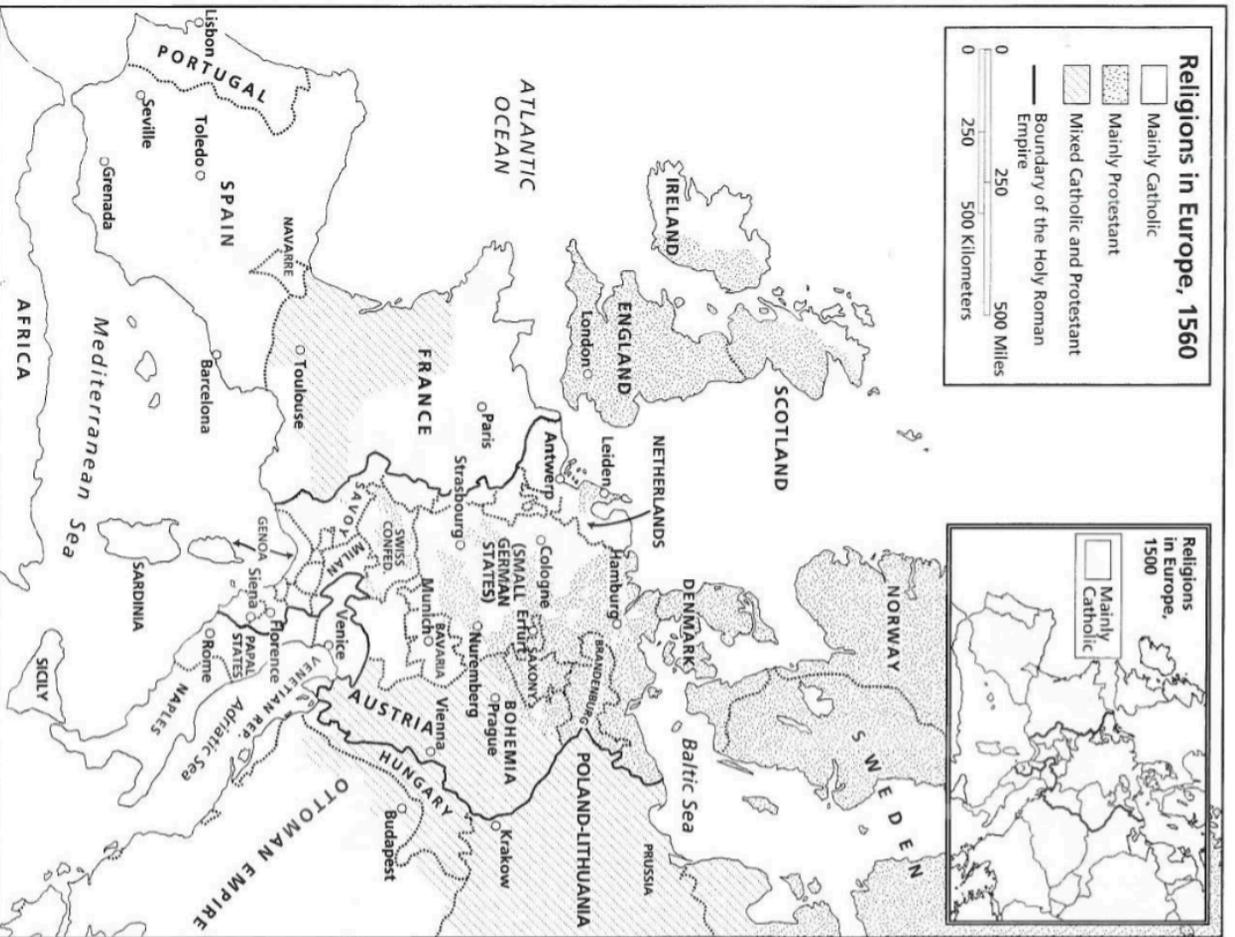
## Spreading the Word

By 1500, printing shops were in every major city in Europe. They had produced more than 8 million copies of books. Most of the books they put out were Bibles and religious texts, but they also published romance novels, collections of art by the German printmaker Albrecht Dürer, and classics by the Roman poet Ovid. Although many people couldn't read, books spread knowledge to bakers and merchants as well as to lawyers and knights, writes historian Elizabeth L. Eisenstein. "Gifted students no longer needed to sit at the feet of a given master in order to learn a language or academic skill. Instead, they could

achieve mastery on their own, even by sneaking books past their tutors." Europe's rulers were quick to recognize the printed word's power to share subversive (troublesome) ideas. In 1501, Pope Alexander VI threatened to excommunicate anyone who printed anything without clearing it with authorities of the Catholic Church. He was right to feel threatened. Books published by Martin Luther and John Calvin in the 1520s and 1530s spread the ideas of the Protestant Reformation. In 1543, Nicolaus Copernicus, a Polish astronomer, published *On the Revolutions of Heavenly Spheres*. It explained his theory that Earth revolves around the sun. That challenged the idea that the sun revolves around Earth, which had become part of Church teachings. In 1620, British philosopher Francis Bacon wrote that printing, gunpowder, and the compass were the three inventions that "have changed the appearance and state of the whole world."

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/magazines/junior/pdfs/JUNIOR-033009-REPRO-01.pdf>

Map A



Maps B

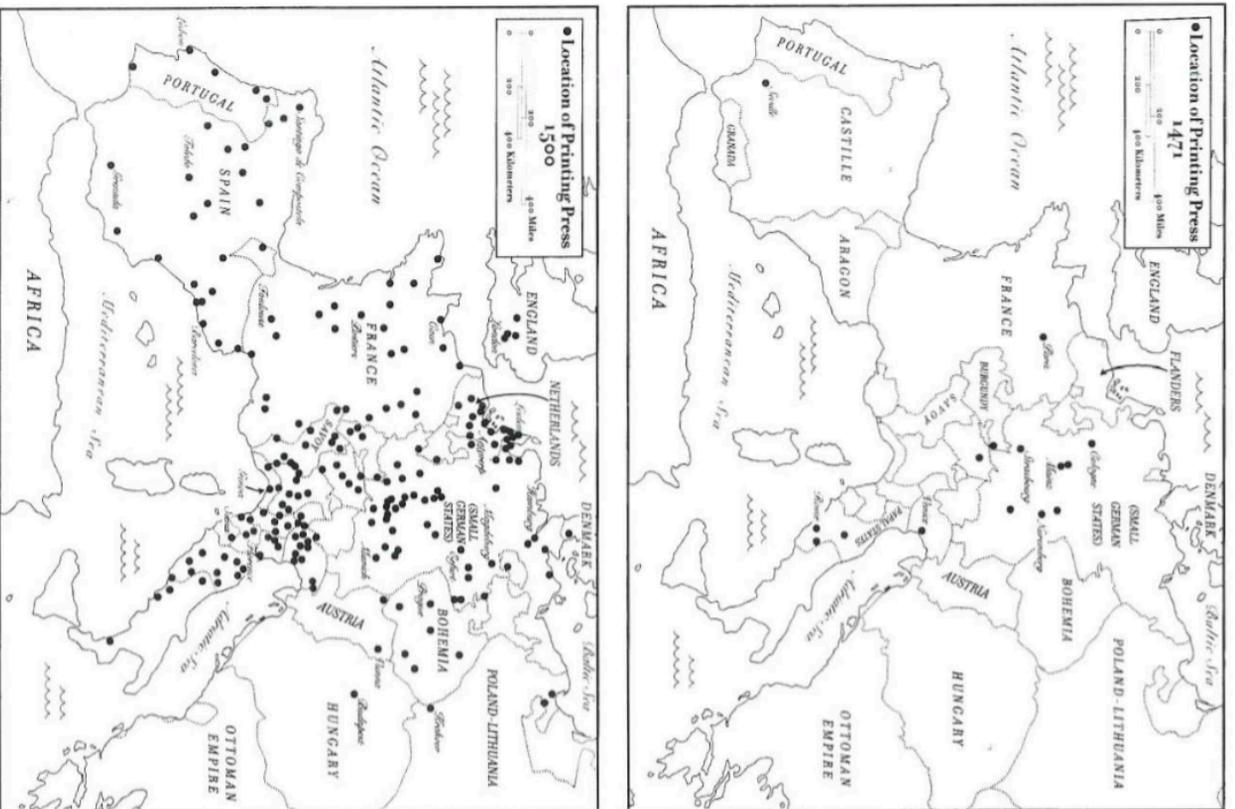


Exhibit 3

# Six Hundred Years Since The Birth of Johannes Gutenberg, Inventor of the Printing Press

By Daniel Woreck and Parwini Zora  
3 January 2001

During the period of the late Middle Ages the Roman Catholic Church was the biggest single landowner in Europe. In alliance with the feudal lords, the church represented the most powerful roadblock to change. Its religious doctrine influenced everybody and every school was dominated by the clergy. Students came mostly from the feudal aristocracy and many studied to become members of the priesthood. Much of the power of the Church was based on its ability to enforce the use of Latin as the language of worship.

*"The whole world admits unhesitatingly; and there can be no doubt about this, that Gutenberg's invention is the incomparably greatest event in the history of the world"*  
-Mark Twain

The invention of movable type press, which made possible the mass printing of the Bible, shook the foundations of the Church. For the first time masses of people were stimulated by printed text and became aware that Jesus Christ was not wealthy, but rather a simple man. New interpretations of the Bible served, above all, the interests of the new merchant class. Old boundaries and divisions—differences of caste and race that divided the masses and cemented the rule of powerful regional kings in the old



feudal system—hindered the emerging bourgeoisie. New interpretations of the Bible became an important instrument for breaking the monopoly of the Church and monarchy and enabling the merchants to realize their goal of a powerful nation-state as opposed to dozens of regional fiefdoms.

The shift from a religious focus and the worship of god to other, more earthly horizons created a new demand for printed matter. The rise of the university and libraries available to scholars filled the growing demand for books, including those of a secular nature. An increasingly literate public was able to confront the emerging fields of science as a whole. The rise of science finally sounded the death bell for the supremacy of the Church.

*"Before printing was discovered, a century was equal to a thousand years."*

-Henry David Thoreau

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## Nate Silver

Writer, ESPN Editor-In-Chief,  
ABC News Special Correspondent

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Bio:

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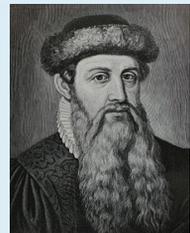
12

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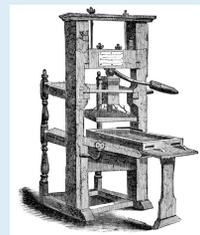
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J. Gutenberg



P. Press



"Basically, books were a luxury item before the printing press. ... They cost in the equivalent in today's dollars of about \$25,000 to produce a manuscript. So unless you were a king or a bishop or something, you probably had never really read a book. And then, all of a sudden, the printing press reduced the cost of publishing a book by about 500 times, so everyone who was literate at least could read. But what happened is that people used those books as a way to [preach] and to spread [controversial] ideas, some of which are popular now but at the time caused a lot of conflict. The Protestant Reformation had a lot to do with the printing press, where Martin Luther's theses were reproduced about 250,000 times, and so you had widespread [spreading] of ideas that hadn't circulated in the mainstream before. And, look, when something is on the page or the Internet, people tend to believe it a lot more, and so you had disagreements that wound up playing into greater [role in dividing people] and even warfare."

[more](#)

**Video**

**“Greatest Invention – The Printing Press”**

By Bill Nye, the Science Guy



## The Printing Press and the Creation of Books

The earliest books were written on scrolls. From the Second Century A.D. to the present time, however, most books have been produced in the familiar codex format—in other words, bound at one edge. During the Middle Ages, manuscript books were produced by monks who worked with pen and ink in a copying room known as a scriptorium. Even a small book could take months to complete, and a book the size of the Bible could take several years. . .

Source: [www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/permanent/gutenberg/2a.html](http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/permanent/gutenberg/2a.html)



Source: *Top visual:* Advertisement for J. Badius' firm in William of Ockham, *Dialogus*, (Lyons: J. Trechsel, c. 1494)  
*Bottom visual:* 16th century French manuscript, *Un atelier typographique*, Bibliothèque Nationale.

# PRINTING PRESS AND LITERACY LEVELS

Exhibit 8



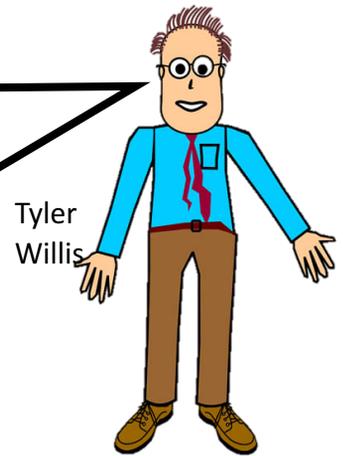
Griffen Powers

To look at the impact that the printing press has had on the world we must first look at the literacy rates before and after Johannes Gutenberg's improvements to the printing press in 1440. In the year's preceding Johannes Gutenberg's printing press, only about 30% of European adults were literate and before that literacy was almost at a standstill across the globe. 200 years after Gutenberg's improvements to the printing press, the literacy rate climbed to about 47%, and in another 200 years the literacy rate reached 62%. Due to Europe's influence, literacy rates not only soared in Europe but all across the world. Today, the average literacy rate of men and women across the world is around 84%, and is expected to rise gradually as education sweeps the globe.

Source: How The Printing Press Changed The World by Griffen Powers  
<https://rampages.us/griffinpowers/2015/04/14/how-the-printing-press-changed-the-world/>

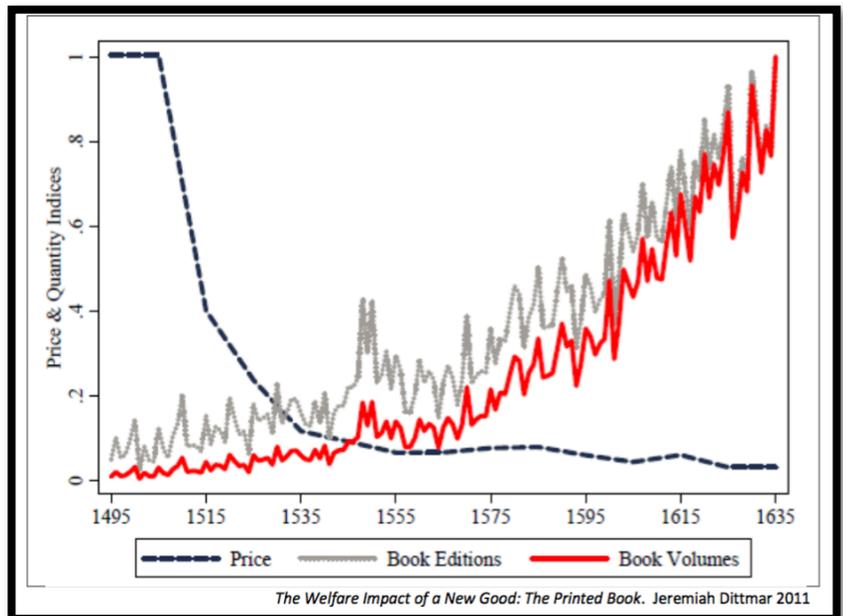
If I were to send you back in time to 1500, ...literacy rates were about 10% for men (and 1% for women). But, in the 150 years following the invention of the printing press, society reorganized around this new information technology, and unsurprisingly literacy rates increased by 2-3x... Fast forward a few hundred years, and literacy (aided by population density) continued to increase significantly. Today, in developed societies, literacy rates are near 100%.

Source: The New Literacy Rate by Tyler Willis  
<http://bigthink.com/cue-the-future/the-new-literacy-rate>



Tyler Willis

Prices and Quantities of Printed Books in England  
1495 - 1639



# TIME

## 100 Most Important People of the Past 100 Years

Title

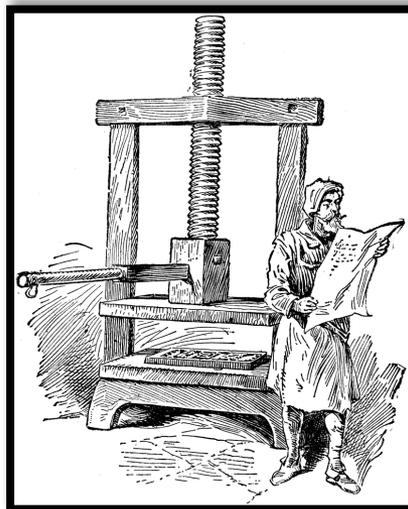




## The Life Millennium: 100 Most Important Events & People of the Past 1000 Years

By Robert Friedman

“Gutenberg’s methods spread with stunning rapidity. By 1500 an estimated half million printed books were in circulation: religious works, Greek and Roman classics, scientific texts, Columbus’ report from the New World. An acceleration of the Renaissance was only the first by-product of the Gutenberg press. Without it, the Protestant movement might have been failed, as well as the subsequent political and industrial revolutions.”



## The Printing Press and its Effects on Book Production – Revolution or Evolution

By Erik Jakobsen, University of Stavanger - May 2005



“The most important consequence of Gutenberg’s invention, was the spread of printed books in medieval and early modern Europe. Classical, religious and scientific literature was printed in the [language of the people] and spread across Europe, increasing the level of literacy by providing readable texts to a growing reading public. These printed texts were sources of information for people of all political, social and economic strata [groups].

More and more, print became associated with the freedom of speech, religion, learning and the fight against old superstitions...

One consequence of the printing press is that it allowed for the quick reproduction and widespread [distribution] of religious and classical texts and ideas across Europe. By making book-production increasingly cheaper, the printed word spread far and wide to [regular people] across Europe, creating a larger reading public...

Would the literature of the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Scientific Revolution have been spread as far and wide without the duplicative powers of print? Probably not. Similarly, would these movements have been as significant without their large audience? No.”

Luis de Santangel, the finance minister of King Ferdinand II,

Concerning the Islands Recently Discovered in the Indian Sea

Because my undertakings have attained success, I know that it will be pleasing to you... On the thirty-third day after I departed from Spain, I came to the Indian sea, where I found many islands... all which I took possession for our most fortunate king... and... no one objected.

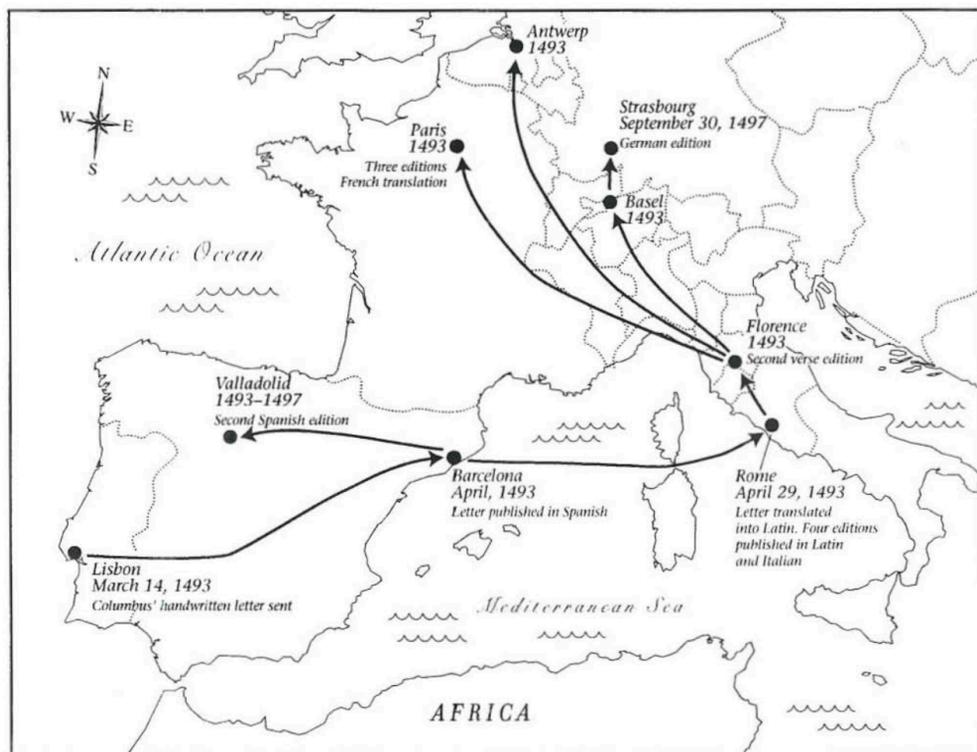
*Christopher Columbus*

Christopher Columbus, Admiral of the Ocean Fleet.

Source: Christopher Columbus' Letter, *Concerning the Islands Recently Discovered in the Indian Sea*, 1493. <https://www.commonlit.org/texts/letter-to-the-treasurer-of-spain>

Source: Map created from various sources.

### Dissemination of Columbus' Letter



**Expanding Knowledge  
of the Globe**

(3 Printed World Maps)

**Source:**  
Henricus Martellus'  
World Map, 1489,  
courtesy British  
Library.



**Source:**  
Martin  
Waldseemuller's  
World Map, 1507,  
Prints and  
Photographs,  
Library of  
Congress, G3200  
ct000725C.



**Source:**  
Abraham Ortelius'  
1570 World Map,  
in *Theatrum  
Orbis Terrarum*  
Prints and  
Photographs,  
Library of  
Congress, G7270  
mf00002.

