

Publishing in Geneva: Communication Meets Religion

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The sixteenth century was a time of great change. One reason for the change was the advent of publishing books and other reading materials. This study has examined the city of Geneva to determine why it had success as a publishing center. The political/economic situation in Europe, materials available for publication, and a new theory of education all added to the publishing climate. This was the time of the Reformation and Geneva was a Reformation city. Monter (1967) points out that Geneva's economy was limited and the city was small in area. Because it was heavily fortified and large in population, every available space was used. It could not be the typical sixteenth century manufacturing city because of the limited space. Most of the goods produced in the city were consumed there.

There was a banking tradition, which created a dependence on commerce. Its location on major trading routes and between major commercial centers, plus its position as being the largest city within four days of travel, helped to establish itself as a commercial center. Growing pressures from increasing populations and an immigration that brought in artisans who had skills and money to invest would change Geneva. With change came recognition of the need for a general educational program. Immigrants needed to be educated so that they could become useful members of Genevan society. New industries and occupations caused by a growing economy demanded new training. Education was a recognized need.

As refugees moved to Geneva from France and Italy, they brought their skills. Many of the French immigrants were in the business of publishing. It was logical that they would continue to wish to publish books and pamphlets because they needed a livelihood. After 1536 they would be able to publish and distribute one of the most prolific authors of his day in John Calvin. According to Monter (1967), publishing was Geneva's first export business. It was to become religious as well as economic. The pressures of an economic change, as well as, a population change would put pressures on a new school system. The Genevans had to develop a curriculum that would accommodate those changes that it would see in the sixteenth century.

Political and religious conflicts also provided some secondary problems for education. Like any other physical disaster, wars destroyed property and displaced people. Those who were on the losing side, as well as those whose livelihood was destroyed, had to move. Geneva's unique geography made it a city of refuge, because it was situated on the route between Eastern France and Spain.

There were two causes for a large refugee population. Francis of France and Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor and king of Spain, were continually at war. Their refugees came to Geneva.

As France , Spain , and Italy , (all Roman Catholic countries) persecuted Protestants and Geneva was a protestant city, their refugees came to Geneva . Innes (1983) pointed to some of the social concerns associated with such refugees. The concerns included employment, religious training, and becoming citizens of Geneva

Geneva had the unique distinction of being an immigrant city. The majority of immigrants had skills and often just needed equipment to reestablish themselves in a productive occupation. There were also people that had few opportunities for work, such as priests who had become Protestant. These men needed to be trained so that they could support themselves. Olson (1989) also points out that there were also young people who had to leave their communities because they had converted from Roman Catholicism to the Protestant faith and no longer could live in their family home. These were joined by orphans and youth who had set out with high expectations but found making a living a difficult task. These people often would be given training via an apprentice system. Genevan society had the concern of socializing, educating, and providing a future occupation for all the young people in the city. The Bourse provided funding and the publishing industry provided the training and employment.

The publication and disbursement of religious material was also supported by the Bourse. The more material available the more people would read. Although not everyone was literate, there were people in each community who were and they would read. Scribner (2001) discusses how even the illiterate could become more informed by the availability of the written word. He states that “The experience of ‘the word’ was mediated in the church and the household: song-books, prayer books, and catechisms were far more common than the Bible; and the picture of a father reading from an edifying text to his household was a more accurate picture than the individual deep in solitary reading” (p. 367).

Books and scriptures were seen as evangelical tools in spreading the Reformation into Roman Catholic countries such as France . Again, the Bourse provided the funds needed to publish the written material and then to provide for sending messengers to transport the material or to send information into France . As Moeller (1979) argues, “No printing, no Reformation” (p. 30). Authors such as Chrisman (1967) and Ozment (1982), point to the availability of pamphlets and new books that spread evangelical ideals throughout Germany and Switzerland . Greengrass (1997) presents background information that demonstrates the growth of the printing industry in Reformation times. Yet, there was another side to the story. The Roman church maintained a great deal of control, not just in printing and distributing the new material, but even in reading the material that was available (Scribner, 2001). The freedom to distribute and make use of the new protestant material made Geneva a city where publishing would become an important industry.

As already mentioned, the fact that Calvin made his home in Geneva and that he was not only a prolific writer but a great influence throughout Europe would affect the cities publication industry. Humanistic educational programs, such as that of Halle , challenged medieval education. The men who attended these humanistic schools often had a pietistic background and wanted to add action to scholarship. Cardier (1960) shows that many of those humanistic teachers had much influence in Paris where Calvin received his formal training. This humanistic influence had had an effect long before Calvin came to the city and that movement would affect Calvin’s works on education that, in turn, would pass on some of this new ideology.

The Reformation began in Geneva as a political and economic change rather than a religious reformation. When Calvin arrived, he found that there had not been much change in the church since Geneva had declared its independence and reformation. Calvin eschewed that idea on his deathbed. He proclaimed, in his farewell, written by the minister Pinant (April 28, 1564), “When I first came to this church, I found almost nothing in it. There was preaching and that was all” (*Letters*, p. 257). Calvin claimed that he influenced the spiritual reformation but the political and economic change had already taken place before he arrived. Calvin was recognized as a leader in theology in his own time. Therefore, it made sense that his written material would be published. The Bourse supported an important method for recording Calvin’s thought. Every time that Calvin preached there was someone there to record what he said. These copyists received a salary from the Bourse.

In fact, Dennis Raguener was fully supported in this occupation as copyist (Olson, 1989, p. 215). The fact that he was fully supported showed both that Calvin was recognized as a leading theologian and that it was important to put his words into print. Without the full time diligence of Raguener, much of Calvin's work would not have been copied or published.

Calvin had some interesting experiences with publication of his materials. It was in Bourges that Calvin published his first book, *Commentaries on the Books of Seneca, De Clementia*, (On Mercy) at his own expense. This was a positive experience that showed his love for study and writing. However, the publishing cost a lot and he did not have a lot to spend. He writes in April 1532 that the printings "have drawn from me more money than you can well suppose" (*Letters*, p. 32)). Parker (1975) argues that Calvin published the Commentary on Seneca's work to make a name for himself in the academic world where he felt he would be working.

Cardier (1960) describes Calvin's education. At the age of eighteen he was supported with wages of a parish priest, even though he was never ordained as a priest. Again, this was a common practice that served the maturing student whose expenses had grown with his age. Calvin surrendered these perferments after his conversion to the Protestant belief in 1534. From that time until he was convinced to stay in Geneva, he earned his living as a lecturer and writer. Wallace (1998) and Naphy (1994) relate some of the background to education in Geneva. Even though schools may have existed, they did not function in the way that Calvin would have liked them to function. Calvin wished to see some of the reforms that the new technology of the sixteenth century could provide.

The greatest technological advance was the use of the printing press. Students needed to have a text from which they could learn. Calvin provided the elementary student with such a text when he prepared a catechism. This text would serve more than one function. Not only would the students have written material that they could read and study but also a systematic presentation of the basic doctrines of the Christian faith presented in a form that was understandable to a child. With this in mind it is interesting that Calvin (1545) would write his catechism in Latin. However, he had another problem in mind, which was uniting the church. If a catechism and curriculum of a school could be a uniting force, then a Latin catechism would show his desire for uniting the church.

In Geneva, education was in French, the language of the people. Although Calvin published his 1545 Catechism in Latin, he explains why in his "dedication." Nationality would determine their spoken language, but if all children knew Latin and read his Latin catechism, the affect would be church unity. William Wright (2006) raised an interesting possibility that may have also affected Calvin's choice of language. He stated that Bucer promoted a universal catechism instruction. It may be that his influence on Calvin while the latter was in Strasburg was a contributing factor. At the same time Calvin was to follow Strasburg's example to have schools taught in the vernacular.

There is a mutual bond between education and the publication industry, which developed in the sixteenth century. Calvin saw the importance of using written material in learning. This innovation to learning may have come about because of the new development of the printing press. No matter how logical it may appear to be, before Calvin's time, pedagogy consisted of the teacher reading from a manuscript and the students copying down the material. The innovation, which provided students with written material, allowed more to be learned in a shorter time.

It also followed the humanist belief that the student was to go beyond what the teacher stated and study for themselves. Even prior to Calvin's time, Battista Guarino (2002), a humanist teacher, suggested that a textbook was most important because the students could write their reactions in the book and that writing would be of great benefit. "*Hoc exercitacionis genus mirifice acuit ingenium, linguam exploit, scribendi promittitudinem gignit, perfectam rerum noticiam inducit, memoriam confirmat, postremo studiosis quasi quondam expositionum cellam promptuariam et memoriae subsidium praesat*" (p.295). The Catechism was to be a basic text for all children and a tool by which the young person could learn with understanding.

Another educational innovation that was stressed by Calvin was that teachers needed special training. He based his idea of trained teachers upon Jesus' call of the disciples. Teachers had a special job to do; therefore, they needed a special time of learning how to be teachers. "Those who are appointed to a public role must realize that more is required of them than of the ordinary individual. Thus, Christ makes no change in the everyday lives of others, but takes these four disciples [Simon, Andrew, James, and John] away from the craft they had lived on till this time, in order to use their effort for a higher calling" (*Commentary on Luke 5:10*, p. 157). Calvin argued that Christ chose unschooled and rough men as an example of what his teaching could do, but he also chose a well educated man like Paul. The emphasis was that teachers needed to be trained. Even beyond that basic training, he insists that teachers must continue to study and learn – the good teacher must make "continuous" progress (*Commentary on Isaiah IV* (1947), p. 55). The *Register* (1541) listed negligence in studying as a vice that needed to be rebuked (p. 39).

Life-long learning was of importance for anyone who was to hold the office of teacher. In his *Commentary on I Peter*, Calvin explains that the prophets had this quality of inquiring. They relied, not just on their own understanding, but made use of revelation. Yet, at the same time, he is careful to point out that there was a sobriety to their searching. "Thus they have taught us by their example a sobriety in learning for they did not go beyond what the Spirit taught them" (p. 239). There are certain things that learners could try to discover that are a waste of time. "Moreover, to seek particular time in prophecies seems to me unprofitable" (*Commentary on I Peter 1:10*, p. 239). Trying to discover the future was not seen as a good use of time; however, discovering the truth was. The teacher must search out truth wherever it was.

Calvin saw that philosophy, although secular, had truth. Partee (1977) claimed his use of philosophy was historical rather than systematic. Calvin looked to philosophy for illustration of truth rather than a guide to it (p. 146). In his *Commentary on Titus*, he says, "[I]t is superstitious to refuse to make use of secular authors. For since all truth is in God, if any ungodly man has said anything true, we should not reject it, for it also has come from, God." On the other hand, in his *Sermons sur le livre de Michée* (1964) he talks about man's propensity to be in control and to learn evil. Thus he warns against the corruption that can be learned from the wrong materials. "*Il est vray, que les homes, tous tant qu'ilz sont, de leur nature sont bien enclins et adornez à mal; il ne faut point que nous allions à l'eschole pour apprendre à mal faire, ung chacun sera son maistre et son docteur*" (p. 7 line 25). His theory of learning is that teachers should be life-long learners and that they should seek out the truth, wherever it might be.

They were not to go beyond the truth in too much speculative theory nor were they to learn for the wrong reasons such as self-aggrandizement or evil. Learning was to give honor to God and the study of His scriptures should be done with diligence. Scholastic teachers believed that subject matter disciplined the mind of the student. An example is the emphasis on classical grammar. Latin was a discipline and demanded discipline to learn it, because it was not the spoken language of the common people. Latin was the language of scholarship and Calvin wished his published works to be considered scholarly. Therefore, he was even encouraged to publish his catechism in Latin. It was to be a corrective on the practices of the Roman Catholic Church that had given up its practice. By insisting that reading materials be available for study Calvin influenced education and encouraged the publication of educational materials.

The publishing industry in Geneva developed at an opportune time because of the new desire to read. Geneva's geography as well as its political and religious situation made the industry a natural development. Calvin was a writer who had the background and ideas that made his works popular. He also established an educational theory that demanded published material. Therefore, Geneva became a center of publishing in the sixteenth century.

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