#6 Gutenberg’s Printing Press and First Printed Bible (1455)
Religion Newswriters Assoc. of America
What do you think were the top 10 religion stories of the second Millennium?
PROTESTANT REFORMATION & INVENTION OF PRINTING PRESS
"What the world is today, good or bad, it owes to Gutenberg. Everything can be traced to this source but we are bound to bring him homage."

Mark Twain
Gutenberg: Man of the Second Millennium
Asteroid 777 named after Gutenberg
“The invention of printing is the greatest event in history. It is the mother of revolution.”
Are we going through another Gutenberg moment? What is it?
The Evolution of Communication

First Written Word

Movable Type

Mass Publication

Email

Twitter

140 Characters. What more is there to say?
I. What conditions existed leading up to Gutenberg’s Invention?

Differences in “books” then and what we have today…
Very few books were in circulation in small monastery libraries.
Monastery libraries only 50-100 books
Papal library in Avignon in 1369 listed only 2,100 books. Yet it was likely the largest library at the time.
US Library of Congress in Washington has 35 million books, adding 10,000 new items each day.
In Gutenberg’s day many important texts only had 3-4 copies available in the whole continent of Europe.
2. Books had to be copied by hand, letter by letter. Could take 2 years. Purchase at cost of 3 year’s salary.
3. Noticeable amount of errors crept into hand-copied books. (So no two copies of books were likely to be exactly the same.)
4. Another difference is widespread illiteracy with many books in Latin rather than in the language of the common man.
II. HOW DID GUTENBERG ENTER THE PICTURE OF HISTORY?
Mainz, Germany (Holy Roman Empire)

Gutenberg born here between 1395 and 1400
Mainz, Germany

Walled city along banks of River Main. Population shrunk to c.6,000 because of a plague. Had c.40 churches inside walls.
Johann Gutenberg

* His father a merchant, family upper-class
* Baptized into Roman Catholic church as infant
* Johannas later admitted to goldsmith’s guild
Gutenberg sailed down Rhine River from Mainz to Strasburg, France. Started to experiment with inks and type. But needed to make a living so came up with idea to make & sell small frame mirrors. Why?
Pilgrims to Rome to see relics.

Held small mirrors to relics to capture image for transfer power.

Business ended when plague swept Europe & stopped pilgrimages.
He turned his attention to the idea of developing a printing machine. Used background as goldsmith & blacksmith.
He started with printing using wooden blocks. What was the problem with this method?
His invention was movable type from an alloy of several metals. Use repeatedly for different books.

- Invent metal type
- Way to hold in place
- Ink that would stick to type
Modeled his machine on Winepress with screw-drive mechanism. Combining several inventions
UPPER CASE vs. LOWER CASE LETTERS
Bi Sheng in China 400 yr. earlier invented movable type — small wooden blocks can’t be used for large print runs. Required new blocks continually made.
What’s unique about Gutenberg?
“Though he had not invented the idea of moveable type, if Gutenberg is to be credited with anything it must be that he made it work—that he systematically tackled each aspect of a finicky, delicate process until he had perfected it…. Gutenberg was not the father of printing so much as its midwife.”

[Keith Houston, The Book]
Scale model in Museum approximating what Gutenberg’s Press looked like.
HOW DID GUTENBERG AFFORD TO DEVELOP THIS MACHINE?

He borrowed 800 Rheingulder at 6% interest from Johann Fust.
1452 borrowed another 800 to print Bible.
Fust demands repayment. But he has no money....
Gutenberg died 3 years later, never to see the wide-ranging impact his invention had on the world and the church!

(February 3, 1468 —c.68 yrs)
WHY DID GUTENBERG FOCUS ON DEVELOPING A PRINTING PRESS?

1. Perhaps because he realized there would be a growing market for books (universities, churches)

2. Because of a spiritual motivation.: “Yes it is a press, certainly, but a press from which shall flow in inexhaustible streams the most abundant and most marvelous liquor that has ever flowed to relieve the thirst of men. Through it, God will spread His word, a spring of pure truth shall flow from it; like a new star it shall scatter the darkness of ignorance, and cause a light heretofore unknown to shine among men.”
3. Perhaps because he thought it would bring unity to the church. (cf. Gansky: “The irony in this was that Gutenberg saw his printing press as a tool to bring about unity in the church. Instead it became the wedge that fragmented the Roman Church.”)
Had Gutenberg foreseen that his printing press with moveable type would lead to the breakup of the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church, he surely would have used his old wine press to make wine and not books.”

REALLY ???
WHAT DID HE PRINT?

* He didn’t start with Bible (would be massive: more than 3 million characters in 1,282 pages)
* Early projects were papal letter, certificates of indulgence, grammar for ecclesiastical Latin.
The Gutenberg Bible

Biblia Sacra Vulgata

Jerome’s Latin version
42 line Bible, Mainz Bible, Gutenberg’s Bible.
1456
Version from 1456 is the most valuable book in world

Only 48-49 copies exist.

Originally printed 180 copies. 17 x 24.5 in.

Cost equivalent to 3 yrs. of clerk’s wages
“Religious truth is imprisoned in a small number of manuscript books which confine instead of spread the public treasure.”

(GUTENBERG)
III. WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF GUTENBERG’S INVENTION?
“The printing press shattered the cohesion of a world religious community, destroyed the intimacy and poetry of the oral tradition, diminished regional loyalties, and created a cruelly impersonal industrial system.” (p. 135)

Most would disagree!!
1] A growing number of Bibles put into the hands of the average person

From Latin to vernacular languages

Don’t need to wait to hear Bible in cathedral. Can have copy in own home.
BIBLE SHAPED LANGUAGES

*Luther’s German Bible shaped German language
*John Calvin’s Bible shaped French language
*King James Version shaped framework for English language
RESULTS OF GUTENBERG:

2] THE SPREAD OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION
RESULTS OF GUTENBERG:

3. AN EXPLOSION IN THE PRINTING OF BOOKS

8 million books published in first 50 years. More than total handwritten copies from 8 - 15th centuries.

Within 15 years printing press in every country of Europe.
“More books were made in the first half century after Gutenberg's Bible than in the preceding thousands years put together, and book production only accelerated from there: 12.6 million incunabula [Latin for cradle] were printed between 1454 and 1500. . . and book production subsequently more than tripled every hundred years. In the second half of the 18th century, western Europe alone had printed more than 600 million books.” (p.128)
Not everyone was happy with this explosion of books.
RESULTS OF GUTENBERG:

4] THE DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOLARSHIP, RESEARCH, AND WORLD-WIDE COMMUNICATION

Printing press meant a new knowledge generating and preserving engine that had a shaping influence on the church & culture.
RESULTS OF GUTENBERG:

5. Development of supporting structures...
A World without books ??
Thanks for authors, publishers, editors, printers, booksellers, etc. Instruments in the hands of God in the building of his kingdom.
Next time: THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION