

THE PRINTING PRESS AND THE BIBLE

Johannes Gensfleisch, better known under the name of Gutenberg, was born around 1397 in Mainz (Germany). In 1444, we come across him in Strasbourg, where he was researching into movable type printing. He also had a press built of wood which, however, was not to his entire satisfaction.

Returning to Mainz in 1448, Gutenberg proceeded to the final adjustments to his press. At the beginning of 1450, he formed an association with Johann Fust, a rich trader, who advanced him a large amount of initial capital and, with several co-workers he started the colossal task of typesetting and printing the Bible in Latin.

Until then, the Bible had existed only in a manuscript form. The text was reproduced by copyists, remarkable for their accuracy, but with a limited output. The custom at the time was for the initial letter of each page to be adorned by an illuminator, so copying a single page often took more than a full day.



We should, nevertheless, salute the work accomplished by these men who, for over a thousand years, faithfully copied out the sacred texts. They worked on until their eyes and hands failed; then others continued their task.

Manuscript copying, then, was a very slow process, the price of a copy, exorbitant. Only wealthy people could obtain Biblical manuscripts. It should be noted that these texts were not written in everyday language, but in Latin or Greek, so the Holy Scripture was only accessible to a few privileged persons.

By 1360, packs of playing cards from France and Spain were reaching Germany. The subjects were engraved on small wooden boards, on which colour had been spread before they were pressed down on cardboard sheets. This led to the idea of reproducing Biblical scenes. The result was the appearance in 1445 of the

“Bible of the Poor” (Biblia Pauperum), which was composed of 40 pages of engravings representing various scenes, ranging from the creation of the universe to the ascension of the Lord Jesus.

This technique, called xylography, permitted a limited print run, but had two major disadvantages. On the one hand, since the pages formed a single block, one simple mistake would make the whole unusable and on the other, the roughness of the wood did not ensure excellent quality.

Then Gutenberg had the brilliant idea of making type by pouring molten metal into moulds. After a number of attempts he discovered the ideal alloy, easy to work and which resisted deformation. This alloy of lead, antimony and tin was to remain the typographical material par excellence for over 500 years. Gutenberg and his team would have to cast 48,000 characters and then file them down by hand to remove the burrs.

So Gutenberg set to work and assembled the requisite material, including a new lever-operated press. This type of press was used for four centuries. Fust lent him 1,500 ducats (the equivalent today of some 130,000 euros or 137,800 Swiss francs, 04/2020), which were used mainly for the purchase of paper and parchment or vellum (calf-skin). A new loan would cover the wages and the complete upkeep of his colleagues.

In January 1452, after two years of preparatory work, he was ready to launch his production. It took 12 hours to set a page and an hour to print 10 copies.

So Gutenberg became the first printer of the Bible. In the autumn of 1454, the so-called 42-line Latin Bible finally came off the press. Composed of two in-folio volumes with a total of 1286 pages, it had a print-run of 185 copies of which 150 were printed on paper. Thirty five Bibles were printed on velum, each one requiring 170 skins. It was the first printed book in the world. There are still 49 more or less complete volumes in existence including a superb copy on paper at the Bodmer Foundation in Cologne (Geneva).

The version used was the Vulgate (the name given in the year 405 AD by Jerome, its translator) which was to act as the reference for many translations of the Bible into the western languages.

From then on, the printing press spread rapidly across Europe. From 1550, the price of a Bible became more affordable. The Holy Scriptures were accessible to all those who wanted to obtain one.

THE BIBLE TODAY

In an ever-changing world, the Bible has not changed; its content has been faithfully handed down to us and remains unchanged. We have proof of this with the discovery in 1947 of the Dead Sea scrolls found at Khirbet Qumran near the Dead Sea. Buried in some caves for almost 19 centuries, these texts are similar to the originals that the translators used for the present versions.

“Heaven and earth shall pass away but my words shall not pass away.”
(Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 24, verse 35).

Through the Bible, God speaks to all of mankind without any distinction of race or religion.

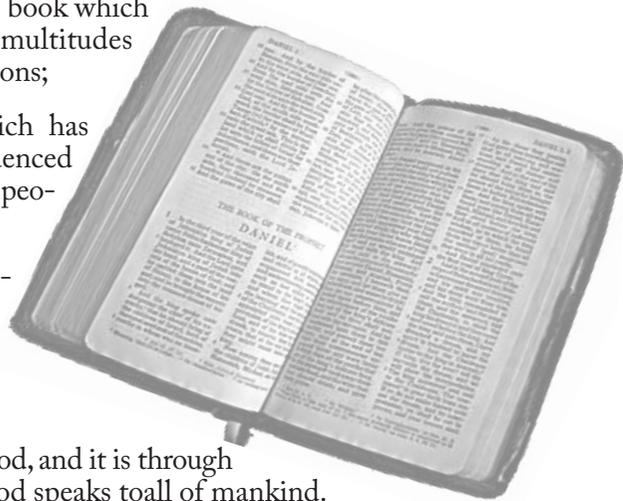
Each year millions of copies are sold or distributed. In 2017, the entire Bible was available in 670 languages. Its complete or partial translation existed in more than 3300 languages and dialects. The word of God is thus within the reach of most of the world's population..

THE BIBLE is the marvellous book which has convinced multitudes over the generations;

THE BIBLE is the book which has profoundly influenced the lives of many peoples;

THE BIBLE is the most translated, the most printed, the most widely read book;

THE BIBLE is the Word of God, and it is through the Bible that God speaks to all of mankind.



So God has placed His Word at our disposal: we are responsible for getting to know it. Let us read verses 16 to 18 of chapter 3 of the gospel according to John: *“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already because he hath not believed in the name of the only*

begotten son of God”. The Lord Jesus further says, *“He that heareth my word and believeth on him who sent me, hath everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.”* (John 5 v. 24). If this message speaks to us of judgment, it also speaks to us of love, of pardon, of salvation, of eternal life. It presents to us a person, Jesus Christ, who gave His life for the salvation of guilty mankind. This salvation depends on only one condition,

BELIEVE ON HIM.

THE BIBLE

Do not despise it	it would condemn you
But read it	it will enlighten you
Listen to it	it will guide you
Believe it	it will save you.

God has spoken to us and still speaks to us today through the Bible. We should read it too! Under divine inspiration, over more than 15 centuries, 40 authors have participated in its writing.

Its message has not grown old. It presents to us Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and was raised again, the only means of salvation to obtain peace with God and eternal life.

“THY WORD IS TRUTH”

(John 17 v. 17)

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