

**A Monastic Dilemma Posed by the Invention of Printing:
the Context of *De laude Scriptorum Manualium*
by Abbot Johann Trithemius (1462—1516)**

*By no means was the invention of printing universally looked upon by contemporary witnesses as an unqualifiably progressive step in the history of mankind; in the monastic scriptorium, for example, the printing art came into direct competition with the long-cultivated art of handcopying. A Benedictine abbot living in the age of incunabula, the Abbot Trithemius of Sponheim near Kreuznach in Germany, composed his *De laude scriptorum manualium* (1492) in support of the proposition that the handcopying of texts is in many respects superior to printing. However, the author was not hostile to the printing art in principle, viewing it on balance as a divinely-inspired aid in the facilitation of his campaign to renovate in contemporary dress the golden age of monastic erudition. Far from being a reactionary in the face of the printing revolution, Trithemius was one of printing's most vigorous Renaissance advocates.*

Of all the remarkable achievements of man coming to the support of the progressivists in the so-called "quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns" marking the early modern period, none has more dramatically underscored the advancement of modernity over antiquity than the invention of printing in the mid-fifteenth century.¹ Not all witnesses to the printing revolution, however, have been equally persuaded that it represented a genuine step forward in the evolution of human society. Among those least inclined to adopt an unqualified enthusiasm toward the novel art, we should not be surprised to find, were the custodians and taskmasters of the monastic scriptorium, the abbots and their priors, whose scribes were increasingly finding their labors obviated and seemingly made superfluous by a method of book production of far greater efficiency than handcopying and ensuring a far more widespread circulation of a given text.

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Among such abbots who stood at the crossroads in the transition from hand-inscription to printing was the highly erudite and reform-minded Benedictine monk Johann Trithemius (1462—1516), who had assumed his post at Sponheim, in the diocese of Mainz, in the year 1483 and thus at a moment when printing was still in its birth pangs.² And so convinced was Trithemius in the value of the traditional monastic mode of book-production that, at the instance of an abbot-friend, he sat down at his desk in the year 1492 and penned a treatise in commendation of the art of hand-copying. Never mind that, to assure the greatest possible circulation of this tract, Trithemius gave over the manuscript for publication to the Mainz printer Peter von Friedberg, whose printing shop, according to Trithemius' biographer Klaus Arnold, "could almost be called the Sponheim Abbey press."³ What interests us here is the fact that in this writing, under the title *In Praise of Scribes (De laude scriptorum manualium)*, Trithemius took a forthright position comparing printing unfavorably to handcopying. In this regard the cardinal chapter in the sixteen-chapter *Praise of Scribes* is the seventh, bearing the heading: "That monks should not stop copying because of the invention of printing."⁴

Questiones super octo libros physicorum Aristotelelis.
Johannes Dullart, Paris, 1506.



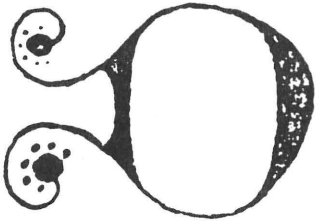
The keynote of this chapter is sounded in its opening admonition to monks:

*Brothers, nobody should say or think: "What is the sense of bothering with copying by hand when the art of printing has brought to light so many important books; a huge library can be acquired inexpensively." I tell you, the man who says this only tries to conceal his own laziness.*⁵

In other words, Trithemius takes up a stance at the outset against the argument, which he must have often heard to his great displeasure from some of his own monks who were finding themselves ill-at-ease in the cloister's scriptorium, that the art of manuscript copying had largely been made redundant and anachronistic by printing. In accusing those espousing this argument of laziness or sloth — thus, of the medieval capital vice *acedia* — Trithemius is consciously in keeping with an attitude traceable to the pristine beginnings of monasticism when the scriptorium was instituted by Cassiodorus and his monastic successors under the working assumption that the vice of sloth can as effectively be cured by labors of the mind as by labors of the body.⁶ But it is not Trithemius' sole intention here to leave his monkish readers with a *moral* admonition against succumbing to a capital vice. It is also his determination to put into the heads of his readers the definite *physical* advantages of handcopying over printing.

The principal advantages of handcopying over printing explicitly singled out by Trithemius in his seventh chapter can be reduced to four. In the first place the handcopied parchment has much greater longevity than the text printed upon paper, so that, he says, whereas "the word written on parchment will last a thousand years," by the same token "the most you can expect a book of paper to survive is two hundred years."⁷ In the second place, inasmuch as the printers are dependent on handcopyists for their texts, there are in existence many more titles of unprinted works than printed ones; given this situation, Trithemius points out, "no matter how many books will be printed, there will always be left some unprinted and worth copying." In the third place, the monastic scribe "is free and as a scribe enjoys his freedom"; that is to say, the scribe is independent in his choice of texts and other matters pertinent to his art, and in the process can produce a more accurate version of a given text on the spot without having to concern himself with constraints placed upon him by a printer. And in the fourth place handcopied texts are generally of an aesthetically superior quality as compared to their corresponding printed texts, often being adorned with beautiful illuminations and decorous lettering, and are usually more accurate besides in their spelling and syntax.⁸

Incipit liber dñi Johānis trithemij abbatis in spanbem De laude scriptorum. ad dñm Berlacū tuiciensem abbatem.



De laude scriptoz, facturi sermonem: illius inuocamus auxiliū: qui syncens scriptoribus, eterne vite claritatē pmisit in premiū. Nampe qui ad iusticiā erudiūt plurimos: fulgebūt sicut stelle in ppetuas eternitates. Quod nō solū de illis intelligendū esse qui de sua vena cūdūt noua: sed etiā de his q̄ vetera trāscribunt. in sequentibus dño largiente monstrabim⁹: Nam quānunciāq̄ vtilis sit doctoris traditio: absq̄ ministerio scriptoris ad noticiā posteroz nequaq̄s deducati. Quicqd̄ em̄ boni agimus. quicqd̄ fructuose docerimus: in obliuioni cito rapitur: nisi scriptorū studio līs cōmendetur. Scriptores ergo virtutē dant verbis: memoriā rebus: vigorem temporibus. Hos si de ecclesia tollas: vacillat fides. caritas friget. spes decidit. ius perit. cōfunditur lex. in obliuionē transit euangelū. Deniq̄ si scriptura defecerit. dispergetur populus. deuotio extinguetur. pax catholice vnitatis cōfusa turbabitur. Sed absq̄ scriptoribus non potest scriptura diu salua cōsistere: que et casu frangitur: et vetustate corrūpitur. Impressura em̄ res papu rea est: et breui tempore tota cōsumitur. Scriptoz autē membranīs cōmendans litteras: et se et ea que scribit. in tempus longinquū extendit. Unde ipse ecclesiā dicit. fidē conseruat. hereses destruit. vicia repellit. mores instruit. et dat incrementa virtutibus. Scriptoz deuotus qualē describere intendimus. deum laudat. angelos lenificat. iustos homines confortat. peccatores emendat. humiles cōmendat. bonos conseruat. superbos debellat. condemnat pertinaces. Scriptoz pietate insignis. dei prece est. quia voluntatem eius et p̄sentibus annūciat et futuris: promittens bonis vitam eternā: penitentibus veniam: negligentibus penam: contemnētib⁹ damnationem.

Beyond these four distinct advantages of handcopying over printing specifically pointed up by Trithemius in his *Praise of Scribes*, he was also well aware of a fifth advantage which arose from the peculiarly monastic context of manuscript production. For though Trithemius could scarcely deny that a given text printed upon paper could be produced more cheaply than a corresponding handcopied text inscribed upon expensive parchment or vellum, he was also made aware by experience that, inasmuch as his budget for book purchases was ordinarily restricted, it was often cheaper to borrow a text for a period and have it copied by his monks than to buy a printed book from outside the cloister. If the monks of the scriptorium could not compete with the printers in the quantities of texts issuing from their labors, this very recognition, in the light of the limited financial resources of the cloister, could be cited to underline the appeal for a more vigorous, not less vigorous, exertion of energy in the monastic scriptorium.

All of this, if we were to leave it here, would appear quite enough to warrant placing Trithemius squarely on the reactionary side in the quarrel between Ancients and Moderns. But on further reflection it is not difficult to demonstrate that such a conclusion, arrived at on the basis of the *Praise of Scribes* alone detached from the overall corpus of Trithemius' writings, is premature and misleading, failing as it does to take into account the broader context within which Trithemius made his appeal in support of the scriptorial art. To help correct this indeficiency I will here attempt to show that, far from viewing printing as an obstacle to the pursuit of *vera eruditio monastica* which he located at the heart of his efforts on behalf of Benedictine reform, Trithemius looked upon printing as a potentially advantageous agent of monastic erudition. Read against this larger backdrop, the *Praise of Scribes* will be adjudged as little more than a *pièce d'occasion* directed at a specific problem of the cloister posed by the invention of printing, provoked by obstreperous monks seeking an excuse to evade the strenuous duties of the scriptorium. In the broader scope, it will be shown, Trithemius fully recognized in the printing art a marvelous — indeed, even a divinely inspired — instrument to promote the cause of monastic learning. In an age when the monastic way of life was increasingly becoming placed on the defensive in a development which was to culminate in the Protestant repudiation of the Benedictine ideal, Trithemius will be seen to have looked favorably upon the printing art as a highly useful tool to help facilitate the restoration of what he dubbed, with a nostalgic glance backward into the Benedictine past, the "golden age" of ancient monasticism.

Of all Trithemius' achievements at Sponheim, we learn from the abbot's autobiographical *Nepiachus* (1507), none surpassed in the abbot's own esteem his compilation of a magnificent cloister library "of about two thousand volumes, both handwritten and printed, on every subject and science which is held of utility among Christians."⁹ Thus, by Trithemius' personal testimony in this and other like references to his illustrious abbey library, his remarkable success in book-gathering was greatly aided by the technological breakthrough known as printing. Though Trithemius does not inform us of the precise ratio between printed and handcopied texts comprising his library, we can assume that many, if not the majority, were typeset. Many times does he make allusion to the greater availability and cheapness of printed volumes as compared to their handcopied counterparts, and we can assume that as he set about building up one of the finest collections of books in Europe with a minimum capital outlay he took full advantage of that fact.¹⁰

The printing press. The smaller printer's mark used by Josse Bade in Paris, ca. 1520.



Trithemius' express purpose in this as in all other aspects of his promotion of Christian learning was to restore his beloved institution of monasticism to its ancient purity. One of the more eloquent statements of this purpose gracing his writings is set forth in his *Book of Complaints (Liber penthicus)*, brought to completion in 1493 and thus the very next year after the *Praise of Scribes*, which opens on the mournful note befitting the title: "When I recall to mind the pristine comeliness of our [Benedictine] Order, I am made so sad at how vehemently it is suffering deformity that I am more inclined to shed tears than to compose this discourse." But finding that his ink mingles quite well with his tears, Trithemius has resolved to move ahead with his objective, namely, to help recover "the golden centuries of this most blessed Order which once prevailed (*huius sacratissimi ordinis aurea quondam secula*) when, by means both of learning and of sanctity (*doctrina et sanctitate*), it irrigated the Church as though it were the river of Paradise."¹¹ And Trithemius makes it clear in various further writings that, to the contrary of being considered an impediment to that worthy goal of a Benedictine *renovatio*, printing should be viewed as a potentially invaluable ally in the implementation of a monastic *renovatio*.

That we might better appreciate this strictly monastic function of printing in the eyes of Trithemius it will be worth our while first to grasp his basically sympathetic response to printing at large. To do so we can do no better than turn to Trithemius' historical account of the invention of printing in his *Hirsau Annals*. For there we discover, under the year 1450, not only that Trithemius was an enthusiastic champion of the new art, but that a distinct tinge of pleasure he felt when he reflected upon the invention is that it occurred upon his own German soil. "In those days in the city of Mainz, located in Germany on the banks of the Rhine (and thus not in Italy as some have falsely written)," Trithemius commences his narrative, "was invented and devised by the Mainz citizen Johann Gutenberg that marvelous and previously unheard-of art of printing and the impression of books."¹² Going on to observe that Gutenberg did not lack important allies to help him bring his invention to a successful conclusion, most notably his fellow Mainz citizens Johann Fust and Fust's son-in-law Peter Schoeffer (Petrus Opilius), Trithemius bursts forth at the close of his account with an encomium to the *ars impressoria* scarcely to be outdone by the most uncritically rapturous advocates of the printing technique:

O blessed art of printing, long to be remembered as belonging to our age! Once there was lacking all which you are now scattering [quod fundis, a play on the word fundere, meaning both "to scatter" and "to cast" or "to melt"] throughout the world. All men now adorn you with the highest praises. Owing to your inventor every language shines forth its rays. Now that this marvelous art (ars haec mira) has been discovered and you have been made our guide, it is henceforth permitted to an unlettered person (parvo) to become as learned as he will.¹³

Moreover, in his later astologically conceived *Mystical Chronology* (1508) Trithemius goes so far as to suggest that there is more than the touch of humanity in “this marvelous art,” that there is also resident therein a touch of divinity. Thus, on the heels of a generally pessimistic depiction of events under the governance of warlike Mars exemplified by such catastrophes as the fall of Constantinople to the infidels and the violent Anglo-French conflict within Christendom subsequently known as the Hundred Years War, Trithemius notes as if to mitigate somewhat our harsh memory of those days that “in the same period the art of printing was newly invented at the German metropolis of Mainz, and this by virtue both of marvelous [human] industry and of a gift of divinity (*mirabili industria, muneris divinitatis*).”¹⁴

Trithemius’ insinuation that there was an inspiration greater than human working in Gutenberg’s invention of printing is echoed in the dedicatory epistle, significantly and fittingly addressed to the Sponheim abbot, prefacing an edition of works by the English Scholastic philosopher William of Ockham appearing from the press of the Lyons printer Johann Trechsel in 1494. According to Ockham’s editor, Josse Badius, who in the next year was to found the famous Paris press known as the *Praelum Ascensium*, printing is “a divinely contrived skill” (*divina imprimendi facultas inventa*) which can rightfully claim, among others, two outstanding contributions to the unprecedented propagation of learning in the present day. The first contribution resides in the fact that, owing to printing, there have now been brought to light “by a certain indelible permanence” (*indelebili quadam diuturnitate*) not only many modern works but many ancient ones as well, restored “in their original lustre,” whose manuscripts have fortunately managed to escape the ravages of time. The second contribution of printing to the unprecedented dissemination of learning cited by Badius in his dedicatory epistle to Trithemius dwells in the relative cheapness of printed books, thereby making their contents more readily accessible to the average man.¹⁵

Johannes Trithemius. Portrait by Master "HB" in Musée Condé, Chantilly.



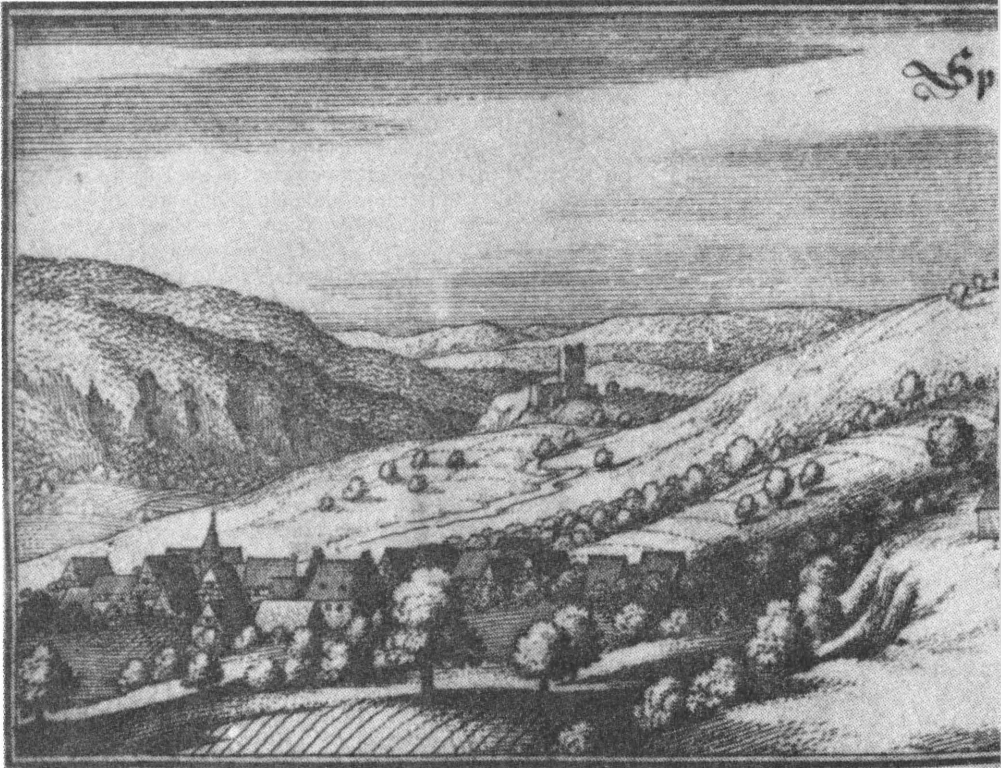
The *Praise of Scribes* composed two years earlier, we have seen, can be interpreted as turning both of these arguments on their head. For it not only emphasizes the greater durability of parchment over paper, but it also implies that, though in absolute terms a printed text is less costly to produce than a handcopied text, given the free labor of the monastic scriptorium it could still be cheaper for a monastery to produce a given handcopied text than to buy its printed version outside the cloister's walls. But at bottom Badius' two major arguments in support of printing can be seen to be compatible with Trithemius' more narrowly conceived comparison of the handcopying and printing arts. Concerning the first point of Badius, namely, that printing gives a given text "a certain indelible permanence," it need only be pointed out that when Badius was using this expression he was thinking of the perpetuity of the text independently of any single copy. Trithemius, on the other hand, who in his book-collecting was acutely sensitive to the durability of individual copies of texts, construed the notion of permanence in the more restricted sense of the perpetuity of an individual book as a physical entity. And with respect to the second point of Badius, namely, that printed texts are cheaper than handcopied texts and thus more easily available to those wanting in sufficient funds to pay for expensive parchment, Badius was laying his accent upon the general democratization of knowledge, in lay as well as in clerical quarters. Trithemius in his *Praise of Scribes*, alternatively, was more concerned with the unpaid labor of the monks working within the cloister's scriptorium and on the relatively limited sphere of usage those texts required in their role as vehicles of monastic erudition.

Yet even in keeping with this latter view of the advantage of handcopying over printing within a strictly monastic setting, Trithemius was not oblivious to the corresponding advantage of printing should a particular text or group of texts become unavailable or disappear altogether from the cloister's library, or if, as in his own personal case, an abbot were to become unhappily alienated from his books and thereby compelled to begin his book-collecting anew. Thus, as Trithemius wrote to a friend soon after moving to a second monastic home at Würzburg so as to relieve his correspondent's feelings on his behalf regarding the loss of his magnificent Sponheim library:

*The world today is abounding with volumes, and so many books are becoming published in our age that no one can read them all. For the art which is called printing was discovered in the time of my infancy at Mainz, the mother city of the Franks, which daily produces an almost countless number of texts by ancient and modern authors alike.*¹⁶

One of the more illustrious instances of this observation, Trithemius goes on to point out, is furnished by "Johann Amerbach of the city of Basel, a learned and exceedingly upright man" who, at the forefront of the printers gracing the present age, "in the year just passed (*viz.*, 1506), after the required emendations were made, printed all the books he could find of the blessed Augustine in fifteen volumes." And if that were not enough, likewise flowing from Amerbach's Basel press were works by St. Jerome, St. Ambrose, and St. Gregory the Great.¹⁷ Hence Trithemius was not excessively worrying that he would now have to start over again from near-scratch in the aggregation of a respectable monastic library. For if he were to require more than the few books which were currently at his side in his relatively straitened circumstances at Würzburg, thanks to the marvelous invention of printing, he could easily duplicate many of his Sponheim titles at a relatively inexpensive cost.¹⁸

Sponheim Abbey, 1645.



As a humanist in much the same mold as various of his German humanist associates making up the Rhenish Sodality located at Heidelberg, including Conrad Celtis and Jacob Wimpheling, Trithemius was not of a mind to overlook the obvious utility of printing in helping to promote the study of the ancient languages.¹⁹ In this regard we need only recall one of the more prominent compliments paid by Trithemius to printing in his already cited encomium to the *ars impressoria* contained in his historical account of its invention in the *Hirsau Annals*: "Owing to your inventor every language shines forth its rays." But as a peculiarly monastic breed of humanist, setting him apart from his lay acquaintances of the Heidelberg humanist circle in spite of his shared advocacy of their literary ideals, Trithemius also took cognizance of a more specialized application of the humanist program of language study to the uniquely monastic way of life. For it was not only his broad-based aim to disseminate language throughout the world, but it was also his narrow-based aim to restore *vera eruditio monastica* which he believed to have reigned supreme in the so-called "golden age" of monasticism.



One of Trithemius' more instructive writings to this point consists of an oration delivered to his fellow abbots of the annual Bursfeld congregation at Erfurt in 1492, in the same spirit as its nearly contemporary *Book of Complaints* plaintively lamenting the deterioration of the Benedictine Order. If there might once have been some excuse for the ignorance of letters in the cloister, Trithemius scolds his audience, this excuse has since lost all credibility. For whereas "once there was a great penury of books, dependent on their being procured at very high prices and great expense," Trithemius reproachfully reminds his Benedictine listeners, "now a great abundance of volumes is daily brought to light by the art of printing on every subject, by means of which our salutary teaching is generously propagated."²⁰ And but a year later Trithemius came forth with a catalogue of illustrious Benedictines, the core of his subsequent *Catalogue of Ecclesiastical Writers*, in the introduction of which he made the identical point to his Order at large. "Behold how opportunely all things now smile upon the studious," Trithemius is now seen to exclaim in a distinctively optimistic vein, "for whom the novelty of the printing art brings forth into the light many thousands of books." As a happy result of the invention of printing

*every man is now able, at little cost, to be learned, and it is a fortunate age (felix aetas) which has acquired this gift from God. Once there was a great scarcity of books, when they were prepared at a great price and expense. But now there exists a large abundance of volumes, and this in every kind of literary subject, by means of which each and every person is now easily able to achieve completeness in the knowledge of letters.*²¹

Scribes at Work. A woodcut from Petrarch's "Gluckbuch", Augsburg, 1539.



That this felicitous state of affairs holds for monks in their specific profession as well as for mankind in general is pressed home by Trithemius in a full-scale biography of a great Benedictine precursor composed in the next-to-last year of the writer's life, 1515. The subject of this biography is the ninth-century abbot of Fulda Rabanus Maurus, a man who, by a providential coincidence, ended his days as archbishop of the self-same city of Mainz which some six hundred years later was to give birth to the art of printing. In the Rabanus biography Trithemius severely takes the members of his profession to task for failing to come up to the linguistic standards set by his highly erudite subject precisely at a moment in history when they have been granted a novel means for learning difficult ancient languages, most notably Greek, with much greater ease than was permitted to Rabanus and his contemporaries. For owing to the marvelous invention of printing, so Trithemius tries to shame his monkish colleagues, never has the time been more propitious for learning Greek. Yet, ironically, the ignorance of Greek is everywhere in evidence throughout the monasteries — and this even though there has never existed a greater abundance both of books in Greek and of instructors to help in transmitting the contents of these books to zealous students as in the current century.²²

In sum, the Rabanus biography but restates a working axiom of Trithemius' monastic program which, in spite of the apparently more circumspect posture displayed toward printing in the *Praise of Scribes*, consistently remained at the crux of the abbot's call for monastic erudition. This axiom is that all the means at the monk's disposal, the novel art of printing included, should be employed to restore, as expressed in the *Book of Complaints*, "the golden centuries of this most blessed Order which once prevailed when, by means both of learning and of sanctity, it irrigated the Church as though it were the river of Paradise." Admittedly Trithemius could not ignore the possibility that printing could also have the opposite effect than that which he was promoting, since it could just as readily be utilized by the servants of the Devil to disseminate false and wicked ideas as by the servants of God to disseminate true and good ideas. Surely this dual capacity of printing was what the abbot had in mind when he envisaged a chapter in his projected but never written encyclopedia of demonology, *Concerning Demons*, under the heading: "Whether the art of printing is more useful than injurious to the Church?"²³ But as was likewise understood by Trithemius, the possible abuse of printing no more invalidated its feasibility as a potential agent of monastic reform than did the abuse of any other art or science with which man was endowed. It is this illicit abuse of the printing art with which Trithemius was primarily concerned in his *Praise of Scribes*, not its licit use. For when monks invoked the art of printing to detract from rather than to enhance the glorious ideal of *vera eruditio monastica*, according to Trithemius, they were, either inadvertently or deliberately, doing more to advance the cause of Satan than of God in the world.

1. For the background of this debate see Hippolyte Rigault, *Histoire de la Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* (Paris, 1856), coining the phrase "quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns"; Richard F. Jones, *Ancients and Moderns: A Study of the Rise of the Scientific Movement in Seventeenth Century England*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, 1961, 1965); and Hans Baron, "The *Querelle* of the Ancients and the Moderns as a Problem for Renaissance Scholarship," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XX (1959), 3–22, reprinted in Paul O. Kristeller and Philip P. Wiener, ed. *Renaissance Essays from the 'Journal of the History of Ideas'* (New York, 1968), pp. 95–114. For a sixteenth century reference specifically mentioning printing as a foremost instance of the advancement of modernity over antiquity see Jean Fernel, *De abditis rerum causis* (1548), cited by Sir Charles Sherrington, *The Endeavour of Jean Fernel* (Cambridge, Eng., 1946), p. 136: "The world sailed around, the largest of earth's continents discovered, the compass invented, the printing press sowing knowledge, gun-powder revolutionizing the art of war, ancient MSS. rescued and the restoration of scholarship, all witnessing to the triumph of our New Age." Cf. Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* (1620), I, 129, in Fulton H. Anderson, ed., and James Spedding et. al., tr. *The New Organon and Related Writings* (Indianapolis/New York, 1960), p. 118: "It is well to observe the force and virtue and consequences of discoveries; and these are to be seen nowhere more conspicuously than in those three which were unknown to the ancients, and of which the origin, though recent, is obscure and inglorious; namely, printing, gunpowder, and the magnet. For these three have changed the whole face and state of things throughout the world; the first in literature, the second in warfare, the third in navigation; whence have followed innumerable changes; insomuch that no empire, no sect, no star seems to have exerted greater power and influence in human affairs than these mechanical discoveries."
2. Of the considerable literature on the invention of printing and its earliest development only a few examples can here be singled out: Theo. L. DeVinne, *The Invention of Printing* (New York, 1876; Detroit, 1969); Pierce Butler, *The Origin of Printing in Europe* (Chicago, 1940); S. H. Steinberg, *Five Hundred Years of Printing* (Baltimore, 1955; rev. ed. Bristol, 1961); Curt F. Bühler, *The Fifteenth-Century Book* (Philadelphia, 1960); Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographical Man* (Toronto, 1962); Rudolf Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Readers* (Wiesbaden, 1967); Colin Clair, *A History of European Printing* (London, 1976); and Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 2 vols. (New York, 1978).
3. See the edition and translation prepared for the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library (formerly Monastic Manuscript Microfilm Library), of St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minn., *Johannes Trithemius: In Praise of Scribes (De Laude Scriptorum)*, ed. Klaus Arnold and tr. Roland Behrendt, O.S.B. (Lawrence, Kansas, 1974), introd., p. 15. See also p. 14 for the circumstances behind the composition of this work, with the abbot prompting it identified as Gerlach of Breibach, residing in the Benedictine cloister of Deutz near Cologne. Trithemius' model for his *De laude scriptorum manualium* is Jean Gerson's pre-printing *De laude scriptorum* (1423). For Arnold's full-scale biography of Trithemius see his *Johannes Trithemius (1462–1516)* (Würzburg, 1971), treating the *De laude scriptorum manualium*, pp. 62 ff.
4. Trithemius, *Praise of Scribes*, ed. Arnold, pp. 63 ff., with the Latin text on the opposite pages, pp. 62 ff., bearing the corresponding heading: "Quod propter impressuram a scribendis-voluminibus non sit desistendum." Besides appearing individually in Friedberg's printing of 1494, this tract may also be found in a collection of Trithemius' monastic writings under the title: *Opera pia et spiritualia*, ed. Johannes Busaeus, S. J. (Mainz, 1604, 1605), pp. 741 ff.
5. *Praise of Scribes*, p. 63.

6. On the monastic origin of the notion *acedia* (*acidia*, *accidia*) see Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth. Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1967), pp. 1 ff. Conceived by the Eastern desert fathers as one of eight (later reduced to seven) capital vices, the idea of *acedia* (in Greek, *akedia*, literally “non-caring”) made its way to the west principally through the mediation of Jean Cassian. For its classic western definition see Cassian, *De coenobiorum institutis libri XII*, lib. X, cap. 1, in Jacques Paul Migne, ed. *Patrologia cursus completus; series latina*, 221 vols. (Paris, 1844–64), 49:360: “tedium or solicitude of heart” (*taedium sive anxietas cordis*). The sixth century monk Cassiodorus, well read in Cassian, directly anticipated a favorite device of Trithemius by playing on a secondary meaning of the word *studium* — “study” as well “zeal” or “diligence” — to prescribe the appropriate antidote to languorous *acedia*. Thus see Cassiodorus’ interpretation of the words: *Dormitavit anima mea prae taedio*, Psalm 118:28, in Migne, *Pat. lat.*, 70:846: “Hanc autem animae dormitationem Cassianus servorum optimus institutor accidiam vocat (Lib. X, *Instit.*, cap. 4), quam magno studio monachis persuadet.” A direct result of Cassiodorus’ secondary meaning of the word *studium* is his *De institutione divinarum*, in Migne, *Pat. lat.*, 70:1105 ff., and *De artibus ac disciplinis liberalium artium*, in *Pat. lat.*, 70:1149 ff. According to H. O. Taylor, *The Mediaeval Mind*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), I, 94: “For he [i.e., Cassiodorus] was the first influential man to recognize the fitness of the cloister for the labours of the pious student and copyist. It is not too much to regard him as the inaugurator of the learned, compiling, commenting and transcribing functions of monasticism.” That Trithemius was greatly appreciative of Cassiodorus in this regard is indicated in many places throughout his writings, most noticeably in his *De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis*, in *Opera historica...*, ed. Marquard Freher, 2 parts (Frankfurt a/M, 1601; facs. ed., Frankfurt a/M, 1966), I, 241 ff.
7. *Praise of Scribes*, p. 63.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
9. Trithemius, *Nepiachus, id est, libellus de studiis et scriptis propriis a pueritia repetitis*, in Johann Georg Eccard, ed. *Corpus historicum mediæ aevi* . . . , 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1723), II, col. 1828. The *Nepiachus* was composed by Trithemius soon after his arrival in a new monastic home, St. James in Würzburg, which abbacy he officially assumed in place of his previous one of St. Martin at Sponheim in October of 1506. Thus he was reflecting within its pages upon a library which he unhappily had been forced to forsake. The reasons which we can infer from his writings for his reluctant decision to exchange Sponheim for the relatively obscure monastery at Würzburg are many, all having to do with a falling out between himself and his monks. Among the criticisms leveled by the Sponheim residents against their abbot, thereby having the effect of alienating Trithemius from his community, the following can be singled out: his all too frequent absences from Sponheim on behalf of the Bursfeld reform movement, his preoccupation with his library and excessive expenditure of monastic funds for its growth, his disturbance of the cloister’s tranquillity by inviting many outsiders to visit him and his library, his overly severe attitude toward monastic observance, and his anachronistic insistence — more directly relevant to the subject at hand — upon hard labor in the monastic scriptorium at a time when the invention of printing had largely dispensed with the need for it. On Trithemius’ Sponheim library see S. K. Padover, “German Libraries in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” in James Westfall Thompson, ed. *The Medieval Library* (Chicago, 1939), pp. 464–65; Roland Behrendt, *The Library of Sponheim Abbey under Abbot Trithemius (1483–1506)* (Latrobe, Pa., 1958); and Arnold, *Trithemius*, pp. 56 ff.

10. In this regard Trithemius distinguishes between the higher prices of books in the first decades of printing when printed books were relatively few in number and their cheaper prices later when they were in greater number. Thus, in the *Nepiachus*, in Eccard, ed. *Corpus*, II, col. 1827, Trithemius notes that his predecessor as abbot, Johann von Kolenhausen, had succeeded in adding only some thirty volumes to the ten or so which had existed at the time of the Bursfeld reformation of the cloister in 1459, but indulgently adds a significant reminder so that the earlier abbot will not be placed in too bad of a light. In his book-gathering activities, Trithemius points out, his predecessor suffered two definite disadvantages as compared to his own efforts in the same capacity. In the first place, we are told, Trithemius has happily been blessed by divine favor with more money for the purchasing of books than was the previous abbot, and in the second place the prices of books have considerably diminished during his long abbacy as a result of their much greater multiplication and proliferation.
11. Trithemius, *Liber penthicus, sive lugubris de statu et ruina monastici ordinis*, cap. 1, in Bus., *Opera pia*, p. 807. See also Arnold, *Trithemius*, pp. 46–7.
12. Trithemius, *Annales Hirsauigienses*, 2 vols. (St. Gall, 1690), II, 421. For a lengthy passage, in English translation, from this account see DeVinne, *Invention of Printing* (see above, note 2), p. 474. But the author, pp. 475–77, has detected many particular errors in Trithemius' narrative.
13. *Ann. Hirs.*, II, 422.
14. Trithemius, *De septem secundis, id est, intelligentiis sive spiritibus orbes post deum moventibus libellus, sive Chronologia mystica* . . . in Freher, *Opera historica*, I, sig. ***2^f.
15. Badius to Trithemius, Lyons, 12 September 1494, dedicatory epistle to *Dialogus magistri Guillelmi de Ockham* . . . (Lyons, 1494), reprinted in Philippe Renouard, *Bibliographie des Impressions et des œuvres de Josse Badius Ascensius, Imprimeur et Humaniste, 1462–1535*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1948), I, 87.
16. Trithemius to Jacob Kymolanus, Würzburg, 16 August 1507, *Epistolae familiares libri II*, II:44, in Freher, *Opera historica*, II, 556. Concerning Trithemius' transfer to Würzburg see above, note 9.
17. On Johann Amerbach see Hanns Bohatta, *Einführung in die Buchkunde: Ein Handbuch für Bibliothekare, Bücherliebhaber und Antiquare*, 2. Aufl. (Wien, 1928), p. 71, containing a brief biography; Peter G. Bietenholz, *Basle and France in the Sixteenth Century: the Basle Humanists and Printers in their Contacts with Francophone Culture* (Genève, 1971); and Arnold, *Trithemius*, p. 71 and *passim*. I am grateful to the referees enlisted by the present journal for calling these references to my attention.
18. *Epist. fam.*, II:44, in Freher, *Opera historica*, II, 556.
19. Arnold, *Trithemius*, pp. 74 ff. Trithemius' associations with the Heidelberg humanists, many of whom visited him at home in Sponheim over the years where they were given free access to the abbot's library as well as to his person, can be traced back to his pre-Sponheim days.
20. Trithemius, *Orationes*, II: "De ruina s. Benedicti et reformationis Bursfeldensis laudibus," delivered 26 August 1492 at Erfurt, in Bus., *Opera pia*, p. 855. On the Bursfeld reform movement and Trithemius' leading part in its spread see Arnold, *Trithemius*, pp. 22 ff.
21. Trithemius, *De viris illustribus ordinis s. Benedicti libri IV*, lib. II, cap. 145, in Bus., *Opera pia*, p. 61.
22. Trithemius, *Vita b. Rabani Mauri libri III*, lib. I, cap. 4, in Johannes Bollandus and Godefridus Henschenius, S. J., *Sancta sanctorum*, I: Februarii. Dies 1–6 (Antwerp, 1658), 528. This tract, dedicated to the current archbishop of Mainz Albert of Brandenburg, is reprinted in Migne, *Pat. lat.*, 107:67–106.

23. Trithemius, *De daemonibus libri XII*, lib. I, cap. 9: "Utrum ars impresoria plus sit utilis quam nociva ecclesie," in Arnold, "Additamenta Trithemiana: Nachträge zu Leben und Werk des Johannes Trithemius, insbesondere zur Schrift *De demonibus*," *Würzburger Diözesan-Geschichtsblätter*, XXXVII—XXXVIII (1975), 259. On Trithemius' demonist and magical preoccupations see Arnold, *Trithemius*, and my two articles: "The Shift from Mystical to Magical Theology in the Abbot Trithemius (1462—1516)," *Studies in Medieval Culture*, ed. John R. Sommerfeldt and Thomas H. Seiler (The Medieval Institute, Western Michigan University, 1977), 147—60, and "Was Paracelsus a Disciple of Trithemius?," *Sixteenth Century Journal*, X (1979), 70—82.

The illustration of Sponheim Abbey, the 1494 page from *De laude scriptorum*, and the portrait of Johannes Trithemius are taken with kind permission from Roland Behrendt's translation (edited with an introduction by Klaus Arnold), Johannes Trithemius, *In Praise of Scribes*, Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1974.