

Call for papers

“Nor thou nor thy religion dost controule, The amorousnesse of an harmonious Soule’: Rethinking Devotional Works and Practices in the British Isles (16th-18th c.)”

A one-day preparatory seminar will take place on April, 5th 2024 to enable scholars to present their research. The conference will then take place at Université Paris Nanterre on 3-4 April, 2025.

This conference is organized jointly by Université Paris Nanterre (CREA EA 370) and Université Clermont Auvergne (Institut d’Histoire des Représentations et des Idées dans les Modernités, UMR 5317).

When John Donne published *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* in 1624, he followed in the footsteps of a long tradition of devotional publications. Four hundred years later the concerns voiced by the English poet still resonate and invite one to think about the evolution and legacy of devotional works which have never ceased to appeal to both devout practitioners and lay readers alike. Such works convey the strong and complex nature of the relationship that the believer has with God. Indeed, devotion implies a series of religious observances, duties and actions, as well as a more inward-looking life, with a focus on keeping the soul in a disposition of piety and fervour.

The project will focus on a better understanding of how devotion lies at the intersection between expression, externalization and internalization. It can be mediated through physical actions, but also through the work of the soul, thus placing it at once in the spheres of the visible and the invisible. One is also led to think about how devotion can be displayed and grasped in texts, since verbal communication or silent worship can be echoed by gestures or visual representations through emblems or illuminations.

When focusing on the historical evolution of devotion through its textual expression, various approaches for further analysis emerge. First, the circulation of devotional publications was evidenced by Richard Whitford (c.1470-1543?), a monk who found success in the 1530s following his *Werke for Housholders* and *Werke of Preparacion or of Ordinaunce unto Comunion or Howselyng*, which focused on lay people’s deeds within their households. 1631 saw the publication of *The Christians Daily Walk with God* by Anglican author Henry Scudder (?-1652), and later editions included texts from nonconformist figures like John Davenport (1597-1670), John Owen (1616-1683) and Richard Baxter (1615-1691). These texts circulated extensively. Indeed, a German translation by Theodore Haak surfaced in Frankfurt five years after Scudder’s book had first been published in English. Several decades later, John Scott’s *The Christian life from its beginning to its consummation in glory: together with the several means and instruments of Christianity conducing thereunto, with directions for private devotion and*

forms of prayer, fitted to the several states of Christians was first issued in 1681 before an expanded second edition was printed in 1683–87. These two instances raise some questions: what role did emendations play? What made some texts run through multiple editions compared to other devotional treatises? Secondly, such texts also draw attention to the changes in one's life or historical events which could prevent devotion from being put into practice, or alter how it was defined or considered: the transformations introduced by the Reformation, the time of crisis during the Civil War, or the development of religious nonconformity, to name but a few examples. A third consideration which stands out are the specific allusions which can be encountered in some devotional manuals, such as Catholic figures – when reading *Motives to Holy Living* (Oxford, 1688), references to the *Abecedaries* composed by Spanish Franciscan friar Francisco de Osuna (1492-c.1540), and to St Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), can be found. What purpose did references to those names and sources serve? Furthermore, some books contained special prayers, for instance “A Prayer to be said by Merchants, Tradesmen, and Handicrafts men” in *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living* (1650) by Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667). Similarly, emphasis can be put on primers – including George Joye's *Ortulus Animae* (1530), the first to be published in English, or William Marshall's *Goodly Primer* (1535) – or other Protestant testimonies in use or circulation from the 1530s onwards.

This project seeks to analyse the devotional works which circulated from the early modern era to the end of the 18th century in terms of materiality, reception, and argumentation in the British Isles, with a possible extension to colonial America. Different types of formats will be considered: manuscripts, letters, diaries, printed texts. Scholars working on topics related to religious and social history, the history of ideas, textual studies, are invited to submit proposals.

With the objective of understanding these issues, suggested topics include, but are not limited to:

- the reception of devotional texts in the public and private spheres, including the description of the effects of devotional practices (conformist and non-conformist testimonies, conversion narratives...)
- the argumentative structure of devotional texts, among other aspects, the role played by intertextual references (Scriptures, patristic and/or medieval texts, books of hours, primers...)
- the circulation of devotional texts (manuscripts, personal correspondence, prayer books, girdle books...)
- the materiality of devotional works (the role of printing and printers, how they could affect the layout of texts in books, the place of devotional texts and collections within the circulation of works in printed form, the addition of hand-written notes and emendations in printed books...)
- comparisons between publications from different denominations
- the connection between devotional texts and political pamphlets and/or scientific documents.

The languages of the conference are English and French.

Participants are invited to submit a title, a 300-to-500-word abstract (25 minutes) and a short biographical notice jointly to Nicolas Bourgès: nbourges@parisnanterre.fr and Julie VanParys-Rotondi: julie.vanparys_rotondi@uca.fr , before 30 September 2023.

Submission is open to doctoral students and early career researchers.

Scientific Committee:

Paula Barros (Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3)

Nicolas Bourgès (Université Paris Nanterre)

Yan Brailowsky (Université Paris Nanterre)

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Clotilde Prunier (Université Paris Nanterre)

Laurence Sterritt (Aix-Marseille Université)

Julie VanParys-Rotondi (Université Clermont Auvergne)

Selected bibliography

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