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Proposal
Material Cultures: Technology, Textuality, and Transmission
16-18 July 2010, University of Edinburgh

*The Impact of the Religious Revival on Children's Reading Practices in France,
c. 1840-1880*

Claude Savart's classic study of religious publishing in France identified a peak in production in the mid-nineteenth century. This religious publishing boom was aimed primarily at children. What kind of impact – if any – did this religiously-inspired literature for children have upon their reading practices? Millions of books were produced by big provincial presses. Most were prize books handed out to pupils, but missionaries also targeted schools for leafleting campaign. Meanwhile Catholic 'governess' authors with close links to missionary organisations successfully monopolised the secular competition, providing the bulk of books for Hachette's children's collection *La Bibliothèque Rose*. Michel Manson, leading scholar in the field, advises caution, for this great mushrooming of production was then largely imposed on child readers in schools, who he suggests were passive recipients. Just because books were distributed, it does not follow that they were consumed.

This paper will argue that the surge in religious books for children nevertheless did have import for children's daily lives and reading practices. Book distribution formed part of a much wider coalition of agencies that worked together to evangelise the younger generation, for the child was increasingly seen as the last hope for the Church facing dechristianisation. Using publishing data and distribution strategies from good books campaigns in conjunction with biographical evidence, diaries, and pedagogical archive material, this paper proposes to analyse several different 'models' of children reading Catholic literature. These 'models' will detail how children were given religious literature, by whom, where, and what were the other ways in which they were being taught in order to build up a picture of reading practices. In so doing we gain an insight into how print culture played an important part in reconceptualising the relationship between children and the Catholic Church in a modern, hostile age.