

How to speak to people about heresy? First prints against the Reformation in French (1520–1530)

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This article intends to address the ways of fighting against heresy in Catholic prints in French during 1520–1530s. The dominant position of the Catholic Church — formulated by the Faculty of Theology in Paris — was that the people had to be kept out of theological debate. On the one hand, the divines thought that public controversy in front of uneducated people — or even the description of the heresy — would contribute to the spread of Lutheran ideas or to the misunderstanding of the right doctrine. On the other hand, they needed to affirm their role as scholars and exclusive interpreters of Scripture. The Doctors of the Church wanted to limit the dissemination of heresy via preventive censorship, repression and theological controversy in Latin. However this proposal contradicted the need to warn the king, his entourage and the people of the danger posed by heretics. The Faculty of Theology authorised the publication of works which described heresy as an offence against God, his mother, the saints, and the whole Church, and which celebrated the repressive action of the political authorities. This description made the heresy identifiable without entering into theological argumentation. Furthermore, many anonymous works — songs, stories of miracles, defamatory poetry — condemned the heretics and their protectors. The king was the first target of these writings. However, towards the end of the 1530s, the success of the Lutheran doctrine persuaded the Doctors — such as Jerome de Hangest and Pierre Doré — of the need to defend the attacks on the Church in French in order to strengthen the consciences of the faithful who were exposed to the danger of seduction in their daily lives. They tried then to share their arguments while asserting themselves as the only specialists able to lead theological reflexion.



Key words: [Luther](#), [Lutherans](#), [Reformation](#), [Faculty of Theology](#), [Church authority](#), [religious polemic](#), [miracle](#), [public opinion](#)

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