

The Use of Propaganda
in the Reformation & Counter-Reformation

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Introduction

Propaganda was a common tool used during the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. Both sides created images of the other as the Devil through song, printed word, sermons, and art. In this paper, I will explore the effectiveness of propaganda in discrediting an opponent, the themes used in Reformation era propaganda, and the lives of three propagators of propaganda. I will illustrate this propaganda through examples from each of the categories listed previously.

A Brief History of Printing in the 16th Century

In order to understand the environment of the 16th century, a brief look at the history of the printing press is in order. Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press with replaceable wooden or metal letters in 1436. The Gutenberg press with its wooden, and later metal, movable type printing brought down the price of printed materials and made such materials available for the masses. In 1498, Ottaviano Petrucci of Venice successfully adapted Gutenberg's design for music. He utilized the multiple impression technique. The first impression would be used for the words, a second for the staff lines, and a third for the notes. This could be reduced to two impressions: words and notes first and staff lines last.

Claiming that he had discovered the secret to printing *canto figurado*, Petrucci was granted a 20 year monopoly on printing such music as well as music with lute tablature. Petrucci's "discovery" was, in fact, merely the processing of printing with multiple impressions, albeit with much finer type material. Petrucci's influence is still felt in the typesetting rules for music that he established, many of which (such as the size of the note stem in relation to the height of the staff) are still in use today.

Themes in Propaganda

The propaganda that came from the Protestants and the Catholics contained very similar themes. Both were highly concerned with discrediting the other side.

Propaganda that came from Lutherans had four primary themes: anti-papery, social morality, individual salvation, and Scriptural stories. The Catholics focused on anti-Lutherism, the veneration of the saints, morality, and Scriptural stories. I will concentrate on the themes of anti-papery and anti-Lutherism.

The anti-pope message in the Lutheran propaganda sought to portray the Pope as the Anti-Christ. This was not a new concept. The concept appeared in the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux as early as the 1130s. (Oettinger, 2001) During the Reformation, the Pope is described both implicitly and explicitly as the Antichrist. The antichrist is described as having been born in Italy, usually in Rome. He is also described as having been selected by the Italians as their leader. There were also descriptions that reported directly that the Pope was the antichrist. Luther himself is credited with composing the lyrics of *Nun treiben wir den Babst hinaus*. It is a scathing description of the Pope as the antichrist. (see appendix 1) Hans Sachs often referred to the Pope as Lucifer.

Also associated with the concept of the Pope as the antichrist is the idea of *verkehrte Welt*, the world turned upside down. This idea describes the world as full of deceit; nothing is as it appears, fools have dominion over the wise, and spiritual leaders are in fact spiritual transgressors. This idea appeared in print in 1499 in Sebastian Brandt's *Das Narrenschiff* (The Ship of Fools). This concept worked well with the image of the Pope as Lucifer.

The Catholics used the description of Luther as the antichrist as much as the Lutherans did of the Pope. Luther was often described as evil, as a cohort to the Devil, or as the Devil himself. Many of the attacks were very similar to the attacks used by the Catholics. The primary difference between the two is that the Catholics had one major target for their attacks. The Lutheran attacks focused on the Pope, his bishops, the clergy, monks, and nuns. As a result, the Catholics used their attacks to defend a great number of people. (see appendix 2)

Forms of Delivery

These attacks were delivered in many forms. The most common was found in songs. Songs were an effective means of delivery because the people would remember them. The use of contrafacta became a common occurrence. A contrafactum, the practice of borrowing a song from one sphere and making it suitable for use in the other by the substitution of words, was a popular way of delivering the attacks on either side. The contrafactum may operate in either direction: to provide pious words to fit a secular song, or profane words to fit a religious song. It may involve 'parody' in the literary sense, offering purposeful variations on the words of the original song, but sometimes there may be only a more general contrast in content between the two songs, or even no obvious relationship at all between them. Although in some cases it is possible to tell which came first, the religious or the secular version, in others it is less clear in which direction the process operated.

The lyrics of these songs would be altered in order to deliver a certain message. They were memorable because people already knew the melodies. These songs also became a source of news for the general public. The songs would tell stories about

events that occurred during the Reformation. Of course, these songs would exaggerate and/or embellish the events in order to support one side of the story. Nevertheless, these songs were an important form of delivery of current events. The lyrics of contrafacta were also used as a source of entertainment. Hearing a new set of lyrics to an established melody could be very entertaining to the people who heard them.

A few examples of contrafactum on the popular melody *O du armer Judas* are: *O jr Munich vnnd Pfaffen* (1522), *Ach du armer Murnar* (c. 1523), and *Ach du arger Heinze* (1541).

Distribution of Propaganda

An important question to address is: How were these songs distributed throughout Europe? The simple answer is that they were printed in pamphlets. These pamphlets were printed in High German to ensure understanding among the different German-speaking regions. Pamphlets were used by both Catholics and Protestants alike.

Pamphlets often did not contain printed notes. Instead, they would name of the original song to set the new lyrics to. The texts in these pamphlets would often have accompanying images for the non-reader. These images are graphic and very easy to interpret. The images often portrayed the target of the attack as working with the Devil or being the Devil or as being a sinner.

Lucas Cranach

Working with Luther in creating these images was Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553). Born in Kronach in Southern Germany, Cranach settled briefly in Vienna (c.1501). While in Vienna, he came into contact with the humanist scholars at the newly founded university. During his stay in Vienna, Cranach created some of his finest works.

They include portraits, notably those of *Johannes Cuspinian*, a lecturer at the university, and his wife *Anna*, and several religious works in which he shows a remarkable feeling for the beauty of landscape characteristic of the Danube school. Cranach then moved to Wittenberg in 1504 as the court painter to Frederick III, the Elector of Saxony.

Cranach remained in Wittenberg until 1550, during this time he became extremely wealthy and one of the city's most respected citizens, serving as burgomaster for several years. His paintings were eagerly sought by collectors, and his busy studio often produced numerous replicas of popular designs. Cranach continued with his religious paintings during this time, but his woodcut designs (notably those for the first German edition of the New Testament in 1522) are generally more interesting than his paintings in this sphere. From his workshop in Wittenberg, Cranach was the artist for many pamphlets and broadsides. Cranach was a close friend of Luther's and shared Luther's view of the Catholic Church. He also painted several portraits of Martin Luther. Despite his allegiance to the Protestant cause, he continued to work for Catholic patrons and was a very astute businessman. Cranach's son and pupil Lucas Cranach, the Younger (1515–86) continued the tradition of his father whose workshop, signature, and popularity he inherited. Their work is often indistinguishable. (See appendix 3 for examples from the Cranach family)

Anti-Lutheran Art

Examples of Anti-Lutheran broadsheets and pamphlets can be found from the very beginning of the Reformation, as early as 1520 and 1521. An early example is 'Luther's game of heresy', which associates Luther with the Devil and vice. (see appendix 4) It shows Luther cooking in a huge cooking-pot with the assistance of three

devils. Luther is depicted in his monastic robes with a raven perched on his shoulder. Emanating from the cooking-pot are various kinds of vice – falsehood, pride, envy, blasphemy, and heresy among others. This broadside is used to show that Luther is brewer of sin and discontentment.

While the Catholics did not have an artist that earned the same fame and notoriety of Cranach, the images still delivered the message effectively. There were, however, a number of well known writers of broadsides that attacked Luther. Among them were Martin Eisengrein (1535-1578) and Johann Jakob Rabus (1545-c.1585).

Martin Eisengrein

Like most members of the first generation of Counter-Reformation propagandists, Eisengrein was a convert. Born into a wealthy Lutheran family in Stuttgart, he had spent his student years attending the universities of Tübingen, Ingolstadt, and Vienna. It was in the last city that he converted, sometime in 1558 or 1559, and there he began to study theology. By 1560 he had been ordained a priest and assumed the powerful position of cathedral preacher at the city's St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna. In 1562, he moved to Bavaria, at the request of Duke Albrecht and he became priest and preacher at the university's St. Moritz parish.

From his arrival in Ingolstadt in 1562 until his death in 1578, Eisengrein dedicated himself completely to the cause of Catholic reform, not just in the university town, but throughout Bavaria. Although called to serve as a parish priest, Eisengrein soon joined the theological faculty of the university, and in this capacity he united with other counter-reformers to rid the institution of its Protestants.

Eisengrein, like Johann Nass, often defended the Catholic Eucharist, transubstantiation, and the Real Presence from Protestant attack. In 1564 he published *A Christian Sermon Concerning the Reasons Shrines Are Held in Such High Esteem in the Catholic Church*; it became one of Eisengrein's more widely distributed works, with at least seven editions printed before 1600.

To explain the Protestant rejection of the outpouring of divine generosity, Eisengrein argues that "godless" heretics have always waged a persistent war against the saints and their devotions. Arians, iconoclasts, Hussites, Lutherans, and Calvinists—each is invoked as another link in a long chain of heresies, inspired by Satan.

Johann Jakob Rabus

Johann Jakob Rabus was the son of one of a late Reformation theologians; he had been educated in the very heart of the Lutheran movement at Wittenberg before receiving a doctorate in theology from Tübingen. In 1565, dissatisfied with Lutheranism, he had traveled to Augsburg to receive theological instruction from the Jesuits. Fearing that he had been sent as a spy, the Society cautiously accepted the young man as a student, requiring numerous affirmations of his sincerity before finally allowing him to convert. The Wittelsbach duke Albrecht V awarded him generous funds to finance his studies at the Jesuit colleges of Rome, Trent, Cologne, Louvain, Mainz, and Dillingen, and ultimately made him court preacher. Doubts about Rabus's sincerity apparently persisted, because the preacher continued to make grand gestures of displaying his Catholicity.

Rabus was free to prove that the miracles that have occurred within the Catholic Church are godly. Like Eisengrein, he recounts a number of miracles worked in the early and medieval Church to demonstrate both the antiquity and continuity of God's

intervention. But he also decries the complete lack of godly miracles in the Lutheran tradition: after more than fifty years, Rabus charges, the reformers had failed to produce any dramatic affirmations such as appeared with such abundance in the Catholic tradition. Moreover, despite frequent attempts by the Lutherans to exorcise evil spirits, their results had not proved lasting. This was hardly surprising, he reasons, since they stand outside the true Church and its apostolic succession; they are thus both deluded by Satan and lacking the raw materials to combat him. As a consequence of their failed exorcisms, they perceive the devil's power to be greater than it really is. To demonstrate his point, Rabus includes stories of Lutheran exorcisms, two of which involve Luther himself. In one case, a possessed girl was brought from Meissen to Wittenberg for Luther to exorcise. Try as he might, Luther was unable to release the woman from her torturer. The message of this incident, Rabus explains, is clear. Even Luther was unable to bend the devil to his will.

Conclusion

Propaganda was a pervasive tool during the Reformation Era for both Protestant ideology and Catholic ideology. Both sides attempted to create images of the other as the Devil through song, printed word, sermons, and art. This extensive use of art as propaganda helps to preserve the popular history of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. The use of propaganda in discrediting an opponent, the themes used in the propaganda, and the lives of three propagators of propaganda are all reminders to us of the power of propaganda. When used effectively, propaganda can educate, entertain, and sway the emotions of the reader. Propaganda is truly a powerful means of swaying public opinion.

Appendix 1

Nun treiben wir den Babst hinaus

Now we drive out the pope
from Christ's church and God's house.
Therein he has reigned in a deadly fashion
and has seduced uncountably many souls.

Now move along, you damned son,
you Whore of Babylon.
You are the abomination and the Antichrist,
full of lies, death and cunning.

Your indulgence, bull and decree,
now they receive their seal in the toilet.
Thereby you stole the good from the world,
and defiled Christ's blood as well.

The Roman idol is cast out.
We accept the true pope.
He is God's Son, the Rock and Christ
on whom His church is built.

He is the sweet highest Priest,
who was sacrificed on the Cross.
He shed His blood for our sins,
true indulgence flowed from his wounds.

He rules His church through his word,
God the Father Himself invests Him with power.
He is the head of Christianity,
to Him be all praise and glory for eternity.

As dear summer goes past,
grant us Christians joy and peace.
Give us a fruitful year, Lord,
and preserve us from pope and Turks.

Appendix 2

Ach Benno du vil heilger man

(verse four)

O Luther, you most evil man,
what has Bishop Benno done to you
that you enjoy desecrating him so,
more than all the others?
You wish to deprive him of his honour,
you truly will not give up.

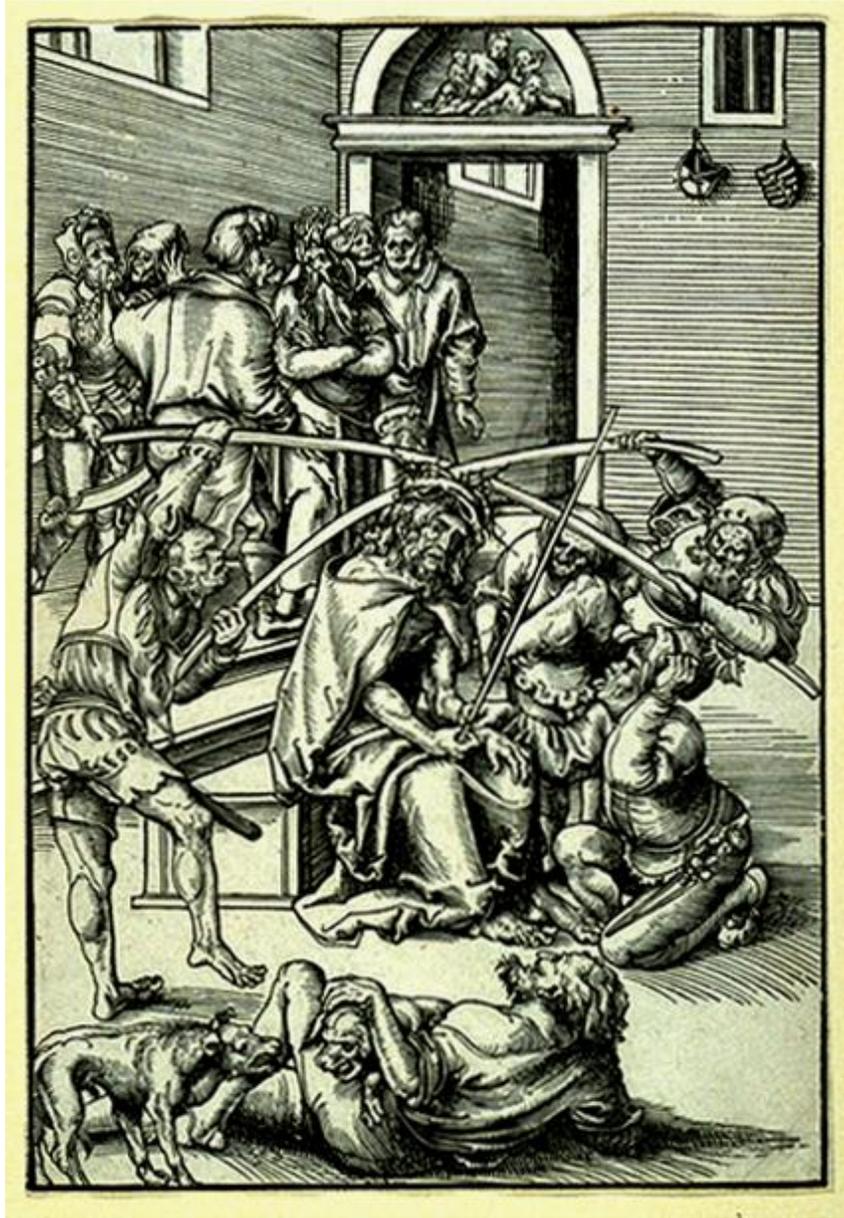
Appendix 3

Examples of woodcuts by Lucas Cranach the Elder



from *Passional Christi und Antichristi*, 1521.

Examples of woodcuts by Lucas Cranach the Elder (cont.)



Christ Crowned with Thorns, 1509.

Resources

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