

Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture

Edited by Peter Burke and Ruth Finnegan

This series is designed to address the question of the significance of literacy in human societies; it will assess its importance for political, economic, social and cultural development, and examine how what we take to be the common functions of writing are carried out in oral cultures.

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FOR THE SAKE OF SIMPLE FOLK

Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation

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2

IMAGES OF LUTHER 1519-25

In any discussion of the Reformation, the first name mentioned is invariably that of Luther. The first mass awareness at the beginning of the 1520s that some great religious upheaval was under way was linked to his person. It is, therefore, most important to ask how Luther was depicted or represented during these years. We can trace numerous published Luther portraits from the early 1520s.¹ Allowing for variations and modifications, there were no less than twenty-six different versions. Luther also appears in nineteen illustrations, that is, depictions containing a narrative element or some form of action which includes other figures besides Luther. He features as well in decorative borders of several titlepages, although the overall effect is intended to be more than merely 'decorative': for example, where Luther points to the risen Christ in another part of the border.² These depictions can be used to analyse the semiological importance of Luther's image during the decisive early years of the Reformation.

We shall deal first with the portraits. The earliest known representation of Luther dates from 1519 (ill. 2). It appears on the titlepage of a published sermon, which Luther had originally delivered when attending the Leipzig Debate, and was probably produced as a result of widespread interest in the event.³ Luther is set in a tondo, wearing the beret and gown of a doctor, with a shield containing his heraldic rose. It has little claim to be a likeness, and he is identified only by the inscription in mirror image around the edge as 'Doctor Martin Luther, Augustinian of Wittenberg'. The doctor's cap and gown, and the gesture of the left hand show him to be the disputant at Leipzig, while the Debate is also mentioned in the sermon's title. The tondo form and the mirror-image inscription suggest that it could have been copied from a medal commemorating the Debate.⁴

The second-oldest known portrait is less ambiguous in intent, an engraving by one of Luther's close friends, the Saxon painter Lucas Cranach, showing him as an Augustinian monk with a large tonsure, looking right (ill. 3).⁵ A Latin epigram praises Luther with a purely humanist sentiment: 'Lucas' pen portrays the mortal features, Luther himself the eternal image of his spirit.' Here we have a simple combination of a visual sign and a linguistic message. The tonsure and cowl shows that he is a monk, the Latin epigram identifies him as Luther and claims to present an exact depiction, the 'mortal features'. Both the choice of an engraving, rather than the more popular woodcut, and of a Latin inscription suggests that it was aimed at a limited audience. How-

ever it may have had a deliberate propagandist purpose, perhaps intended as a reply to the rumour that Luther's likeness had been burned publicly in Rome.⁶ If Luther was but a mortal being whose life might easily be snuffed out, his spirit would nonetheless live on. This shows excellently the signifying power of such a simple composition, where the purpose of the whole is far more than the sum of the individual parts. It is an iconic sign, that is, it presents the likeness of Luther; it is an indicative sign, indicating that he is a monk; finally, it is also a symbol of his immortality, thus establishing his ideological significance.⁷

Similar humanist sentiments appear with two other portraits. One is a better-known Cranach engraving dated 1521, showing Luther in a cowl and doctor's beret (ill. 4). The other, also from 1521, shows him as a monk leafing in a book, framed in a niche (ill. 5). Both carry the same connotations as illustration 3, but extend the denotation by identifying him as a doctor and by linking him with the Bible. With slight variations, these are three signs which recur in all depictions of Luther: as monk, as doctor, as man of the Bible. So powerful are these signs that they identify Luther even when any likeness is lacking. Signifier and signified are so fused that any resemblance is unnecessary. The connection can be as oblique as in illustrations 6-7; indeed, as can be seen in some of the examples discussed below, the iconic link was weak as often as it was strong.

Ein Sermon gepredigt zu Leipzig uffm Stifft am tag Martij in pau

him puch. Jar durch den vorleser war Doctor in
Martino Luther aufsteher zu Wittenberg mit
ent (dubblig) epistler erricht / so im von
gleich in seiner abgefügten segensföhen
spruch in der güt der Disputation zu
Leipzig gehalten.



Ein Sermon gepredigt zu Leipzig
uffm Stifft am tag Martij in pau



- 2 Titlepage of Luther, *Ein Sermon gepredigt zu Leipzig* (W. Stockel, Leipzig, 1519), GNM
- 3 Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Luther as Monk* (1520)

The basic forms of the Luther portrait are fully established with the early examples. He is shown in a tondo, framed in or before a niche, or else standing against a free background. He may be shown bust or half-length, later full-length, sometimes turned to the left or the right, sometimes directly facing the viewer. The tondo found comparatively little use, appearing only in two book illustrations and two single sheets. The free-standing portrait of the monk was used twenty-nine times in thirteen variations. It appears twice as an engraving, three times as a single-sheet woodcut and twenty-four times in book illustrations. Thirteen of these emanated from Strassburg, four from Augsburg and one from Colmar. The portrait of Luther in the niche was also used twenty-nine times in thirteen variations, including one engraving and five single-sheet woodcuts or broadsheets. The twenty-two which can be traced to their place of publication appeared in twelve editions from Augsburg, five from Strassburg, three from Basel, one from Nuremberg and in one Low German edition. Although based on the likeness supplied by Cranach, the majority of these depictions of Luther as monk were published predominantly in two south German centres, Strassburg and Augsburg.⁸

The three signs identifying Luther as a monk, as a doctor and as a man of the Bible establish a code of recognition for images of Luther, in which they may appear separately or in combination. The most widely used was that of Luther as monk, with or without the Bible, although the Bible appears in over



Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Luther in Doctor's Cap* (1521), BM



Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Luther as Monk in Niche*, GNM

two-thirds of all Luther portraits or illustrations.⁹ Luther in his doctor's cap appears only nine times in the portraits, but this image recurs more frequently in the illustrations to be discussed later. Four of these portraits were engravings, four were book illustrations, one was a single-sheet woodcut.¹⁰ This code of recognition points to an important feature of Luther's early image. Cranach's portraits, with their humanist tributes to Luther's immortality, did not set the tone of the connotations which began to cohere around the figure of Luther. The emphasis, rather, was religious.

This is confirmed by the early pamphlets about Luther. Luther as monk is he who lives a pious Christian life; as doctor he who is a pious teacher; as a man of the Bible he who points to saving doctrine. All three are emphasised in Luther's defence as early as 1520, in a pamphlet which argues that he must instruct the folk by virtue of his office as a monk (*ain ordensmann*), a preacher and a doctor.¹¹ These features are stressed repeatedly in the pamphlets of 1521-2 dealing with the 'Luther affair'. The Luther portraits thus form part of a powerful and extensive religious sign, based on the most popular image, Luther as monk. However, the portraits go on to develop a more intricate assembly of images around the general notion of Luther as a man of religion.

First, he is shown as inspired by the Holy Spirit (ill. 8). To a woodcut showing him framed in a niche, an extra block has been added above his head,

Bunder Michael Sryel Zinguliner von Eßlingen.

Von der Ehrfürmigen / rechtbes
gründten der Doctoris Martin Lutheri / ain
Gebrauch / sichen fürnlich Lieb / Haupt
seyner neben anfügung.

In halber Deyen
Thyn.



Ich will mich mit
fleiß /
Gottes gnad ich
pursch /
se mich laßz tuns
lich /
Gott ligh die Engel

Der wort hymus
ach /
Der wort nite
ach /
Christlichen
flacht /
am der wende



6 Titlepage of M. Stiefel, *Von der Christfermigen . . . leer*
Doctoris Martin Luthers (1522), BL

7 Illustration in Eberlin von Günzburg, *History Jacob Propsts*
(Colmar, 1521)

containing a dove symbolising the Holy Spirit. This can be dated as 1520 or early 1521, and the sign of the dove was used in five other depictions.¹² The visual connotations attached to Luther here are also echoed in printed pamphlets, which stress that God has enlightened him, inspired him or chosen him to speak out against falsehood. The niche alluded to this indirectly, for in the middle ages it was usually a backdrop for Evangelists or significant theologians. The dove, however, is a much more explicit sign to borrow from the medieval iconography of the saints. The dove, as the bearer of divine inspiration, was an attribute given to Church Fathers, in particular to Gregory the Great. The Holy Spirit was said to have dictated St Gregory's works into his ear, and this sign of divine grace elevated him above all other Church teachers. The attribute was sometimes given to other great Fathers of the Church, for example, in Michael Pachet's *Altar of the Church Fathers* in Munich, which shows SS Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome and Gregory, all with the dove of divine inspiration.¹³ The connotations were clear enough, and it was only a short step from here to depict Luther as a saint.

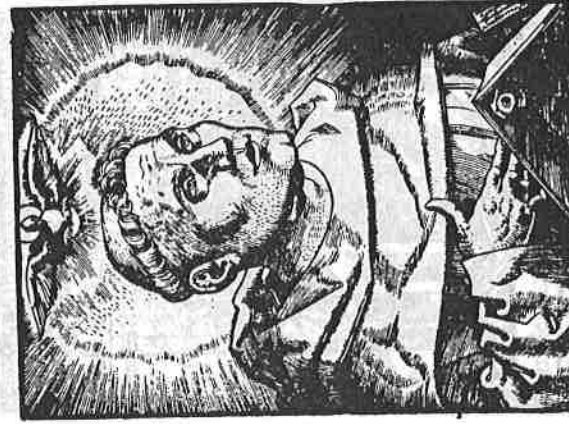
A copy of illustration 8 gives Luther both the sign of divine inspiration and the nimbus of sainthood (ill. 9). When it was used in a 1521 report of the proceedings at the Reichstag of Worms, the notion of Luther as a Father of



8 *Luther as Monk with Dove (1520?), BM*

the Church was underlined by an inscription calling him 'a servant of Jesus Christ and a restorer of *Christian doctrine*' (my emphasis).¹⁴ This was perhaps the most successful single version of a Luther portrait, appearing as a single-sheet woodcut, and in no less than nine different works. Sainthood was also emphasised in a 1523 copy by Daniel Hopfer of Cranach's portrait of Luther in his doctor's cap. By adding a nimbus, the artist gave a new weight to the original inscription, now translated into German (ill. 10). The most extreme development of this theme is found in the titlepage of Luther's edition of the New Testament, published by Hans Hergot in Nuremberg in 1524-6 (ill. 11).¹⁵ Luther is seated in his doctor's cap and gown, writing in his study, with a crucifix before him, and has the nimbus and the dove. Considering the work in which it appeared, the identification as a Father of the Church, or even an Evangelist, could not be more explicit. This depiction extended its influence beyond Germany, appearing as an illustration in a Czech edition of one of Luther's works (ill. 12).¹⁶

Such depictions reveal a desire to place Luther within the framework of divine history, and to single him out as a chosen tool of the divine plan. This is confirmed in pamphlets about Luther. These see him as raised up by God, or divinely chosen.¹⁷ For others he is a prophet, even a Daniel awakened among the people.¹⁸ A 1520 pamphlet, written by 'the student Laux



9 Hans Baldung Grien, *Luther as Monk with Dove and Nimbus* in BL 3906.f.119

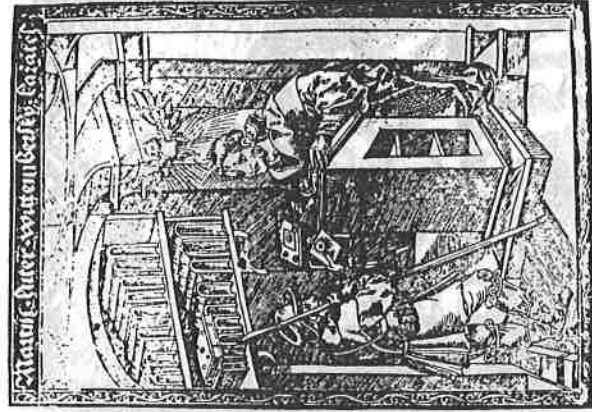
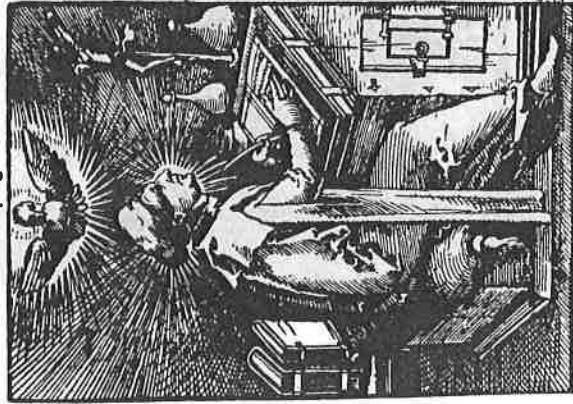
10 Daniel Hopfer, *Luther in Doctor's Cap, with Nimbus* (1523), BM, GNM



Gemigger', names him an apostle, chosen by God as a light for Christendom.¹⁹ A 1523 dialogue extends this thought further, calling him 'an angel, tool or prophet of God', just as John the Baptist was an angel sent to prepare the way of the Lord.²⁰ Here the term 'angel' is used in a general sense only, to mean a messenger from God, but there was another usage which related Luther to the prophetic literature so prevalent at the time. Thus a pamphlet of 1524 identifies him with the angel in Apocalypse 18.1-2, who is sent from heaven to overthrow the Babylonian whore and to break the cup of abomination from which all the kings and peoples of the earth have drunk.²¹

The apocalyptic note was made more explicit in 1523 by Haug Marschalck, who linked Luther to popular prophecies about the Emperor Frederick III. This eschatological figure was to return from the grave as the renewer of Christendom, who would overthrow Rome, chastise the clergy and recover the holy sepulchre.²² Marschalck merges many elements of this legend in a semi-allegorical passage about Luther. The holy sepulchre is guarded by monks and clergy, who attempt to prevent Christ's resurrection, but they are overcome by the 'Emperor Frederick', here in the figure of Luther's protector

Das new Testament Drüsch.



11 Titlepage to *Das new Testament Drüsch* (H. Hergot, Nuremberg, 1525)

12 Illustration in Czech edition of Luther, *Vom Anbeten des Sakraments* (1523)

Frederick the Wise. The door of the tomb is then opened, and Christ in the form of the Word of God rises again. The three Marys, who come to the grave seeking Christ, the holy Scripture, and who are told to go and proclaim his resurrection, are Luther, Melancthon and Karlstadt.²³ This is an allegorical rendition of the old prophecy, to which Marschalck explicitly refers, but he has no doubts about the divine and far from allegorical role of Luther. He gives an acronym of Luther's name which not only singles him out as a prophetic figure, but also links him to the widespread literature on the Antichrist:

L *Lautere Evangelische Lehre* (Proclaimer of evangelical doctrine – pun on *Luther* – *Lauter*)
 U *Überflüssige gnad des heyligen geists* (abundant grace of the Holy Spirit)
 T *Trewlich diener Christi* (loyal servant of Christ)
 D *az bedeut* (that signifies)
 H *Helian* (Elias)
 E *Enoch, welche den Entchrist verraten* (and Enoch, who expose the Antichrist)
 R *Rabi, das er ist meister worden aller schriftschender* (Rabbi, for he has mastered all defilers of Scripture).²⁴

In popular legend, Enoch and Elias were the two prophets sent by God to expose the Antichrist's identity, so that Marschalck has also assimilated Luther to this evocative realm of popular prophecy.²⁵

Sanctification of Luther reaches its apogee in a pamphlet published by Melchior Ramminger of Augsburg in 1521, where Luther's trial at Worms is described in terms of Christ's Passion. This pamphlet, which exists in two versions, the other also published in Augsburg in 1521,²⁶ indicates how important pictorial representations of Luther were thought to be at the time. The parallel between the Passion and Luther's hearing at Worms is kept as close as possible until the crucifixion, where Luther is not executed, but his books are burned instead. However, a Dominican pins up a picture of Luther to be burned, over which is written: 'This is Martin Luther, a teacher of the Gospel.' Here the parallel is once more made exact, for burning in effigy was regarded as a magical means of harming the person represented. To the left and right of Luther are burned (depictions of?) Hutten and Karlstadt, but Luther's picture miraculously refuses to burn, until placed in a container of pitch, which melts into the flames. This book-burning was wholly fictitious, but it has all the truth of incipient myth, and while the further implied parallel, Luther's resurrection, is not referred to in this work it was explicitly drawn in others.

In 1523 Heinrich von Kettenbach published an evangelical version of a prognostic: small popular works issued annually with predictions for the coming year or years. These formed the backbone of popular prophetic literature, and in the manner of the genre, Kettenbach foretold Luther's

resurrection, linking him again to the Antichrist literature:

Luther will be as if buried, and the tonsured ones will guard the grave, but he will rise again afterwards (like Christ), and will alarm the antichristian horde of Gog and Magog, and defeat a great part of it, and will become valued again throughout the world, as Christ's belief was, when he rose again.²⁷

These sentiments also found expression in Luther portraiture. A depiction of Luther as monk, shown full-length and carrying the Bible, in the collection of Dahlem, has the inscription around its four sides: 'Luther has suffered under the papacy, and has risen again in the hearts of Christians.'²⁸

How are we to interpret these views of Luther? They certainly show an attempt to present him as a figure embodying the religious yearnings of many Germans during 1520-1. They also show that he has been assimilated into a traditional religious framework, creating a hagiography through which he appears as a living saint. The Passion parallel is especially significant here. It cannot be regarded merely as allegory, or as a version of the pious medieval tradition of conforming to the life of Christ.²⁹ The Reformers themselves took so many pains to point out that exaggeration of this tradition had led to mere humans being placed almost on the same level as the divinity, or at least to attributing to them such exceptional sanctity that they seemed to challenge the role of Christ as sole mediator. The aura of sanctity cast around Luther certainly approached this level. Here visual depictions were both more suggestive and less open to qualification than printed pamphlets. Even the use of simile or allegory could be ignored by many of Luther's supporters, and his glorification taken literally.

In some accounts Luther's journey to Worms was recorded like the legend of a medieval saint. One chronicler recorded how the church timbers began to crack under the weight of those gathered to hear him preach in the Erfurt Augustinian church. Luther is said to have stilled the danger with a word, and the chronicler commented: 'This was the first sign that Luther worked, and his disciples came to him and served him.'³⁰ In his *History of the Reformation*, written in 1546, Friedrich Myconius, who had been present at Luther's progress through Erfurt, wrote how the Devil had torn down stones from the gables to prevent Luther preaching in nearby Gotha.³¹ Such later testimony might be called into question had the papal legate Aleander not reported indignantly about a similar adulation of Luther in Worms. As he stepped down from the cart on his arrival, a priest touched him three times on his garment, and boasted thereafter that he had a relic of the greatest of the saints. One man even argued before a crowd on the marketplace that Luther was without sin, had never erred, and was therefore to be placed above St Augustine.³²

Portraits of Luther played an important part in this adulation, and Aleander was incensed over their wide distribution in 1521. He mentioned

one showing Luther and Hutten side by side as defenders of Christian liberty,³³ but two others correspond to the religious sign discussed above. One showed Luther with the nimbus of sainthood, the single-sheet version of illustration 9; the other was perhaps a version of illustration 11. The former was still circulating in 1522, when the Nuremberg Council prohibited its sale.³⁴ There was, without doubt, an extension of late-medieval veneration of the saints onto Luther, and it seems that the widespread demand for Luther's portrait was influenced by a desire for the *heilbringende Schau* discussed in the previous chapter. Without doubt, Luther was well on the way to becoming the object of a new cult, what both he and Erasmus called a 'sect' when applied to the followers of medieval saints. The growing usage of the term 'Lutheran' as a partisan label during the years up to 1525 confirms this view.³⁵

The pamphleteers, at least, soon tried to correct the impression that adhering to Luther's doctrine meant adhering to a new sect. *A Dialogue between a Father and Son concerning Martin Luther's Teaching* of 1523 is typical. The father is won over by his son to Luther's belief, and avows that he will be a good 'Martinist', but he quickly corrects himself and states that one should be not Martinist but Christian.³⁶ Another dialogue of 1523 contains a similar admonition to be 'not Lutheran but Christian'.³⁷ But this was only a marginal modification to the myth developing around Luther's figure. Myth is understood here in Roland Barthes' sense, in which Luther becomes a sign which itself constitutes a signifier in a more elaborate semiological system.³⁸ We may see this by examining Luther illustrations, where the sign created by the portraits is placed in a narrative context.

One or two of these illustrations contain the simplest narrative action, as in illustration 12, where Luther is greeted by a messenger. Similar is the title-page of a 1524 pamphlet describing the Devil issuing a challenge to Luther. Two versions of this titlepage simply show Luther seated in his study as a messenger from hell enters through the door.³⁹ Such depictions, however, show a narrative development from illustration 12, for Luther is confronted by an adversary. Indeed, the most common form of narrative shows Luther as protagonist. Its lowest level of polemic is found in the titlepage to a report of Luther's hearing at Worms (ill. 13), where he is denoted by the familiar figure of the monk, but where there are few other connotations. It is more complex in illustration 14, where Luther is present at the burning of his books before the pope, cardinals and clergy. Luther confronts the pope and the clergy in another report of the proceedings at Worms, published in Augsburg in 1521 by Melchior Ramminger (ill. 15). In both cases, the literal truth of the encounter matters less than the fact that the Church authorities are established as Luther's true adversaries. (Luther never confronted the pope, nor were his books burned before the pope and his cardinals.)

It is illuminating that a simple juxtaposition can change the way in which a work can be read. Ramminger had used the same block for another work that

same year, to show the pope in league with the Devil (ill. 16). For the Luther illustration, the left half of the block was cut away, and the figure of Luther as monk inset on another half-block in its place: collaboration thus becomes antipathy. This reveals how quickly the Luther image had become a schema which propagandists could adapt to their purposes.

Two paradigms of Luther's adversaries emerge in these illustrations. One is the Devil, the other the pope and the clergy; the two could easily be merged. This occurred in very simple form in a 1521 pamphlet attacking Luther's opponents, by Mattheus Gnidius, where the Devil is shown as a crouching beast dressed in a monk's habit (ill. 17). Luther is depicted full-length, holding the book and facing the reader directly. The arrangement of shapes is very effective here. Luther is a solid, vertical figure, feet spread apart, firmly facing the reader, strongly contrasted with the horizontal, crouching, bestial form of the monk demon which faces sideways. Luther appears firm but placid, the demon angrily breathes fire and tears with its claws at a cowl. The spatial arrangement in which Luther is placed above this figure rounds off these contrasts with the suggestion of Luther's ultimate victory over his adversaries.⁴⁰ Two other examples which stress the theme of confrontation, *Luther*

as *German Hercules* and the titlepage of the pamphlet *The Lutheran Strebkatz* (see ill. 23, 43), will be discussed below.

Let us turn our attention to illustrations with more detailed narrative. Luther appears with Hutten and Johann Reuchlin as 'defenders of Christian liberty' in the 1521 titlepage of the *History of the Four Heretic Dominicans of Berne* (ill. 18). The pamphlet describes a notorious case of monastic fraud from the beginning of the sixteenth century, which involved a fake miracle. Luther had no connection with the case, but he is included here, possibly because some of those responsible for the prosecution of the offenders were among Luther's leading opponents. Luther is depicted in his doctor's cap in his role as adversary. He appears in this role in the complex titlepage to a Swiss pamphlet of 1520, *On the Old and New Belief* (see ill. 48), and again in the titlepage of a pamphlet sympathetic to the orthodox viewpoint, *A Game of Bowls*.⁴¹ In all these cases the depiction of Luther is a sign of his opposition to orthodox belief.

Other woodcuts reveal the steady accumulation of layers of connotation around Luther's image. The illustration known as *The Divine Mill* (see ill. 76) takes up the associations with the Bible established by showing Luther with a

**Ein vnderred des Bapsts vnd
seiner cardinelen zue im zu thun**
sey vnd das wort Gottes vnder zu tructen
ein teglicher sich darauß zu befechten.



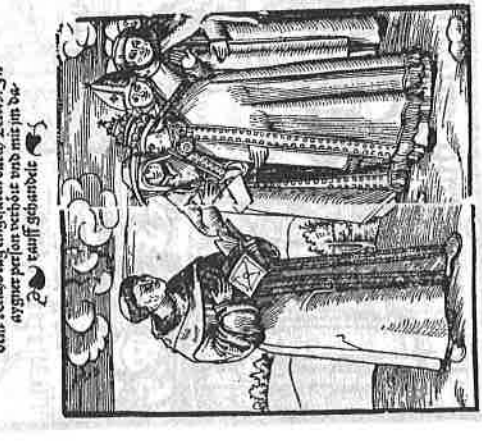
13 Titlepage to *Doctor Martini Luthers öffentliche verher zu Worms* (J. Nadler, Augsburg, 1521), BL

**Doctor Martini Luthers öffentliche
verher zu Worms im Reiches tag
vor Kay. Ma. R. ed vnd wider
ten am 17 tag Decembris im Taufent
Stuff dinstag vnd ainmbochour
figlichen Jar.**

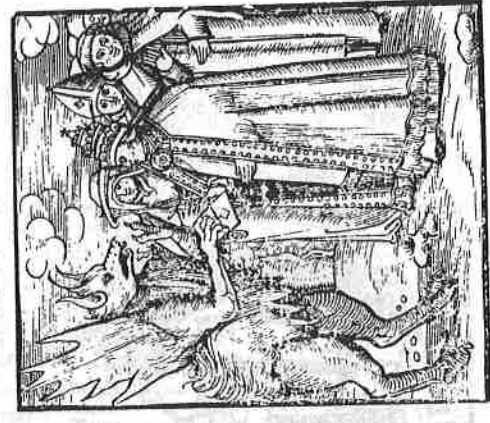


14 Titlepage to *Ein vnterred des Bapsts und seiner cardinelen* (1524?), BL

**Ain anzaigung wie D.
Martini Luther zu Worms auf
dem Xristen tag einigem durch R. 40. In
ayner person verhöret vnd mit im de
tuff geurtheilt**

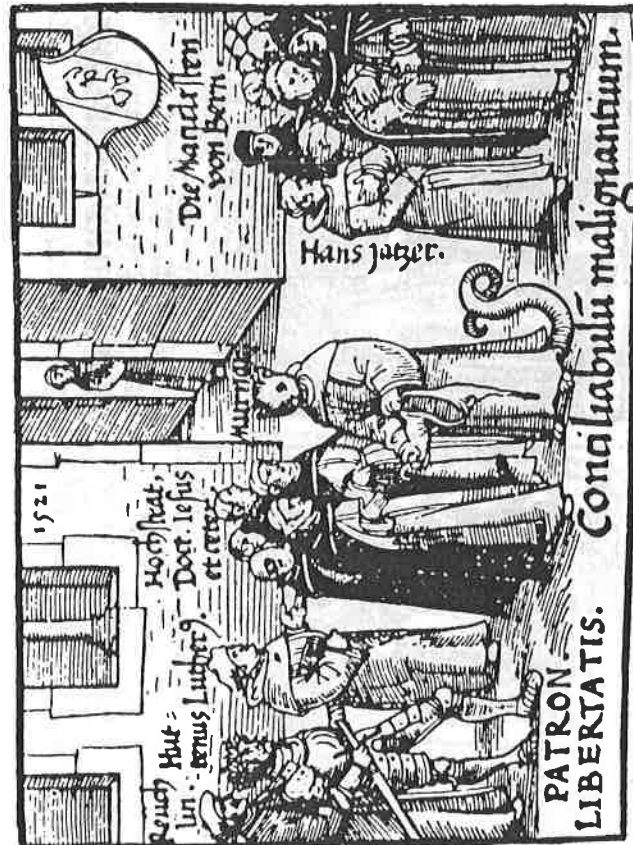


Ain großer Preiß
so der Fürst der hellen genant Lutter yet den
geoffenbart als D. Bapst Bischoff Cardinel vnd
der gleycher zu weylt vnd empheit. 42.



15 Titlepage to *Ain anzaigung wie D. Martinus Luther zu Worms* (M. Ramminger, Augsburg, 1521)
16 Titlepage to *Ain grosser Preiss so der Fürst der hellen* (M. Ramminger, Augsburg, 1521), BL

LUTHERVS.



- 17 Illustration to M. Gnidius, *Dialogi* (1521), GNM
 18 Titlepage to *History von den fier ketzren Prediger* (H. Preuss, Strassburg, 1521)

book. Luther is shown distributing the Bible to the pope and the clergy, who reject it with horror. A fragment of a coloured woodcut (ill. 19) links Luther and Hus as good shepherds. Luther, holding the book, stands beside the crucified Christ in the sheepfold. Hus stands outside, clearly an indication that he is but a forerunner of Luther. A reference in the accompanying text to false shepherds doubtless refers to a lost part of the woodcut, which probably showed the pope and cardinals as ravaging wolves. In the works so far discussed, this is the first iconographical reference to Luther's doctrinal emphasis on the crucified Christ as the sole mediator of man's salvation.

The next example (ill. 20) makes many of these references more explicit, although Hus is omitted. Here we see a pope and cardinal as wolves ravaging the flock of Christ, which seeks shelter around the crucifix. Luther, in his doctor's hat, carrying a pen and the Bible, moves towards them with a gesture warding them off. The pen is no doubt a sign of his writings in defence of true Christians. On a small hill in the background, two saints, each carrying a book, and perhaps intended to be Peter and Paul, point to the crucified Christ and the open page of Scripture. In the top right-hand corner, a goat and a wolf stand before a church building. This may allude to the biblical separation of the sheep from the goats at the Last Judgment. It may also imply that those who seek shelter in the old belief are goats, who will fall prey to the wolves when removed from the protection of Christ. The contrast between salvation and damnation is also alluded to by the rays of the sun which suffuse the left-hand side of the woodcut, while the right-hand side, towards which the wolves carry the stolen sheep, is clouded in darkness. The left-hand side is also rich with vegetation, the opposite side desolate and stony.

In the printed text Luther speaks in the first person, stating that the shepherds have become wolves in disguise. He has taught, preached and written about this, even at danger to his own life. Indeed, Luther's vulnerability to attack from the wolves is emphasised iconographically by placing him outside the fold. With this illustration, we can see evangelical propaganda reaching a more subtle and complex level than the near-hagiography of the portraits. It uses a wider range of signs and codes, which will be discussed in detail in a later chapter. Here we must note that it allows the presentation of a more elaborate message about Luther's doctrine.

This can be seen in a 1524 broadsheet, *Luther leads the Faithful from Egyptian Darkness* (ill. 21). Luther in his doctor's cap leads the faithful out of a dark cavern towards the light, where they gather around the saving image of Christ crucified. Above the cave, a throng comprised of the pope, the clergy and Luther's opponents attempt to prevent this. Using the paraphernalia of orthodox belief, they try both to distract the faithful from the crucified Christ and to drown out Luther's words. Inside the cave, the figures of an emperor and a king, representing secular authority, resolutely face away from the light into the darkness, completely disregarding Luther's message. The

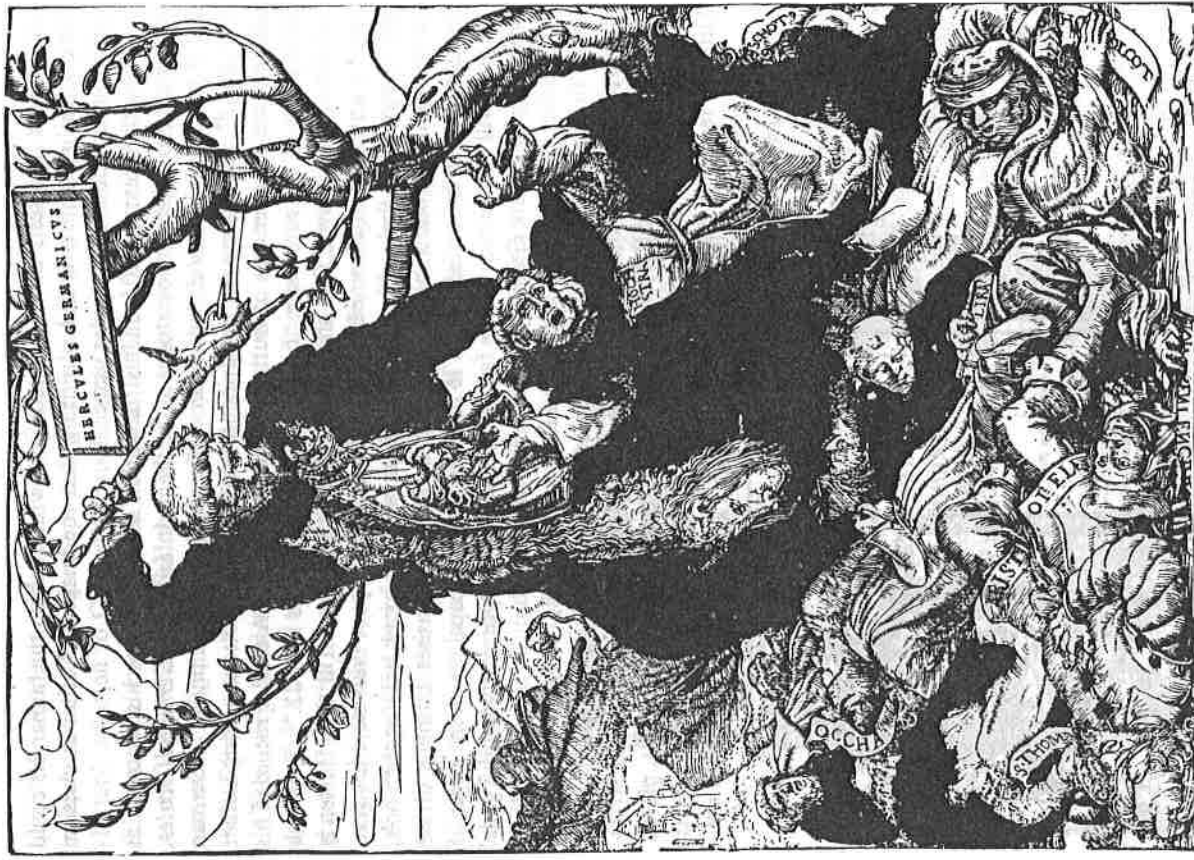
awarding the judgment to Luther's group (indicated by the inclination of the sceptre to that side).

In the printed text this scene is described as a dispute largely about simony, the sale of holy things as a form of financial exploitation of the faithful. The text placed in Luther's mouth makes clear that the godless also seek to profit from false belief. Moreover, they refuse to debate the matter, but by means of bans and prohibitions attempt to intimidate Luther from revealing the truth. The true judgment, however, is given by Christ, who condemns false belief and reminds the reader of his command to preach the pure Gospel. Christ's condemnation of those who persecute his prophets again underlines Luther's prophetic image. Luther is a teacher, an adversary of false belief, a proclaimer of true doctrine and one specially favoured by God.

In the Luther portraits we discerned one dominant image, Luther as saint, which constituted a major paradigm for propaganda in Luther's cause. We can now add a second, based on the illustrations. Luther appears as a teacher of true doctrine, an opponent of false belief and the expositor of the unchristian nature of the papal Church. Both paradigms can be directly related to distinct images of Luther. Luther as saint draws largely on the image of Luther the monk; Luther as teacher on that of Luther the doctor.

There was also a third image, which seems to be visually less developed in the propaganda: Luther as nationalist and humanist hero. The early portraits were given a humanist tag about Luther's immortality, following perhaps the Renaissance custom of portraying the great and glorifying the deeds on which their greatness rested. The niche was used in the Renaissance as a backdrop for portraits of famous men. Such forms of representation stressed non-religious, secular values, something far from Luther's purpose. It shows how humanists attempted to assimilate him to classical models, rather than to biblical or devotional images, such as the prophet or the saint. A good example of the type is the illustration *Luther as German Hercules* (ill. 23).⁴³ Luther is depicted in monastic habit with tonsure, but he has been given the signs of the classical hero Hercules, the lion's pelt and the club. Hanging from a rope through his nose is the pope, and with his club he smites down the cowering figure of Hochstraten. On the ground lie those already dispatched: Aristotle, Aquinas, Occam, Nicolas of Lyra, Peter Lombard (identified by his *Book of Sentences*) and Duns Scotus. Behind Luther, another monk flees in terror from the scene.

The Latin text fills out the classical allusions, to three of the labours of Hercules. Equated with the many-headed hydra are the various figures who represent pagan philosophy and the Scholastics who, like the hydra, grow another head as quickly as one is cut off. They are as wild as savage Cerberus, by which perhaps Hochstraten is intended. Luther is especially praised for his defeat of the triple-bodied Geryon, an allusion to the triple tiara of the pope. This broadsheet was produced in 1522, possibly from humanist circles close



Germanus Alcidem tollentem monstra Lutheri
 Hec non horret impia Roma tuum?
 Nonne a deo natus ut triplicem fulgorem sacro
 Gerere posses? Hic laqueus cuncta capax
 Cerebrumque traxit: fuit quæ mole soporibus,
 Cerebrumque traxit: fuit quæ mole soporibus,
 Cerebrumque traxit: fuit quæ mole soporibus,

Excedit male fana cohorti, cui ceteros ipse
 Cedat: et iussu fertur hinc Hydra vocat.
 Quam igitur formæ agnoscit dominum? pa
 Tendit illi ad cuius latus manu?
 Enclitum spiritus: hinc fuit quæ mole soporibus,

23 Hans Holbein the Younger, *Luther as German Hercules* (1523), Zurich

to Erasmus. It attests the narrow confines within which the humanists could regard Luther, and it is not surprising that the image of Luther as classical hero found little broad popular usage.

The other feature of humanist depiction of Luther was his portrayal as national hero. There are overtones of the theme in *Luther as German Hercules*, for it was no doubt modelled on an earlier version of Maximilian as German Hercules.⁴⁴ The theme is most evident, however, in depictions pairing Luther and Hutten as defenders of truth and Christian liberty. Alexander recorded his annoyance at the rapid sale of such a picture in Worms in 1521.⁴⁵ Two such depictions are known. One shows both figures half-length (ill. 24). Hutten is clad in armour and crowned with the wreath of the poet laureate, his sword half-drawn from the scabbard. Luther is shown as a monk holding the book, facing right, before a niche. The text in Latin emphasises Luther's divine mission, but in humanist terms: if he is defeated by papal error, the anger of the gods will be aroused. In like fashion, Hutten's inscription invokes the gods, promising to restore Germany's golden liberties.

Another version shows Luther and Hutten full-length, the Luther depiction being that used for the Gnidius dialogue (see ill. 17). It found its most effective use in the titlepage to Hutten's *Dialogues*, which appeared in Strassburg in 1521 (ill. 25). The figures are used almost as title decorations, placed to left and right of the printed title. Both figures have Latin inscriptions. Luther's reads: 'I sing the truth'; Hutten's: 'We shall conquer, we shall con-

CHRISTIANAE LIBERTATIS



Numita caelestem nobis popore Lutherum,
Nolite diu manus facili uideri nihil
Quam si Pontificum crudelis depromit error,
Non licet uos impia turba deos.

Si qua fides Superis potitur flumine Dni
Iuppiter aut fides est si qua relictis pris.
Hic deus opprobriis reparabitur aurea quondam
Libertas. Nolite, Alia iacta diu est.

quer!' Hutten's comment refers to the scene below, where armed knights and mercenaries drive off the pope and a crowd of Catholic clergy, alluding to Hutten's solution to Germany's problems, an anticlerical war. The text above this scene also expresses Hutten's sentiments: 'I hate the church of the wicked.' At the top of the page, God the Father holds an arrow poised to throw at the retreating clergy, and David, identified by his harp, holds an inscription from Psalm 92.4: 'Arise, O judge of the earth, render to the proud their deserts.'

This titlepage portrays Luther and Hutten as proclaimers of divine wrath against the Roman Church. Luther has been assimilated to Hutten's programme, but the image of Luther on which the work draws is still that of the religious man who speaks the truth. This shows the strength of the paradigms of Luther as saint and Luther as teacher of true belief. In visual propaganda, the image of Luther as nationalist or humanist hero is usually subordinate to either or both of these, and the paradigm of Luther as humanist hero did not achieve any comparable popularity.⁴⁶

How are we to understand the use made by Reformation propaganda of



these paradigms? It is the function of the early portraits of Luther that they invest him with a kind of Weberian charisma, with an extraordinary quality by which he is set apart from other men.⁴⁷ Continual emphasis on his office as monk, and so a man of religion, and on his personal piety designates him as someone especially close to God. It was natural to present him as a saint, acting within the context of divine history. This propaganda image invested him with a special form of authority, identifying him as a prophet — in Weber's terms, 'a purely individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment'.⁴⁸ In this way he could be seen to break legitimately with the established order in the Church. By invoking a source of authority outside and above it, opposition to the Church is morally legitimate.⁴⁹ The logic goes a step further. Those opposed to Luther are also opposed to the source of his message, and since this is of divine origin, they oppose God and are in league with the Devil. We shall see in the following chapter how this theme was developed.

Finally, it is necessary to be aware that we are describing not the real-life, historical Luther, but the Luther of the propaganda works. These sought to construct an ideological relationship between Luther and his followers, providing powerful affective arguments to justify Luther's break with the Church and to induce others to do the same. Yet we have seen that this was not purely a propaganda creation, for there is evidence outside the propaganda itself that many people shared these perceptions. The propaganda both recorded such perceptions while it sought to arouse them in others.⁵⁰ In so doing, it attempted to touch many different levels of consciousness of the age. We shall investigate some of these levels more fully in later chapters.

3

ENEMIES OF THE GOSPEL

It is ironic that the most popular image of Luther during the early years of the Reformation should have been Luther as monk. From the beginning, monks were regarded as his chief opponents, and early propaganda for the evangelical movement was directed largely against the institution of monasticism. This is hardly surprising, for there was a long tradition of popular criticism of clerical laxity, and the humanists had already waged an energetic campaign against monasticism. It was only natural that the image of Luther as a man living a pious Christian life should have been juxtaposed to a picture of monastic vice.

Pre-Reformation criticism was blunt enough. An excellent example is a satirical depiction of monastic lack of sobriety, dating from the last quarter of the fifteenth century (ill. 26). An abbot reclining on a giant jawbone is pulled across the ice by nuns because he has become so swollen from drink that he cannot walk. Two others similarly laden break through the ice, and



26 *The Abbot on the Ice*, Albertina