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FORGING EVANGELICAL COMMUNITIES IN REFORMATION GERMANY AND SWITZERLAND

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Dedicated to the memory of my grandpa,
Leonard “Spud” Steinke,
who would have given me $50 for “passing”,
and my grandma,
Anne Frohlich,
whose storied and family-centred life came to an end as I wrote this thesis

CONTENTS

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Introduction

As reform movements swept across European cities and towns in the sixteenth century, ecclesiastical and intellectual leaders clashed over popular support for their polemical and apologetic causes. In the Protestant German-speaking regions where these clashes particularly intensified, influencing and persuading took on a new sense of urgency. Both the leaders and the lay proponents of Evangelical reform left few medieval traditions or popular forms of culture untouched as creative means of winning support were discovered and instituted. The particular topic of this thesis is borne of this context—a society determined to wield any form of popular culture at its disposal as a weapon for the sake of the salvation of souls.

In a late medieval world that was largely illiterate and visually-driven, theatrical performance had naturally evolved into one of the leading forms of popular entertainment. The stage only strengthened what can be described as a communal society, whereby a religious and social collective consciousness was the beating heart of cities and towns. With regard to the popular plays of the era, the medieval ecclesiastical tradition permeated theatre at this time, and many of the Protestants objected to what they viewed as over-the-top theatricality and religiously questionable elements that had come to define the performing arts. Yet, in the hands of the Evangelical reformers, theatre and other related media were turned to become efficacious armaments against the Roman Catholic hierarchy and institutions. What this paper will demonstrate is that the Evangelicals took this form of popular culture in the age of Reformation—theatre—and reformed it in a way that affirmed a community's religious and confessional values over and against the communities and institutions of the Roman Catholic Church. The theological agendas injected into play scripts were broad in scope; the Evangelical playwrights sought to create Word- and faith-based communities, implode and redefine the papal

church on Evangelical terms, and familiarize common people with scripture and contemporize the biblical stories for the sake of relatability and encouraging an educated laity. Of course, the Reformation stage was not only populated by Evangelical actors; the Roman Church had its own various responses with regard to theatrical media created during this time period. However, these uniquely Roman counters fall outside the calculated scope of this study: the sources examined here are a matter of delving into the minds of individuals who increasingly viewed themselves as new and distinct, and who hoped their audiences would gravitate to like-minded social and religious grounding. Thus, Reformation-era Catholic media—in that it expressed support for an already-established religious identity and status quo—is very much a distant source base for a study that explains how the stage was reformed to forge communities that were truly novel.

The first chapter paints the background of the thesis topic, where the history of the drama is traced from its origin to the forms it had taken in German-speaking Europe by the turn of the sixteenth century. Out of the liturgy and ritual of the early medieval church was the drama rediscovered and crafted, which from there had exploded during the course of a few centuries into massive theatrical undertakings in various ecclesiastical and festive settings. More importantly, in both religious and secular contexts, this form of popular culture grew in—and indeed reflected—a society based on collective expression, where performances were truly conjoint events, representative of communal values and perspectives. Particularly in urban cultural and economic centres, theatre flourished under the communally participative nature of these performances: peasants partook of festivals, craft guilds contributed both actors and settings to various productions, and ecclesiastics contrived and reworked scripts to perform. The stage epitomized a social and religious collective consciousness.

Next, theatre is discussed under theological and theoretical lenses—in the second chapter, the question posed and answered is: "Why drama in Reformation society?" The vast majority of the late medieval populace, by any modern estimation, were illiterate and uneducated. Surely linked to this is a characteristic of the times that people relied upon and preferred visual media for anything from contemporary editorials to entertainment. Therefore, performances, dancing, and song became effective means of persuasion as the stage was morphed into a pulpit. Quite often, scripts and skits were written almost as "visual sermons," and the theatrical devices at the playwrights' disposal—like contrast, exaggeration, and rhyme—could smoothly facilitate the process of making the intellectual discourse of leading theologians accessible to common folk. Laughter, mockery, and lampooning would help to reinforce an "in-group/out-group" mentality, placing the target of a community's ridicule on members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy.

The third chapter is devoted to theatre in the Reformation during its early and carnival years. Popular festivals—particularly Shrovetide in German-speaking communities—had borne the emergence of largely secular forms of theatre. During these city-wide celebrations, peasants and artisans turned the world "upside-down," inventing games and plays that inverted social orders and that were often used to lampoon and criticize social superiors—particularly ecclesiastical authorities. Martin Luther and other leaders of reform built a foundation of support on the common people in the beginning years of the Reformation, and the rampant anticlericalism of the time (as shown by early plays) would have been a fitting starting point between the reformers and the people they eventually came to champion. As for carnival, it was a time of utter debauchery and over-indulgence, and the play scripts for these occasions are not spared from this context; indeed, the crudeness and vulgarity of the carnival plays may even have been a fertile ground for criticism of certain groups or types in a playwright's struggle to leave

an impression on the audience. Attention is given to early carnival festivities across Germany that lampooned the papacy and its supporters, to satirical texts and religious dialogues that continued a theatrical tradition of piercing Roman Catholic identities, and to Bern and its intensely polemical *Fastnachtspiele* at the beginning of the Reformation.

Given the immorality and volatility of popular festivals—not to mention their perceived roots in papal traditions—it is not surprising that most events and performances of this nature disappeared in Protestant German-speaking Europe. Yet, the reformers still saw the efficacy of the stage in reform programs, and so another uniquely Evangelical twist on theatre rose shortly afterwards. As the fourth chapter demonstrates, many reformers found their answer to the problem of an unhinged theatrical environment in the precepts of humanism. Ancient literature and languages became of central interest to the reformers, and their enthusiasm in the classics spawned an outburst of creative playwriting that adapted biblical stories to the style of the Romans and Greeks. The scriptures were contemporized in dramatic settings, making the plays both didactic and relatable for various audiences. At the same time, the clear-cut comedic and dramatic types of the classic genres were transformed in a way that still made community polemic against opposing groups simple and effective. Much in line with the opinions of a humanist like Philip Melanchthon, this form of theatre was used to educate students in Greek and especially Latin, while also instilling moral messages into the broader community.

As medieval stages are placed under an analytical light, one characteristic immediately jumps out to modern observers: how very "un-theatre-like" this theatre could be! Often, performances lacked an actual script or recognizable plot, their length spanning over days or weeks rather than hours, and certainly had no box offices for purchasing tickets or seats. One historian's remark leads the plunge into a study of theatre during this time: "If we are to

approach the drama of the Middle Ages intelligently therefore we must first dismiss all our own contemporary notions of what a theatre should be and how a play should be written."[1] During the centuries immediately following the drama's revival, the close link forged between the stage and religious settings blurred the line between actor and audience, while during the later medieval centuries, the German carnival theatrics resembled more of a community game than anything else. Not until the composition of dramatic genres of the later sixteenth century does medieval theatre begin to resemble modern theatrical architecture. Rather than actors and audiences—though these separations did occur in various plays—the Reformation stage of German-speaking communities had theatrical participants. Therefore, breaking free from an understanding that demands rigid characteristics of the modern theatre is of benefit.

Definitions also need clarity moving forward. Most central to the thrust of this paper is the designation of terms used for the competing religious factions—such markers as "Evangelical," "Protestant," or "Roman Catholic." John Maxfield, in his study concerning Martin Luther's formation of an Evangelical identity, provides a useful overview of the term "Evangelical" that this thesis adopts.[2] "Evangelical" was a term used in the sixteenth century to denote the movement first led by Luther and his supporters (this dissertation often draws on Luther as a primary source for the very reason that he was the champion of the initial Evangelical efforts). As for "Protestant" identifications, this is a term that does not arrive until the 1529 Diet of Speyer.[3] A small group of German Evangelical princes—and eventually, a

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[1] Glynne Wickham, *The Medieval Theatre* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 4.

[2] John A. Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis and the Formation of Evangelical Identity*, Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies 80 (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2008), 3-5.

[3] A full translated text of the 1529 Protest can be found in "The Protestation of the Evangelical Minority at Speyer, April 19, 1529," in *The Augsburg Confession: A Collection of Sources with an Historical Introduction*, ed. Johann M. Reu (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1930), *487-98.

coalition of princes and free imperial cities—formally protested the annulment of a decree set out at the 1526 Diet that had granted the participating estates the freedom to regulate their own religious affairs (that is, in essence, to continue reforms of the new faith). In 1529, however, a majority of the Diet's members at Speyer reaffirmed the Edict of Worms; thus, it declared Luther and his followers as heretics and in effect legally halted future Evangelical reforms. The response of the Evangelical coalition challenged this instruction, and the term "Protestant" is then traced to these events. However, this study works within a timeframe where such labels are not ascribed to these religious camps, but still employs these terms based on clear identities emerging right from the beginning of the Reformation in 1517. Essentially, a lack of technical labels does not at all translate into an absence of communal identity.

This thesis also grapples with expressions of "popular culture." Rather than becoming bogged down in theoretical approaches, a working definition of popular culture shall be treated only in brief. Among others, definitions of popular culture can denote a mass culture as opposed to that of the elite, social custom, or even common superstition.[4] Within the boundaries of this study, it has little to do with elite versus mass, "official" versus subculture, or superstition; rather, popular culture is defined as the totality of media and activity that encapsulate the tastes and demands of the cultural mainstream, with no consideration of social or economic standing of its members. Consequently, the celebrated theatre of the Middle Ages is an exemplary candidate for being a specific form of popular culture. And certainly, during the medieval centuries, popular culture can hardly be distinguished from popular belief, which is a totality of expression regarding religious matters or the divine. For Reformation-era theatre and its roots, the

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[4] For a brief survey of definitions and approaches regarding popular culture, see Robert W. Scribner, *For the Sake of the Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation*, Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 59.

Evangelical reformers approached this particular form of popular culture cautiously, but also with an excited desire, seeing the stage's potential to shape the ideal Evangelical communities.

Chapter 1

From Liturgy to Drama:

The Medieval Stage and the Collective Consciousness

> And instruct [the performers] to play their part in such a way as not to excite laughter and mockery, but with piety and great attention in the fear of God. . . . Further, let them make no any alteration nor say anything which might make the spectators laugh. But let all things be done to arouse awe or fear.
>
> —Instructions to the director, a passion play from the thirteenth century

The Remission of the Classical Stage

As the Christianization of the Roman Empire began to take hold during the fourth century and continued on into the fifth, many of the cultural tokens of the Greeks and Romans were erased, and the vibrant forms of pagan culture submerged into the depths of antiquity. At the same time, these relics of the classical era would not survive the tumult of the centuries' political disintegration, as the unified empire in all of its glory was reaching its final days. Constantine had moved his political centre to the East, and Rome would not even last as the capital of the Western part of the Empire during the course of that half's short lifetime. With the marked change in political and religious values came change in the expressions of entertainment, of societal principles, and art.

One of the most prevalent forms of popular culture—the drama—was also sucked into this whirlpool of religious and political upheaval. The Christians targeted the theatre based chiefly on its ties to idolatrous festivals devoted to the pagan gods. Of course, the morally degenerate behavior of the mimes and the performers' habit of mocking Christian practice only added to the Christians' hostility towards the stage. In addition, the drama, at least in the declining West, would suffer from the political realities of the time, as the barbarians found little

need to preserve such activity.[5] The once-unified empire, split in two and Christianized, saw the cultural monuments of its people fracture and crumble along with it. The once-weighty voices of Sophocles, Terence, and Seneca faded into distant whispers, and throughout the early Middle Ages the theatre would remain in historical obscurity. It would not be until the tenth century that the drama would finally be resuscitated and slowly entrench itself once again as a celebrated form of popular culture.

Quem Quaeritis and the Revival of the Drama

Dramatic and theatrical elements had pervaded the liturgy and ritual of the medieval church, and these were the first murmurs of the revival of the drama. A liturgical tradition based on dialogue blended with calculated physicality and gestures of the clergy is enough on its own to detect the resemblances with staged performances; yet, what is missing in terms of identifying a clear origin of the theatre is its essential component: impersonation (telling a story through character representation and resemblance).[6] Therefore, the first true reappearance of the drama was found in a text incorporated into the liturgy known as the *Visitatio Selpuchri*, the earliest record of which is found in a tenth-century Benedictine manual, the *Regularis Concordia*, from a monastery in England (after which, its influence spread inwards to the continent).[7]

Set to music and rhythm, and embroidered with theatrical features, the text did what tropes (musical interpolations added to the liturgy) would eventually come to accomplish, which was to give embellishment to the worship service:

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[5] For a brief overview of the decline of the theatre in the Western Roman Empire, see Oscar G. Brockett and Franklin J. Hildy, *History of the Theatre*, 10th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2008), 60-62. The authors note the last recorded performance in Rome was in 549 A.D.

[6] Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 1:79-80.

[7] Thomas Bacon, *Martin Luther and the Drama*, Amsterdamer Publikationen zur Sprache und Literatur 25 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1976), 3.

Interrogatio:
Quem quęritis in sepulchro, o Christocolę?
Responsio:
Iesum Nazarenum crucifixum, o caelicolae.
Non est hic, surrexit sicut predixerat; ite, nuntiate quia surrexit de sepulchre.
Resurrexi.

Question:
For whom are you searching in the sepulchre, oh Christians?
Answer:
Jesus of Nazareth the crucified, oh inhabitant of heaven.
He is not here, he has risen as indeed he had predicted. Go, announce that he has risen from the grave.
I have risen again.[8]

The dramatic elements of this brief musical addition to the Easter mass were clearly drawn out in the *Regularis Concordia*, as directions for costume, movement, and gestures are recorded; the priests singing the text impersonated both the angel (giving the *interrogatio* and the second sentence of the *responsio*) and the three Marys (who deliver the first sentence of the *responsio*).[9] The last line ("*Resurrexi")* of the trope is used as a transition to the introit to the mass, where the whole choir then rejoices and sings of Christ's resurrection.[10] While important to recognize that the dialogue in this context was still considered during that time as *officium* rather than *ludus* (church office as opposed to game or play), it was this prototype of a drama that would develop into the expansive body of medieval church theatre.[11] Perhaps more significantly, this prototype reveals medieval theatre as a community event right from the very beginning. Though the

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[8] Quoted in Young, *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 201. The author includes a picture of the actual manuscript on page 203. The translation is my own.

[9] Bacon, *Martin Luther and the Drama*, 2-3.

[10] Lynette R. Muir, *The Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 13-14.

[11] For more detailed accounts of the Easter trope, see, for example, Glynne Wickham, *Medieval Theatre*, 29-33; Young, *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 201-22; and Muir, *Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe*, 13-16. Young and Muir note that the *Visitatio Sepulchri* needed to be detached from the rigid mass liturgy and incorporated into other offices like matins, which allowed more flexibility as true dramas.

community was limited and isolated in the sense that it was initially a monastic enactment, performance was being used to affirm a collective set of values. Monks became actors, cathedrals were converted to acting-spaces, and the "closed-community drama" contained an almost indistinguishable line between performer and audience.[12]

The trope had begun to be appreciated for its dramatic and even entertaining elements, and naturally started to evolve into new forms and new contexts. As Glynne Wickham notes, once the ceremony had been standardized in its monastic setting, three developments were likely to ensue: "the original ceremony may be embellished and expanded; similar ceremonies modelled on it may legitimately figure in the liturgies for other festivals; and the individuals responsible for creating them may develop a technical awareness of what they are actually doing."[13] Indeed, these developments are exactly what occurred in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as the Easter trope began to emerge and transform in Germany and across Europe. The Easter scene was lengthened and the ecclesiastical rubrics regarding them were made more complex, while extra-biblical characters began making appearances in the twelfth century.[14] Christmas, too, was a popular occasion for theatrical performances, as texts were composed to dramatize scenes of the Nativity story, and the Feast of the Epiphany, which immediately followed Christmas, was an opportunity to create scripts concerning the magi.[15] Therefore, by the twelfth century—particularly in view of the emergence of the Latin word *representatio*

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[12] Muir, *Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe*, 45-46.

[13] Wickham, *Medieval Theatre*, 40.

[14] Ibid.; Muir, *Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe*, 17.

[15] Muir, *Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe*, 16-17. Muir reports the existence of an elaborate late eleventh-century play in Freiburg, where the magi have expanded dialogue with Herod, and their journey from the East to the manger is traced.

(representation) as an alternative to *officium*—the drama had firmly been established, and the once-exclusive ecclesiastical offices of monastic communities started to resemble the Roman, largely-participative *ludus*.[16]

Corpus Christi and the Communal Stage

The pattern forming within this body of texts was that dramatic performance had come to be associated with the festivals of the church, encouraging devotion and penitence.[17] Religious communities would gather in expectation of the growing liturgical entertainment that had been incorporated into the major feasts and worship services of the church year. It was during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that the "embryonic plays [were] separated from the liturgy without losing their liturgical kernels, were much expanded, [and] translated into the vernacular."[18] Giving theatre a truly communal flavour in this period was a laity that became actively involved in the staging of dramas on the festival occasions. While the Latin Easter plays had been the initiative of clergymen, performed and sung as part of their clerical duties, a genre of vernacular mystery plays was created by laymen who supervised and participated in them.[19] The start-up of new monastic orders, particularly that of the Franciscans, facilitated preaching and teaching in the vernacular, as reforms during this time legitimized the use of mother tongues in religious contexts. The Lenten preaching of these friars also played a significant role in the creation of lay liturgical drama in that these orders focused on popular piety and vigorously

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[16] Wickham, *Medieval Theatre*, 40.

[17] Lynette Muir, "European Communities and Medieval Drama," in *Drama and Community: People and Plays in Medieval Europe*, ed. Alan Hindley, Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe 1 (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 1999), 2.

[18] Genevieve Kelly, "Theater and Theology in the German Reformation," *Lutheran Quarterly 25*, no. 2 (1973): 161.

[19] Catherine E. Dunn, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Drama, Medieval."

reminded the laity of the importance of repentance at Easter.[20] The scope and purpose of the drama broadened considerably in the hands of the laity, who displayed their awareness of the blackness both of their sin and of the crucifixion. Their plays during Easter not only depicted the celebrated visit to the sepulchre, but the actual passion itself. Grouped with the genre of vernacular mystery plays were the miracle plays—dramas which were driven across Europe by popular saints' cults. "In several countries," so notes Lynette Muir, "communities were formed devoted to a particular saint whom they honoured by plays based on their patron's life and miracles."[21] Thus, the mystery plays, much like any form of medieval theatre to that point, continued to affirm communal religious identities in the places in which they were performed in a number of ways.

From the beginning of the thirteenth century to the middle of the fourteenth is considered the period where these vernacular plays became the dominant form of theatre in the Middle Ages, virtually having replaced the purely liturgical dramas.[22] And indeed, within this genre of mystery plays was that type of drama far more popular than any other in medieval Europe—the Corpus Christi Play and its variations. The feast of Corpus Christi, first celebrated in 1246 in Liège, was originally intended to bring about increased veneration of the Eucharist and its redemptive power through more frequent communion, and to accentuate the sacrament's significance on Maundy Thursday, which was being overshadowed in the Holy Week liturgy.[23] Pope Urban IV had attempted to formally establish the feast in the medieval church in 1264, but

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[20] Wickham, *Medieval Theatre*, 58-59; Muir, *Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe*, 19-20. Wickham titles his chapter on this period of dramatic history as the "Drama of Repentance."

[21] Muir, "European Communities," 3.

[22] Brockett and Hildy, *History of the Theatre*, 79.

[23] Muir, *Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe*, 23.

because of his death the following year, its official inauguration to the church year would have to wait until 1317, when it was recommended by Clement V and instituted by John XXII.[24] It held particular meaning for the laity because it "honored that mystery which to the medieval mind gave meaning to existence (the union of the human and divine in the person of Christ and the promise of redemption through his sacrifice)."[25]

Given that the feast was an occasion for the laity, it was natural for the vernacular mystery drama to burgeon during this widely-celebrated festival. With religious communities eager to proclaim and communicate the power of Christ's crucifixion and the meaning of the sacrament that commemorated it, came the dramatization not only of Jesus' passion, but of events from the rest of the Old and New Testaments that surrounded it. The Corpus Christi Play in the German-speaking territories increased in size and complexity, as the Eucharist became the axis of medieval theatre in the fourteenth century:

> The ultimate goal of both community and church, to portray everything from Creation to Last Judgement in one great cycle, was realized in the *Fronleichnamsspiel*, Corpus Christi Play. *Fronleichnamstag* was the only holy day not pledged to the honor of a saint, martyr, or particular biblical event. Rather, it was designated . . . for the observance of pure church dogma: transubstantiation. The service was mostly processional in character; the consecrated Host, carried through the church and ultimately through the village or town, gave testimony to the physical presence of Jesus in the sacrament. Since this worship service was not limited to specific biblical stories within the liturgy, it was the most satisfactory nucleus for the portrayal of the complete cycle of religious stories. Such an undertaking often involved over a hundred characters in outdoor performances.[26]

The feast's popularity sprouted other related mystery plays found in considerable quantity in medieval Europe; alongside the multi-day cyclical plays of Corpus Christi portraying biblical

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Brockett and Hildy, *History of the Theatre*, 79.

[26] Bacon, *Martin Luther and the Drama*, 5-6.

events were processional plays of floats and tableaux and sometimes simple dramas staged by Corpus Christi guilds.[27]

Most pertinent to the present study is what these massive theatrical undertakings revealed about the medieval societies that staged them. Long removed from the simple Easter trope sung by the Benedictine monks, the theatre now encompassed communities in their entirety: lay and clergy came together on this renowned day that articulated communal values and collaboration more than any medieval drama that had come before it. To demonstrate this, one could simply point to the sheer length of these mystery plays, and the amount of time that a community would invest in regards to its own celebration of and participation within the dramas. The plays, which reached their height in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Germany, would regularly consist of between forty thousand and fifty thousand lines, and be performed over the course of not just days but often weeks.[28] The hours committed to writing elaborate scripts, building floats on which the texts would come to life, and designing the costumes and props that would ensure the vivid recreation of Christ's passion story and the events surrounding it should be translated as a measure of community involvement. And indeed, a central driving force behind the communal effort for a successful and efficacious Corpus Christi play cycle would have been the gravity of meaning underlying what the medieval towns and cities performed—that is, communicating their own sinful shortcomings and the brutal reality of Christ's suffering and death.

The *Fronleichnamsspiele* affirmed communal expression not only through the "what" and "why," but also through the dramas' "where," "how," and "who." With an eye to the location of their performance, one historian has noted that the early modern world was structured

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[27] Muir, *Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe*, 23.

[28] James A. Parente, Jr., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, s.v. "Drama."

in a way that brought communal settings to the foreground of medieval culture; information was disseminated in and social and religious dialogue occurred around public places (much against modern conceptions of private and individualized access to information or means of decision-making). The mind and mouth of the medieval societal body were marketplaces, churches, and the steps of a town hall.[29] Another historian, in a study of medieval processional theatre and its relationship to community, has described the European city of this time as a "living organism in which the streets are vessels carrying the life-giving blood of commercial enterprise and social interchange to all its members," and whereby city-wide theatrical processions were representative of various institutions within the community.[30] The mystery plays and the events they depicted were performed and proclaimed in these public, communal settings—large town squares, churches and their courtyards, the winding streets; any recognized locales of medieval culture could be morphed into stages for collective articulation. And the large crowds that gathered outdoors to take in these plays were a crucial component of this "communal self-expression."[31]

With regard to how the plays were performed and who exactly participated in them, a few last observations of the social and religious consciousness demonstrated within the medieval drama can be made. The costs of these dramatic cycles were substantial, and the extent of community involvement is attested to by the various participants. Parente writes, "The mystery plays involved vast numbers of the local urban populace; patricians and merchants not only

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[29] Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 8.

[30] Alan E. Knight, "Processional Theatre and the Rituals of Social Unity in Lille," in *Drama and Community: People and Plays in Medieval Europe*, ed. Alan Hindley, Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe 1 (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 1999), 100.

[31] Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*, 78.

financed the staging of many Passion and Corpus Christi plays, but they often bought themselves major roles and paid for the requisite props and costumes."[32] In addition, the funding for the vernacular mystery plays could come from the church, civic authorities, and other lay groups.[33] A unique aspect of medieval drama was the participation of craft guilds in staging Corpus Christi plays. Specific guilds took control of aspects within the plays that were exhibitive of their craft and lent distinctive meaning to their involvement; for example, blacksmiths portrayed Jesus in shackles at his trial, bakers assumed responsibility of the portrayal of the Last Supper, and well-keepers staged the events in Genesis concerning Noah and the Flood.[34] Of course, the audiences, too, were comprised of members from all social classes.[35] That the immensely popular Corpus Christi plays could find such variety in group involvement and funding, and transcend social stratification in such a way, is certainly a fitting final attestation to the theatre as a truly communal articulation of medieval social and religious values.

It is difficult to probe the historic minds of medieval theatre participants, particularly those of the laity, who fade into historical silence with limited written testimony left for future generations. Trickier still is the study of popular culture and determining how and to what extent various groups within medieval societies interacted with one another through popular forms of

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[32] *OER*, s.v. "Drama."

[33] Muir, "European Communities," 4.

[34] Glenn Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community in Reformation Bern, 1523-1555*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought 85 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 35; *OER*, s.v. "Drama." Ehrstine is citing Werner Mezger, "'Quem Quaeritis—wen suchen ihr hie?' Zur Dynamik der Volkskultur im Mittelalter am Beispiel des liturgischen Dramas," in *Modernes Mittelalter. Neue Bilder einer populären Epoche,* ed. Joachim Heinzle (Frankfurt/Leipzig: Insel, 1994), 222-23. See also Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 36, who demonstrates the importance of the guild systems in towns for performances and the transmission of popular culture. He notes that specific guilds even had their own "cultures"—patron saints, traditions, and rituals.

[35] *OER*, s.v. "Drama."

media and culture. However, the popularity of such dramas in the German territories suggests conclusions of the very real and very present collective identity of medieval communities. Outlets for expression, as dramatic performances are, should be particularly recognized when communities lend to them popular weightiness. Peter Burke deftly summarizes this point:

> If an individual produces innovations or variations which the community likes, they will be imitated and so pass into the common stock of tradition. If his innovations do not meet approval, they will perish with him, or even before. Thus, successive audiences exercise a "preventative censorship" and decide whether a given song or story will survive, and in what form it will survive. It is in this sense (apart from their encouragement during the performance) that the people participate in the creation and transformation of popular culture, just as they participate in the creation and transformation of their native language.[36]

So it was with the flourishing brand of mystery plays of the late Middle Ages. In this approach, one deduces that if plays were popular, it would have been indicated through a community's support and the collective acknowledgement of its own belief or value structures. The communities spoke approval of the voices and events on stage through their participative emphasis on the celebrations and occasions during which the dramas were staged. As mentioned above, theatrical performances of Corpus Christi and mystery plays in medieval Germany tended to be inclusive events, where social stratification is blurred by all-encompassing involvement of the community in the plays. The vernacular dramas on the eve of the Reformation were assertions in a forum of complex public discourse, and ideas could percolate freely between social classes in communal environments such as these.[37]

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[36] Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 115.

[37] Stephen L. Wailes, *The Rich Man and Lazarus on the Reformation Stage: A Contribution to the Social History of German Drama* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1997), 13; Wickham, *Medieval Theatre*, 109.

Enter the Evangelicals

With this history of the medieval theatre illustrated in brief detail, the Evangelical reformers' interaction with the stage that was to come would be sculpted from the context in which the revival of the drama occurred. So what intertwined the Reformation and the stage so closely? In addition to its communal nature, the drama of the Middle Ages was largely a child of urban centres. Until now, this study has used the word "community" in a loose sense to describe the clusters of medieval men and women who wrote, performed in, and gathered together to take in the popular plays. Yet, in the interests of specificity, the communities that bore the prevalent dramas—mystery plays, hagiographical miracle plays, whatever the genre—were most often cities and towns. One historian writes that "plays found their primary location in the heartlands of commerce and the centres of population mobility that offered the greatest opportunity to gather a crowd."[38] The cities were the cultural hubs of medieval Europe, as travelling merchants and artisans congregated where they could thrive financially, and as various national and linguistic groups found points of intersection in these places. The craft guilds established in urban centres sponsored cultural events and carried forward local traditions from one generation to the next. Indeed, as Lynette Muir has noted, medieval man—like the society as a whole—was strongly "clubbable;" towns and cities formed associations and societies for a host of reasons, whether artistic, financial, or religious.[39] The medieval theatre and its rampant popularity roots itself in these locales where creative endeavours were not only conjured up, but brought to fruition through environments of economic mobility and like-minded groups. Perhaps, then, it is not an exaggeration to claim that contemporary observers, both domestic and foreign, agreed that

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[38] Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*, 77.

[39] Muir, "European Communities," 15.

"the brightest spots in the German landscape were its cities."[40] In the years of the Reformation, the urban centres that so fittingly nurtured popular forms of culture also proved to be those areas where reformers could draw those same crowds and mobile audiences, thus causing Evangelicals to turn their gaze to the cities and their theatrical revelries.

More significant in the minds of the reformer is that the theatre finds its origin at the altar of the medieval church, which would become the central target of Evangelicals. It was a form of popular culture deeply embedded in the dogmatic and liturgical ground of the papal ecclesia, and to separate the stage from the church in the eyes of medieval participants would be a futile endeavour indeed. Though the term "secularization" of the drama is tossed around loosely to describe its transformation in the thirteenth century and onwards, there was little secular with regard to the intention of the plays that were being written and performed outside of strictly liturgical settings. Many of the vernacular dramas were still being written by monks and cathedral canons—often the only individuals who had the training to undertake such massive textual projects and to do so with the rhetorical and poetic skill needed for a successful production.[41] And because of its origin in religious celebration, with the medieval stage "there is a spatially close contact between performers and public which conditioned a style of performance in which the division between action and spectator was less clear-cut than on the later picture-frame stage."[42] As this study has shown, the voices at work in communal theatrical performances were—at the very least—partially representative of the voices of the towns and

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[40] Gerald Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, New Dimensions in History: Historical Cities (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1966), 4.

[41] Dunn, "Drama, Medieval."

[42] Alan Hindley, ed., introduction to *Drama and Community: People and Plays in Medieval Europe*, Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe 1 (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 1999), ii.

cities which put them on. Thus, for the reform-minded Evangelicals, the celebrated participation in plays like the *Fronleichnamsspiele* was a celebrated participation in the dogma of the papal church and the foundational principles of its liturgy and mass.

The corruption and abuses of the papal church had also begun to creep into the popular dramas of the late Middle Ages, a phenomenon that would not go unnoticed by the Evangelical reformers. In Corpus Christi plays, the Host was put on display, paraded about the town and city streets, and flaunted for the sake of marvel. This was a practice that mirrored what was happening inside the churches, where many parishioners would simply leave after seeing the Host's elevation, as this was the most efficacious act of the service for them.[43] The once-humble Eucharist had mutated into a spectacle in the hands of ecclesiastical leaders for a misguided laity. As the communities eagerly proclaimed their faith and religious values through the mystery and miracle plays, it was with an ever-inflating emphasis on the brutal death of Christ and the dramatic portrayal of his crucifixion. The development of the medieval theatre was indicative of a trend in the Late Middle Ages that placed the search for Christ's physical body at the forefront of the spiritual mind; of course, the stage provided a tangible means for giving spiritual and visual access to the corporeal aspects of the passion.[44] Likely most irksome to the Evangelical reformers was the ecclesiastical leaders' contribution of adding some extra certainty to the salvation of souls through the portrayal of Christ's passion—indulgences were contracted for play attendance and participation![45] From Strasbourg to Mainz to Vienna, playgoers were recorded to have received remission of their sins based on their participation; though forty days

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[43] Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 19-20; Robert Scribner, "Popular Piety and Modes of Visual Perception in Late-Medieval and Reformation Germany," *Journal of Religious History* 15 (1989): 459.

[44] Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 16.

[45] Ibid., 18.

was the most common period granted for remission, dramas could prove to be even more spiritually beneficial, as a papal legate once bestowed a 240-year remission of sins to the burghers of Calw for their performance of a *Fronleichnamsspiel* in 1502.[46] Without a doubt, the earmarks of the medieval church pervaded the theatre, and the reformers would plan their line of attack on this popular revelry as the ecclesiastical creature it was.

The pre-Reformation stage was certainly fostering what one scholar has called a "devotional spectatorship," where the relationship between viewer and viewed was intimate and often moving with regard to spectator response.[47] Therefore, as the Evangelicals set their sights upon medieval forms of popular culture and expression, the theatre would stand out as a significant target for reform. The stage was not only flaunting the traditions of the papal church, but communities were rejoicing and articulating in unison their approval. The cities and towns in which the drama thrived rallied around local saints' cults in miracle plays, abused the Eucharist at Corpus Christi in encouraging ecclesiastics to turn the Host into a spectacle, and participated in the peddling of indulgences during major theatrical events. The medieval stage was devout, it was well-entrenched, and it was collective and communal. To break the German-speaking people free from what the reformers perceived as the spiritual shackles of the medieval church, they would need to transform the theatre in ways that affirmed their own collective social and religious identities—counter-communities affirming the Evangelical messages over and against the papal church.

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., 19.

Chapter 2

Why Drama?

Theology and Theory of the Reformation Stage

> It has been mandated for all men to spread and propagate the Word of God our Father by whichever means possible, not only orally, but also through writings, painting, sculpture, psalms, songs, musical instruments, just as the Psalm says: "Praise him with timbrel and dance, praise him with strings and pipes." And Moses says: "You shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be and move between your eyes, and you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." Moses wishes the Word of God to be considered and pondered through the eyes; for this reason, earnest and moderate plays (not histrionic performances as earlier under the papacy) can render the Word more apt and distinct. For such spectacles strike the eyes of the masses and at times move more than public sermons.
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> —Georg Major, a letter to Joachim Greff, 1542[48]

Manipulating the Theatre Medium

Why drama? What could it offer to German communities that made accepting the new faith more appealing? As obvious as the point may seem, the Reformation was centred on exactly that which the common name given it suggests: reform. In a macroscopic historical lens, it was a reform of broad societal institutions and entities: church, state, and family and social life underwent significant change over the course of just a few decades. Yet, for the focuses of the present study, the Reformation also triggered remodeling on more specific grounds, as forms of popular culture and entertainment were targeted as part of broader reform packages. Just as the Reformation, in a wide scope, was not primarily a period of elimination or destruction, the reformers in a similar vein did not seek to abolish the cultural monuments of the papal church, but rather sought to restructure them to meet their own criteria of what could continue as acceptable societal practice. Important as the treatises and pamphlet literature of the sixteenth

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[48] Epigraph translated in Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 5.

century were for winning the religious sympathies of medieval men and women, the theological reform goals of the newly-formed Evangelicals would need to be realized through other facilitating vehicles beyond the printed text.[49] The published intellectual skirmishes of Martin Luther and his opponents quickly leaked on to new battlegrounds—those popular and cultural territories familiar to the common German people.

Glenn Ehrstine has aptly described the sixteenth-century Protestants as being "masters of media manipulation."[50] Indeed, means of entertainment and various medieval methods of transmitting information were viewed creatively as opportunities to capture the hearts and minds of the contemporary populace. As the reformers set their sights upon the medieval drama, theatre was quickly altered in such a way that it could meet their needs in both a positive and negative sense; that is to say, performance could be used effectively both as a tool for Evangelical community-building and as a weapon to demolish the firmly-entrenched religious identities founded on the papal church. The same galvanizing, reform-oriented messages one might read in a newly-printed pamphlet or hear in a fiery Sunday sermon were adapted to theatrical contexts, transforming the stage into a Reformation pulpit. Rather revealing, then, is the etymology of the English word "pulpit" from the Latin *pulpitum*—the very name used to describe the stage or acting-platform of Roman theatre![51]

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[49] One leading study, as an example which emphasizes the printed text as a driving force behind the Reformation, is Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[50] Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 288.

[51] Brockett and Hildy, *History of the Theatre*, 51.

Relating Through Eyes and Ears

With regard to the examination of media usage on the eve of the Reformation, some contextual issues of medieval society that need to be grappled with are at work. As has been noted, the printed word played an important role in the dissemination of new ideas during this time period. The creation of the Gutenberg printing press happened around 1450 in Mainz; thereafter, the press spread rapidly to the commercial centres of Europe, and eventually to the intellectual hubs wherein the prominent universities were found.[52] Mark Edwards reports that "in the Holy Roman Empire and the Swiss confederacy there were some sixty-two presses by 1520, and Cologne, Nuremberg, Strasbourg, Basel, Wittenberg, and Augsburg were the leading publishing centres."[53] The reformers capitalized on the newly-developed printing technology, and carried the printed word to its heights of sixteenth-century efficacy through that form of media which contemporaries simply called a *libellus* or *Büchlein* (a "booklet" or "little book"), or what modern German scholars dub the *Flugschriften* (literally, "the flying writings").[54] With Martin Luther leading the surge of printed pamphlets and published treatises, Reformation theology and messages of reform were widely circulated and discussed across German-speaking communities.[55] Yet, in late medieval society, the significance of printing should be examined

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[52] Robert Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe: Culture and Education 1500-1800* (New York: Longman, 1988), 156.

[53] Mark Edwards, Jr., *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 15.

[54] Ibid.

[55] One study mentioned in Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*, 17, estimates that approximately 10,000 pamphlets were issued from the presses of German-speaking territories from 1500 to 1530. Almost all were attributable to the Reformation, while approximately one-fifth of all texts were from the hand of Luther.

only in view of its historical and social context, which proves to be one that could not be exclusively or even prodigiously reliant upon printed text.

Thus, when theatre and performance are placed in the foreground of media analysis, two aspects of medieval society are worth particular emphasis: the culture at the time being visually-driven and, at the same time, one based on oral transmission. Robert Scribner has been a leading voice in the exploration of these features of medieval society and popular culture. With respect to the first, he demonstrates in a few ways the late medieval attitudes that gave considerable weight to visual modes of communication and expression: forms of popular belief increasingly featured the mysteries of Christian theology made observable through icons and statues; celebrations and rituals of the church accentuated visual piety and salvific acts based on seeing; and tangible access to the sacred was realized and displayed in the form of relics.[56] For the reformers in German lands seeking to amplify their voices through various forms of media, "a medium of communication which used visual symbols rather than print or which kept the number of a words to a palatable minimum was likely to reach much larger audiences than substantive literature."[57] Certainly, these very principles could be adapted to the theatre; a popular culture that was markedly visual opened up all kinds of opportunities for an Evangelical playwright.

In terms of the oral aspect of medieval society, this point has already been introduced in the preceding chapter, as it has been noted that transmission of ideas, information, and popular culture occurred in the central locales of the spoken word. Town squares, streets, and churches were made the forums of public discourse. In addition to these, for town and country, stood the

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[56] Robert Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, 3-4.

[57] Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe*, 18.

inns and taverns, where songs were sung, broadside ballads and pieces of art were posted on the ale-house walls, and its frequenters passed on rumours, criticized authorities, and debated the sacraments or the innovations in religion during the Reformation years.[58] And of course, a society almost entirely illiterate or semi-literate would have been one thoroughly steeped in oral modes of communication and of the articulation of values or ideas.[59] Many historians of the Reformation have accepted a study which places the overall literacy rate of Germany in the early sixteenth century at 5 percent, and the proportion of literate people in the cities anywhere from 10 to 30 percent.[60] To push the point even further, the cities themselves only contained about 10 percent of the Holy Roman Empire's population: "in other words, . . . the literate were a minority within the cities; and the cities enclosed a minority among the empire."[61] The theatre, as both an oral and aural form of popular culture, would once again reveal itself to be an opportune vehicle for facilitating reform packages in a society that could, for the most part, neither read nor write.

At this juncture, the social-historical studies founded on these contextual realities have a tendency to derail—at least in part. Difficult to deny is that medieval society was mostly illiterate and that social stratification was often sharp and broad in German-speaking lands. However, differences in socio-economic standing or disparity in literacy rates should not translate into having to use a two-tiered analysis model of popular culture or popular belief; more

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[58] Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 109.

[59] For more on oral culture in the Reformation, see Robert Scribner, "Oral Culture and the Diffusion of Reformation Ideas," in *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London: Hambledon Press, 1987).

[60] R. Engelsing, *Analphabetentum und Lekture, zur Sozialgeschichte des Lesens in Deutschland zwischen feudaler und industrieller Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart: 1973). See, for example, Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, 2; Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*, 37-38; and Paul Russell, *Lay Theology in the Reformation: Popular Pamphleteers in Southwest Germany, 1521-1525* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 11.

[61] Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*, 38.

simply, illiterate or poor does not mean uninformed or uninterested. Scribner demonstrates masterfully how the Reformation could only take root in a visually- and orally-driven late medieval Germany through the employment of media sources beyond the printed text.[62] Yet, even he begins to use words like "exploit" when describing how the literate reformers approached potential mediums of communication in relation to the lower, illiterate classes.[63] Language like this hyperbolizes the discrepancies in social standing, and usually from there makes stratification the primary scope in which medieval and Reformation history is viewed. Social historians of similar analytical patterns tend to describe the reformers' relationship to uneducated laity or lower-class people as being generally casuistic or calculatedly manipulative for the purposes of realizing their reform goals.[64]

This study suggests that the opposite was very often the case in Reformation Germany and Switzerland. In particular, the medieval theatrical tradition exhibits time and time again throughout its history an interested and involved laity, taking part in festivals and performances that blurred, at least to some extent, the social stratification that is so tempting for an historian to exaggerate. A two-tiered model of analysis that views the common people or laity as the victims of some sort of educated elite trivializes the active roles that various levels of this society played in the articulation of religious and social values (whether playwright, actor, spectator, or whatever the part). Steven Ozment argues that the appeal of Protestantism to common people was rooted in the laity's increasing awareness of the spiritual burdens and religiously spurious

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[62] Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*. The author's methodology places popular woodcuts and images as the focus of study, with these illustrations and prototypical comics being laced with reform messages.

[63] Ibid., 246, 248.

[64] This perspective, which continues to be a hot source of debate, is demonstrated most forcefully in Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978).

demands being placed on them by the church. In his words: "Protestant preachers may initially have attracted audiences because they spoke to pious laymen who, like themselves, were not only aware of the failings of the church and clergy, but also thoroughly persuaded that they had been doctrinally hoodwinked and religiously exploited by what was, in the end, unnecessary and untrue."[65] Or, more succinctly, "reformers and intellectuals . . . spoke to an informed laity unusually sensitive to the societal consequences of religious issues."[66] Therefore, the propagandistic potential of the theatre is realized not in an analytical puddle of negative connotations but rather in a way that acknowledges what the reformers viewed as opportunities for collaborative discourse. Reforming expressions of popular culture and belief was not a matter of manipulation for self-focused reform packages but a matter of the salvation of souls.

A Culture of the Word and the Stage as Pulpit

As the reform-minded theologians encountered various forms of medieval media at their disposal, it is best to begin by emphasizing, above all, that "Protestant popular culture was a culture of the Word."[67] The Reformation in this theological scope—driven by dialogue, by performance, by sermons, by song—would hit its stride in social and religious contexts that thirsted for oral modes of communication and the transmission of ideas. The tracts and written messages of the leading theologians found only a limited audience due to lack of literacy, but these very writings were consumed and distributed en masse through verbal means by captivated groups of literate clergymen. Scribner, writing of the pulpit and its crucial contribution to the

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[65] Steven Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities*: *The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth-Century Germany and Switzerland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 46.

[66] Steven Ozment, "The Social History of the Reformation: What Can We Learn from Pamphlets?" in Hans-Joachim Köhler, ed., *Flugschriften als Massenmedium der Reformationszeit* (Stuttgart: 1981), 171, as cited in Russell, *Lay Theology in the Reformation*, 9.

[67] Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 226.

persuading of German-speaking communities, states that "religious reform was first and foremost a powerful preaching revival. The first act of any community which developed an interest in the new ideas was to request a preacher to proclaim the 'pure Word of God.'"[68] Burke, in a similar way, describes Protestant communities as the bearers of "sermon culture."[69] The spoken word that would boom out cries for freedom from the chains of the papal church originated in written theological treatises, was amplified from the pulpit, and from there found new environments for both fresh audiences and fresh illustrations of reform ideas.

The transitions from pulpit to stage and from reform-minded clergymen to reform-minded playwrights had no insurmountable obstacles blocking them. Even for Luther, a clear parallel between preacher and dramatist was made:

> One may assume that the Jews had many such poems and plays [that is, the possible "dramas" in the books of Judith and Tobit found in the apocrypha], by which they prepared their feasts and Sabbaths and impressed God's words and deeds with enthusiasm upon their youth, especially when they were at peace and well-governed. For they had talented people such as prophets, singers, poets, and the like, who vigorously and in all ways practiced God's word.[70]

Luther here confirms the legitimacy of other didactic avenues within faith communities that extend beyond the borders of worship settings. For the Reformer, poetry, songs, and plays were blurred into a conglomerate of artistic forms which could all be used for teaching and preaching in German communities. In fact, Luther rarely made so sharp a distinction between poetry and play-text as most probably would, often using the medieval German terms for these (*Geticht* and

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[68] Scribner, "Oral Culture," 51.

[69] Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 226.

[70] Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Deutsche Bibel* (WADB) (Weimar: Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1883-), 12: 8.5-10, translated in Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 22.

Spiel) interchangeably.[71] In Protestant Germany, the theatre could certainly be of use, complementing and adding to the intensely Word-focused communities that the leading reformers envisioned.

Of course, given that the medieval drama was virtually a creature of the papal church and its traditions, the reforming theologians naturally expressed some degree of hesitancy in seeing its continued use in German towns and cities. Because of the incontestable link between mystery plays and the ecclesiastical liturgy and ritual, Luther tended to equate Catholic theatre and the mass. For him, both of these cultivated improper spectatorship and improper devotion by robbing any aspect of faith from the audience's participation from what could be spiritually useful; that is to say, the "affective aspects" of theatre and liturgy did more to evoke pity from a passive audience rather than impart faith and meaning to active spectators.[72] The critical moments of scripture for the Christian faith were mutated into either entertaining or emotionally overwrought experiences on the Catholic stage:

> In the dramatizations of the passion Luther felt the forces of Catholic dogma at work. In his opinion, the dramatic portrayal of this particular part of Jesus' life could only be inspired by sentimental conception of religion, and to him this was unacceptable. . . . Luther considered this preoccupation with the passion [rather than the resurrection] to be evidence of the Church's intentional falsification of biblical history.[73]

The dramatic tradition at the beginning of the Reformation was lacking a body of scripts and performances—and more generally, the spiritual depth of understanding—which could meet the demands and expectations of the new Protestant piety. The opening for an effective persuasive

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[71] Bacon, *Martin Luther and the Drama*, 69.

[72] Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 23-24.

[73] Bacon, *Martin Luther and the Drama*, 43-44.

device in the medieval theatrical tradition was clear, but the drama would first need to be transformed from papal creature to Evangelical apparatus.

Fitting for the reform-oriented playwrights accompanying a tradition of sermons and oral persuasion were the products of their craft—the play-texts themselves which would function as types of "visual sermons" for the Evangelical communities.[74] The voices of the reform movement advocating theatre as a vehicle for Reformation theology stressed the usefulness of conveying the Word through visual media. Given the large crowds that would gather for medieval theatrical performances, the plays were often more focused on visual aspects of production to begin with (costumes, effects, and set design took dramaturgical precedence over dense or lengthy dialogue, which would fall upon the ears of a minority in the audiences).[75] These visual sermons, free from questionable papal dogma and the abuse of the Eucharist found in Corpus Christi productions, did indeed meet the expectations of a Word-centred Protestant culture as the events of scripture interpreted through Evangelical eyes found fresh dramatic contexts in German-speaking communities.

The reformer playwrights viewed the drama as a simple way through which one could contemplate scripture visually. Dramatic performances tripled the media opportunities—printed text, spoken word, and visual image—for all types of audiences; the literate accessed written play-texts as Evangelical literature, but more significantly for the majority of people, semi-literate and illiterate, the plays would serve the common people through dialogue and images on

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[74] I have borrowed this phrase from James Parente, *Religious Drama and the Humanist Tradition: Christian Theater in Germany and in the Netherlands*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 39 (Leiden: E.J. Brill: 1987), 69.

[75] Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 19. Ehrstine notes that the emphasis on visual aspects also rooted itself in that late medieval piety which tended to focus on visual media as conduits of grace—in these cases, witnessing the passion.

stage.[76] For those who were not able to read scripture or the theological tracts being published by leading reformers, the Evangelical playwrights could weave into their plays didactic or moral qualities that would transform the grace-conveying and emotionally affective aspects of the medieval plays preceding them. Joachim Greff, one of the principal Protestant playwrights of the Lutheran cause, underscores the weight these dramatists placed upon fostering an active, introspective spectatorship through their play-texts. As he writes in 1542 in an introduction to one of his plays: "The play is not performed only that you might look upon it. Wood and stone could do that, too. Rather, it should serve to better people, so that, when the play is over, everyone can take something home with them and retain it for the rest of their lives."[77] The stage in Evangelical communities was an excellent opportunity to encourage a spiritual contemplation in the viewing participants; in the same preface, Greff writes, "A thing we see tends to penetrate our heart more deeply, and this is the reason such stories are performed. What we see leaves a more lasting impression with us than that which we have never seen, although faith must always come first."[78]

Evangelical Simplicity

Under a theological lens, the efficacy of the plays perhaps lay in the simplicity of the broader, doctrinal messages of the Evangelical reformers. The ever-popular slogans of *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, and *sola scriptura* rang out from the pulpits and treatises with increasing frequency and importance. Distinction continually marked the theology of the reforming theologians,

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[76] Scribner provides the inspiration for this in *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, 2-3. He discusses Marshall McLuhan's theory of the "hybridisation of media," as woodcuts were useful both as written and visual forms of communication.

[77] Joachim Greff, *Ein Geistliches schönes newes spil,* Biij^{r}-Biij^{v}, translated in Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 219-20.

[78] Greff, *Ein Geistliches schönes newes spil,* B1^{v}, translated in Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 217-18.

cleaving clear strokes between the papal and Evangelical churches—between the behaviour and doctrinal tenets of the Roman Catholic Church and those of the Protestant religious communities. Andrew Pettegree argues:

> Within [a] context of a general engagement with contemporary issues and grievances, Luther also benefited from a brutal simplification of his central theological message. For Luther's supporters, what seems to have made the greatest impact was the excoriating criticism of the corruptions of the priesthood (and particularly the papacy) and the doctrine of scripture alone. The concept of justification by faith could . . . have the same transforming effect as it had for Luther himself.[79]

Perhaps Luther and other theologians of the new faith did indeed have their messages benefit from "brutal simplification," but this should not detract from core Evangelical principles that were often simple in and of themselves. Luther's tracts—his immensely significant 1520 *Babylonian Captivity of the Church,* for example—were often published originally in Latin and therefore intended only for a specific educated few. Yet, his more accessible works written in German, with identical urgency and degree of importance, speak to the same issues at stake for every member of Christendom. For the Evangelical reformers, doctrine always boiled down to the gospel and faith in Christ's sacrifice, while everything else was merely secondary. As Luther wrote to his German readership in 1521:

> For if you ask: What is the gospel? you can give no better answer than these words of the New Testament, namely, that Christ gave his body and poured out his blood for us for the forgiveness of sins. This alone is to be preached to Christians, instilled into their hearts, and at all times faithfully commended to their memories.[80]

Proclaiming Christ alone, while always drinking from the pure fountain of scripture, had an attractive simplicity that would have been rather appealing to medieval Christians. With relative

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[79] Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*, 168-69. However, Pettegree argues that justification was an issue that could only popularly resonate with educated men.

[80] Martin Luther, *The Misuse of the Mass* in *Luther's Works,* American Edition (AE) (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, 1955-1983) (36:183).

ease, Evangelical theology could be packaged to represent tenets of the Christian church of faith, standing in stark opposition to a papal church of works, muddied canons, and recondite salvation.

With regard to the potential of the theatrical medium as propaganda, complementing the simplicity of theological message was the simplicity of rhetorical device. Theatrical performances and texts employed the use of rhyme and alliteration for the purposes of easy recollection and leaving a more permanent impression. One figure in the Reformation theatrical tradition who consistently adopted these techniques was Hans Sachs of Nuremberg, one of the most prolific playwrights and satirists of the time. Modern English translations of his short, couplet-style dialogues and plays which retain the original sense of rhyme are helpful in demonstrating the accessibility of his reform-minded texts. One of his tales, *The Monk Zweifel and His Relics*, tells the story of a monk who hoodwinks the members of a community by filling his pockets with their German kreutzers in exchange for their access to his counterfeit relics. Hans Sachs describes the character's entrance into the community:

> Hither was brother Zweifel sent,
> Lapse of this custom [the annual visit by members of his monastery] to prevent;
> A crafty man and eloquent;
> And all the peasants, where he went,
> With open mouths attention lent
> To what each hearer thought to be
> A miracle of piety.
> For each one heard with faith so great
> None doubted aught he would relate.
> They were a simple peasantry;
> No doubts within their minds could be.[81]

The accessible language used by Sachs is particularly fitting in his targeting of audiences sympathetic to, if not themselves made up of, "simple peasantry" wherein the exploitation of

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[81] Hans Sachs, "The Monk Zweifel and His Relics," in *Merry Tales and Three Shrovetide Plays*, trans. William Leighton (Westport: Hyperion Press, 1978), 46.

these communities by representatives of the papal church would resonate. Luther even attested to the value of linguistic and rhetorical simplicity in winning over the hearts and minds of common people: "He who teaches most simply, childishly, popularly . . . that's the best preacher. I like it to be easy and earthy."[82] For him, the role of a preacher is centred on relating to an audience in terms they can enjoy and understand: "Complicated thoughts and issues we should discuss in private with the eggheads. I don't think of Dr. Pomeranius [Johannes Bugenhagen], [Justus] Jonas, or Philip [Melanchthon] in my sermon. They know more about it than I do. So I don't preach to them. I just preach to Hansie or Betsy."[83] To illustrate effectively the contrast between papal community and Evangelical community, the language of playwrights and satirists would need to be moulded in such a way that made it conducive to a memory-based and orally communicative common society. Therefore, plays and tales were often colloquial, illustrative, and memorable.

The Propagandistic Potential of Theatrical Devices

Linked closely to simple linguistic techniques were the theatrical devices at the playwrights' disposal for the purposes of instilling reform messages. The device that was especially powerful on stage for reformers wanting to construct Evangelical-minded communities over and against those of the Roman Catholic persuasion was the use of contrast. Evoking once again the visually-driven fabric of medieval society, a popular form of media in this time was woodcut art, which dated from the end of the fourteenth century.[84] This

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[82] Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Tischreden* (WATr) 4: no. 5047, translated in Fred W. Meuser, *Luther the Preacher* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), 53.

[83] WATr 3: no. 3421, translated in Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, 53.

[84] Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, 5.

technology developed alongside the printed text, and became a relatively cheap and easy-to-produce item of mass communication.[85] Illustrated broadsheets would prove to be a close companion and influence to the stage in several ways, but perhaps demonstrated no more clearly than through the use of contrast in both. Visual media often served to distinguish opposing principles or groups, leaving no ambiguity in message to its audience. In the case of most Evangelical media, visual forms of popular culture severed members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy from the commoners and communities guided by the Word of God. As Scribner writes:

> The role of the visual image in popular devotion was to call the mind of the pious believer to spiritual truths, and to concentrate his attention on them. . . . Often working through satire or parody, they nonetheless serve to call attention to the truth about the old and new belief, and to concentrate the reader's attention on it. The process involved is one in which familiar images are set in new surroundings or given new connotations.[86]

The contrasting light shed upon the two camps—Protestant and Roman Catholic—is indeed constantly employed in Reformation visual propaganda. One Swiss pamphlet of 1520 entitled *Vom alten und nüen Gott, Glauben und Lehre* (*Of the Old and New God, Belief and Doctrine*) contains a title page illustration that separates explicitly the Evangelical faith community from that of the papal church.[87] On the right half of the illustration, Paul, the four Gospel writers specified by their symbolic figures, Moses, and Aaron stand alongside Luther, the leader of the Evangelical movement. They are all positioned underneath the resurrected Christ, the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, and the Father in heaven, indicating a downward flow of spiritual authority: inspiration begins in the Father and travels through the Holy Spirit to Jesus, then

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[85] Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*, 103; Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, 5.

[86] Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, 115.

[87] Cited in Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, 69.

proclaimed through the scriptures and the biblical saints, and received eventually by Luther.[88] On the left hand of the illustration is the papal community portrayed in scathingly oppositional terms. The Roman pontiff is propped up as a carnival puppet by his human supporters, among whom are Aristotle and contemporary opponents of Luther. The puppet-pope is crowned by two devils, and the authority for the members of this community is suggested as being human-based and against the will of God.[89]

This use of contrast in the visual image was just as easily and effectively adapted to theatrical contexts. Niklaus Manuel, a playwright based in Bern, exemplifies well an early dramatic tradition on part of the Evangelicals which calculatedly separated the good and godly (the saints and the Evangelical reformers) from the wicked and satanic (the pope and his minions). Rather appropriate for the adaptation of the visual image to the stage is Manuel's original vocation as a painter, with a host of Swiss and German artists-turned-playwrights along with him.[90] In his *Vom Papst und seiner Priesterschaft* (*The Pope and His Priesthood*) of 1523, Paul and Peter make appearances in the contemporary papacy-ruled Christendom.[91] Directions in the play-text dictate that the two apostles stand together separately on stage from the unfolding events, watching with amazement how the pope stews in pomp and glory; the apostles were the representation of scripture in their privileged location on stage, and through their gestures and frowns highlighted the incongruence between the damnable papal decrees and the true Word of God.[92] Moreover, the characters are identified by their religious affiliation by physical location

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[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid., 69-70.

[90] Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 206, 215.

[91] Ibid., 224-25.

on stage: "The tension between the play's antithetical poles is realized in its staging. According to a character's sympathies, either Protestant or Catholic, he or she stood nearer to the biblical or papal section of the stage."[93] The same sensational and contrastive illustrations found in woodcut art depicting the papal church as inimical to scripture had quickly and forcefully found a new setting on the Reformation stage.

A second theatrical device that stands out for Evangelical playwrights sculpting communal identities is the use of mockery, lampooning, and laughter. Pre-Reformation theatre and the medieval mystery plays in particular had come to be more than just moving religious experiences, as they were ever more witnessed for the elements of humour and entertainment that had penetrated the once-solemn occasions.[94] These sorts of features of medieval drama contributed to the gradual secularization of the theatre, where amusing extra-biblical characters or scenes increased in popularity.[95] The reformer playwrights could employ familiar comic techniques of the medieval drama, but rather than ascribing the target of ridicule to the traditional comedic types like demons, King Herod, or Pilate's guards, the new source of laughter would be the members of the papal hierarchy. One horrified eyewitness in 1524 Nuremberg, observing the Reformation take root in its early years, howled:

> In this city the sincere faith in Christ is utterly abolished. No respect is paid either to the Virgin Mary or to the saints. They ridicule the papal rites and call the relics of the saints bones of men who have been hanged. In Lent they eat meat openly. Confession is neglected, as they say it should be made only to God. They generally communicate under both forms. *They make a laughing stock of Pope and Cardinals by circulating*

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[92] Ibid.

[93] Ibid., 227-28.

[94] Bacon, *Martin Luther and the Drama*, 8.

[95] Ibid.

> *drawings and caricatures*. In short, they consider Martin their enlightener, and think that until now they have been in darkness.[96]

Exaggeration and caricature certainly played into the satires and plays of the Evangelical reformers, as their opponents and representatives of the papal church are often mocked as a whole variety of laughable antagonists—fools, gold-lovers, warmongers, and the list continues. The utilization of humour to reinforce Evangelical communal attitudes surely developed alongside the Reformation itself. One early skit in 1520 presents fictitious minutes of a faculty meeting between prominent theologians opposing Luther, chaired by Jacob Hoogstraten (a Dominican inquisitor). Hoogstraten is portrayed as an oaf who pales in intellect and understanding next to the Evangelical reformers; he confusedly remarks, "There has now arisen a man by name of Philip Melanchthon, of whom they have great hopes. He has devised a new logic and a new rhetoric. . . . I don't understand a word of it."[97] Shortly after, he continues his idiocy, commenting that he has never actually read a word in scripture: "I have always been so busy with St. Thomas that I've never had time to read the Bible."[98] The satirists and playwrights could be outright hostile through contrastive and blasphemy-accusing tones, or they could affirm an audience's sense of superiority over the Roman pontiff and his sycophants by making these individuals a laughing stock. Either way, the papal church during the Reformation quickly found itself having to face an onslaught of satirical and theatrical polemic.

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[96] Quoted in Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 174, emphasis added. The author does not indicate his source.

[97] Johannes Jäger, "Theologists in Council," in *Scheming Papists and Lutheran Fools*, trans. and ed. Erika Rummel (New York: Fordham University Press, 1993), 63.

[98] Ibid., 66.

Evangelical "In-groups" and Papal "Out-groups" in Reformation Theatre

Relevant to a discussion of how the theatre could contribute to fostering new religious and social collective values in medieval communities is an application of social-scientific principles. What the playwrights and satirists were attempting to achieve then can now helpfully be described in terms of social psychology—identifying "in-group" mentalities which stand in opposition to perceived "out-groups." Social identity theory, the label given to such an approach, lends a fresh perspective of analysis to the realities at work during the Reformation encounter with the theatre. One aspect of this theory is that with regards to intergroup conflict, the more intense it is, the more members within each group will begin to function as parts of their respective group memberships rather than behave as individuals.[99] The apocalyptic cries of pope as Antichrist or the political skirmishes during the Reformation years may come to mind as triggers of conflict intensification. More specific to the theatrical tradition, this element of social identity theory may help explain why polemical tones in play-texts were sharply augmented in the beginning years as opposed to the second half of the sixteenth century, as reformers had to combat the deeply-entrenched communal values sympathetic to the medieval church.

Linked to this aspect of conflict intensity is conflict perception, as "the mere awareness of the presence of an out-group is sufficient to provoke intergroup competitive or discriminatory responses."[100] The Reformation stage, through clear-cut types, contrast, and biting social commentary, was a valuable medium for the Evangelicals seeking to bring attention to the problems they saw in church and society. Finally, social identity theory wrestles with group or community self-image, where unequal distribution of resources—wealth, power, or prestige—

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[99] H. Tafjel and J. C. Turner, "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behaviour," in *Psychology of Intergroup Relations,* ed. S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1986), 8.

[100] Ibid., 13.

promotes antagonism when a subordinate group seeks to shed its "consensually negative self-image, and with it the status quo, and starts working toward the development of a positive group identity."[101] This trend occurs most visibly in the first few years of the Reformation, as peasants and commoners who were originally the on-stage fools and targets of ridicule slowly come to be portrayed in satires, plays, woodcut art, and even important theological tracts as the abused victims of the medieval church. However, they rise up as a group in control of their own lot, standing on board with the scriptures and the Evangelical reformers against the malignant papal clergy.

The polemic theatre of sixteenth-century Germany and the Swiss Cantons was born in a context which emphasized visual and oral mediums of communication above all else. The theological support of the Evangelical reformers and the theoretical framework in which theatre could succeed both as a Protestant community-builder and an uprooting force to the entrenched papal identities have been demonstrated in the present chapter. However, what the exploration of these advance to the overarching study of Reformation theatre is the answer to the original question: "Why drama?" Pettegree writes, "What we can be certain is that, in the first generation of Evangelical agitation, the decision to adhere to the Reformation was often a very painful one. It involved difficult choices and life-changing decisions. It involved exchanging the familiar round of traditional observance for a new order which was untested and largely unknown."[102] Theatre bridged that gap into the unknown; it was a lantern that lit up the dark, unchartered territory of reform. The stage was accessible, enjoyable, and effective as a teaching tool for scripture and encouraging a spiritually-active spectatorship that could recognize for themselves

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[101] Ibid.

[102] Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*, 1.

the religious burdens and abuses surrounding them. The stage affirmed the solidarity and holiness of German communities standing on board with the Evangelical innovations, soothing doubts about being on the fringe of social and religious society. And the stage busted positive associations with the papal church that had previously grown out of the medieval drama and the largely popular Corpus Christi plays by criticizing and mocking their ecclesiastical representatives. Through performances, dialogues, and satire, the tables were turned on the once-powerful papal church, and the beginning of the uniquely Evangelical encounter with the drama started in the popular and uncultivated performances staged during the German carnival revelries.

Chapter 3

Lampooning and Ridiculing the Papal Community:

The Evangelical Engagement with Carnival Theatre and Popular Satire

> This year, to the great advancement of Evangelical freedom, two well-informed and widely circulated plays . . . were composed and performed publicly on Cross Lane. . . . Through these wondrous exhibitions, heretofore uncontemplated (since they were thought blasphemous), a great mass of people were moved to consider and distinguish Christian freedom and papal servitude. In the Protestant cause, there has hardly been a booklet which has been printed so often and distributed so widely as these plays.
>
> —Valerius Anshelm, *Berner Chronik*, ca. 1523[103]

Carnival Revelries

The Reformation was triggered in 1517 by Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* concerning the use of indulgences written for the purposes of debate; it began as an intellectual issue (or, as Pope Leo X famously misjudged it: "a squabble between monks"). Yet, other forms of popular media that harnessed the reform messages and theology of the academics made the significant issues at stake in these academic contexts accessible and relatable to the common people. Reformation propaganda was pragmatic; it was earthy; it was largely unrefined. The original Evangelical encounter with the stage, which happened in the carnival revelries of German-speaking towns and cities, epitomized these very principles. The immensely participative and satirical carnival games and plays celebrated by these communities attest to a medieval popular culture that made laughter and lampooning a prominent theme of collective expression. The theatre, examined here as a propagandistic form of communication, became polemically-driven in the hands of the first reforming playwrights, satirists, and performers who sought to dismantle

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[103] Epigraph quoted in Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 79.

the Roman Catholic identity entrenched in local communities, and redefine the papal church and its representatives on Evangelical terms.

As with other large-scale performances in the Middle Ages (such as the Corpus Christi dramas), the plays, processions, and celebrations of communities during carnival were inextricably linked to a festival of the church. The Shrovetide play (*Fastnachtspiel*) "is distinguished not so much by internal characteristics as by external circumstances, namely by its staging during the pre-Lenten season, usually in the week preceding Ash Wednesday."[104] Lent, a period of penance and the observation of strict fasting, commemorated the weeks preceding and including Christ's final days; the prospect of facing this season of the church stirred up a time of merriment and indulgence that would soon be replaced by sorrow and forbearance.[105] Thus, Shrovetide or *Fastnacht* (the eve of the fast) becomes known also as "carnival," a word rooted in the Latin *carnem levare*, meaning "to put away meat."[106] Carnival, put simply, was wild. Food, sex, and gluttony were the major themes of the celebration, as untamed behaviour came to characterize the popular folk festival.[107] In Nuremberg, the festival seems to have been created alongside and melded with the *Schembartlauf,* a tradition probably dating to the fourteenth century. According to later city chronicles, the butchers of Nuremberg were rewarded by the emperor the opportunity to run and dance masked through the streets once a year for their loyalty to the town council during a local uprising in 1348.[108] Processions and floats were the centre of

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[104] Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 79.

[105] Wickham, *Medieval Theatre,* 134.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe,* 186-87.

Fastnacht festivities, as masked players and performing troupes paraded the streets and acted out skits for the urban spectators. Carnival was established almost as a counter-reality, where merriment, the absurd, and the fringes of moral behaviour could intersect; this popular festival "was the time to forget the restraints of daily life."[109]

Indeed, the same licentiousness and altered social structures found in the homes and streets during Shrovetide was just as frequently seen on stage in the plays of these festivities (the *Fastnachtspiele*). The origin of the play genre is disputed, though the first extant play-scripts for Shrovetide date to the middle of the fourteenth century.[110] The medieval religious drama had begun to exhibit entertaining or comedic scenes during the presentation of biblical events dating to at least a few centuries before the Reformation. The secular farces of *Fastnacht*, if not drawing directly from the liturgical and religious plays, at the very least contained the same elements of "horseplay and crude buffoonery" found in the comical scenes of religious dramas.[111] Members of lower social classes often starred in such performances and comprised many of the audiences. The carnival plays "were usually performed in the raucous atmosphere of a local tavern, but they were later transferred into public squares and halls. Their plots were derived for the most part from folk tales featuring clever peasants deceiving each other and their

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[108] Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 214. For a more thorough survey of extant manuscripts related to the Schembart origins, see Samuel L. Sumberg, *The Nuremberg Schembart Carnival*, Columbia University Germanic Studies 12 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941).

[109] James A. Anderson, *Daily Life During the Reformation*, The Greenwood Press Daily Life Through History Series (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2011), 140.

[110] Andreas Loewe, "Proclaiming the Passion: Popular Drama and the Passion Tradition in Luther's Germany," *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 12, no. 2-3 (2010): 240.

[111] Bacon, *Martin Luther and the Drama*, 19-20. For examples of studies asserting that carnival and its plays are traced to pagan celebration and magic rites, see Maximilian J. Rudwin, *The Origin of the German Carnival Comedy* (New York: G.E. Stechert, 1920); and Wilhelma C. Garvin, *The Development of the Comic Figure in the German Drama from the Reformation to the Thirty Years' War* (New York: Haskell House, 1971), 16.

social betters."[112] In this way, then, the plays were written by commoners for commoners. The *Fastnachtspiele* were written in crude German and often vulgar in both language and subject matter. Glenn Ehrstine suggests (in a chapter appropriately titled "Protestant Carnival: A Contradiction in Terms?") that the play as a genre is perhaps paradoxical in its inherent traits: "Most carnival plays . . . were transgressive in nature and frequently contained graphic depictions of violence and unabashed discussions of bodily functions such as fornication and defecation. Nonetheless, there also existed a substantial subsection of *Fastnachtspiele* with moral or didactic content."[113] As crude and offensive as the Shrovetide plays could be, there was an avenue for reformers to tread that could lead to the persuasion of common people who so cherished their carnival revelries.

Fastnacht: A Crude Articulation of Anti-Roman Sentiment

The Reformation, to some extent, succeeded as a mass movement in German-speaking Europe because of rampant anticlericalism becoming ever more visible at the turn of the sixteenth century. For the purposes of hashing over the connotations of the term in the present study, one scholar's definition of anticlericalism is used as a starting point: "a structural critique of the power of the clergy,"[114] which then broadens to popular perceptions of clerical or papal attitudes and tendencies in a general sense. Ozment has demonstrated that for its success as a revolutionary movement, Protestantism largely relied on anti-Roman sentiment and the grievances of German populations concerning the burdensome medieval church: "Foremost among Rome's predatory practices . . . was the sale of indulgences," while "on the heels of the

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[112] *OER*, s.v. "Drama."

[113] Ehrstine, *Theatre, Culture, and Community*, 79.

[114] Peter Matheson, *The Imaginative World of the Reformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 19.

indulgence preachers came Rome's legions of mendicant friars, relic hawkers, and miracle workers."[115] Money was perceived as being pickpocketed from the common German people, highest-bidding clergy were rewarded with handsome benefices, and the moral deprivation of the ecclesiastical representatives was often recognized and attacked.[116] Therefore, the anticlericalism existing in German-speaking communities was not in the background of the creation and dissemination of Reformation propaganda like theatre and satires, but rather placed in the foreground.

Here, in slowly-brewing anticlerical and antipapal dispositions, carnival could and would first intersect with Evangelical goals. The crude nature of the carnival and its plays was perhaps an appropriate fertile ground for exposing, rather vividly, the moral and sexual sins of the ecclesiastical leaders of the time. A community which played witness to the morally questionable practices of the papal church and its clergy naturally expressed their disapproval on the carnival stage in the same unsoftened patterns of behaviour that they observed. Placing particular individuals or groups as the targets of ridicule, however harsh or crude as the criticism may be, served a corrective function rather unique to *Fastnachtspiele* for the German communities: "Carnival plays deal with social problems in a special festive context. They are in no way morality plays or moralistic, but in contrast use *laughter* as a means of correcting bad manners or reprehensible conduct."[117] New targets were gleefully scorned and ridiculed in vulgar language; Gerald Strauss records part of a sixteenth-century Shrovetide play where a

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[115] Steven Ozment, *Protestants: The Birth of a Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 13. The examples listed by the author are based on the grievances presented to the emperor at the 1521 Diet of Worms.

[116] Ibid., 12-13.

[117] Leif Søndergaard, "Combat Between the Genders: Farcical Elements in the German Fastnachtspiel," in *Farce and Farcical Elements*, vol. 6 of *Ludus: Medieval and Early Renaissance Theatre and Drama*, ed. Wim Hüsken and Konrad Schoell (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 173.

peasant seeking medical advice from a doctor brings him a flask of his daughter's urine, wanting to know what plague has gripped her, to which the doctor replies:

> Your daughter, it seems, is a serving maid.
> The hired man is the cause of her state.
> He broke into her lower story
> And punched a hole there, deep and gory,
> Which made her belly bulge and swell,
> But in a few months she will be well.
> It's a disease, I understand,
> Widespread these days in our land.
> It causes women to ache and vomit;
> The holy nuns, too, suffer from it.[118]

The Evangelicals also adopted this sort of carnivalesque language from time to time. In one of Niklaus Manuel's Shrovetide plays, a man discovers that an indulgence he purchased is useless, and decides to express his frustration with the papal church in an unsubtle act of defiance: "I discovered that it was worthless. This was told to me by knowledgeable people. I was then overcome by anger and wiped my ass with the indulgence."[119] Mockery and insult were the sources of carnival humour, but the communities often used them with calculated intention: "This laughing truth, expressed in curses and abusive words, degraded power."[120] Crude and vulgar, the carnival stage seems a strange partner for Evangelical reformers, but the audiences listened, and underneath the laughter, the commentary was biting.

Even more significant is how the carnival revelries and their plays functioned in medieval society and communal life. It is worth repeating that theatrical performances during this time, no

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[118] Quoted in Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 216. The author does not name his source.

[119] Niklaus Manuel, *Niklaus Manuels Spiel evangelischer Freiheit: Die Totenfresser. "Vom Papst und seiner Priesterschaft*" *1523*, ed. Ferdinand Vetter (Leipzig: H. Haessel, 1923), 53, vv. 1031-34, translated in Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 102. On page 107, Ehrstine comments, "The modification of church documents from instruments of salvation to implements of defecation . . . is Manuel's most common carnivalesque motif."

[120] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 92-93.

matter the occasion, were indeed a form of collection expression—the bigger and more participative, the louder the voice being projected from the stage. Mystery plays and the Corpus Christi cycles put on in the summer or during other festivals were riddled with papal dogma, articulating a medieval religiosity steeped in the influence of the papal church. However, the wild, entertaining, and largely secular nature of carnival presented a unique opportunity for a community to produce social commentary or express disapproval on stage, even in opposition to the very messages conveyed in religious festivals. The performances in taverns and town squares had flexibility for satirical and polemic tones towards ecclesiastical communities in that they were outside the sanction and boundaries of the church. Popular festivals like carnival "celebrated the community itself, displaying its ability to put on a good show; and perhaps the mocking of outsiders . . . was, among other things, a dramatic expression of community solidarity."[121] Indeed, laughter for medieval communities revealed the social consciousness of the entire group.[122] Therefore, Protestant reformers took the popular folk tradition and made it an agent for encapsulating early anticlerical sentiments and amplifying voices of discontent in German-speaking communities just prior to the Reformation. Or, in the words of another historian, "The carnival play captured a particular moment in the Evangelical agenda, and the boisterous undiscriminating anticlericalism that proved so powerful a component of the early urban reform movement."[123]

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[121] Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 200.

[122] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 92.

[123] Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*, 85.

"Everything is Turned Upside-down"

Fastnacht's function, in line with its celebration of counter-reality, is often described in terms of its bizarre tendency to invert social structures and confuse accepted understandings; in many ways, carnival was a time for turning the world upside-down. Mikhail Bahktin proposes that carnival had its own set of backwards laws that the people immersed themselves in:

> We find [in carnival] a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the "inside out" (*à l'envers)*, of the "turnabout," of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and un-crownings. A second life, a second world of folk culture is thus constructed; it is to a certain extent a parody of the extracarnival life, a "world inside out."[124]

This theme of the topsy-turvy world studied in popular culture and literature trickles across linguistic lines—the French *le monde renversé*, the Italian *il mondo alla rovescia*, or the German *die verkehrte Welt* all capture the sense of a counter-reality that completely reverses society.[125] In this model of interpretation, a low culture celebrates its otherness from sanctioned culture, and the festival is an opportunity for marginal members of society to find their own autonomous voice in society.[126] The peasants in pre-Reformation carnival were ridiculed by townspeople as foolish, dirty, and impure—the play-texts presented them as literary stereotypes: ignoramuses, drunks, and uncultured outsiders.[127] These carnival plays that depicted the peasants as such are merely microcosmic demonstrations of a medieval society that largely perceived the "common

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[124] Baktin, *Rabelais and His World*, 11.

[125] Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 188.

[126] Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 85. For more on this approach, see especially Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 303-67. For opposing and alternate theories on anthropological study of carnival, see Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 85-86 and his footnotes. Some scholars assert that Bakhtin simplifies the complexities of carnival to a monologic system. Carnival is, for instance, described instead by Max Gluckman (*Custom and Conflict in Africa* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1965], 109) as a "rite of rebellion," which serves as a safety valve releasing pressure from a social system to sustain the status quo.

[127] Leif Søndergaard, "Combat Between the Genders," 172.

man" as nothing more than an illiterate bumpkin.[128] Yet, in the world turned upside-down, the peasant eventually came to be celebrated, despite his crudeness, as someone who jousted with members of higher classes and exposed the unsaintly character of his social superiors (priests, emperors, whomever) with wit and cunning.[129]

Evangelical reformers seized upon this element of a topsy-turvy world and continued the same theme in their encounter with carnival festivities for the purposes of enlisting the common German people. Christendom was ruled from Rome outwards, with the papacy staking its claim to the utmost voice of authority in the medieval church. The papal rituals and dogma were universally-accepted religious practice—the "normalcies" of medieval spirituality. Thus, as Scribner writes:

> A world structured around the efficacious power of the Catholic cult and ritual becomes for the Evangelical believer both an anomaly and a danger to the world as a whole. The restructuring of this world is a necessity, most effectively carried out with the removal of the old religious order and establishment of a new. The reordering of matters such as images, relics, the church hierarchy, etc., both removed them from their position of authority and demonstrated the effective loss of their spiritual power.[130]

Fastnacht revelries unleashed chaos into ordered structures and normal understandings. The authority of the pope was laughed at through the playful inversion of social and religious hierarchies, rituals and processions of the medieval church were parodied, and the carnival participants elatedly placed ecclesiastical representatives under a beaming light of ridicule. In terms of carnival's use as Evangelical propaganda, demolishing communal Roman Catholic identities began by first exhibiting the papal hierarchy's spiritual worthlessness and lack of

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[128] Russell, *Lay Theology in the Reformation*, 13.

[129] Bacon, *Martin Luther and the Drama*, 20.

[130] Robert Scribner, "Reformation, Carnival and the World Turned Upside-down," in *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London: Hambledon Press, 1987), 97.

legitimate power; antipapal and anticlerical carnival festivities quelled fears concerning the influence of the once-mighty religious monarch in Rome.

Even Luther's theology mirrored the concept of a topsy-turvy world. The discrepancies in spiritual status between clergy and laity were leveled out in his call for a priesthood of all believers. Indeed, an equaling-out of spiritual status was perhaps the minimum that can be said about Luther's view on the new relationship between ecclesiastics and laity. If the clergy were supporters of the papal church, a topsy-turvy world was realized in situations where the laity adhered to scripture and the purity of the gospel while their clerical counterparts clung to papal traditions and canon law. In these cases, there was not merely a spiritual levelling occurring, but a complete inversion that contrasted holy and wicked. Luther believed he was witnessing in his time the fulfilment of a prophecy from the book of Jeremiah: "that among the great men one would find less understanding and justice than among the laity and common people. Thus so it is now, when the poor peasants and children understand Christ better than the pope, the bishops, and doctors; everything is turned upside-down."[131] His early theology continually indicates support for an educated and Word-focused laity, empowering common people with scripture translated into German.[132] Therefore, in this way, Luther encouraged the social and religious status quo to be distorted and inverted, all for the purposes of forming Evangelical communities with members that could stand on side with the gospel and the church of faith. Scribner draws out this same theme in his study of visual propaganda: "This kind of social inversion is found running throughout Evangelical propaganda, where the common man, the Evangelical peasant or the poor stand for the supporters of Christ and the Gospel, while the clergy stand for its

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[131] Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luther's Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe (WA) (Weimar: Bo□hlaus Nachfolger),7:315.6-8, translated in Russell, *Lay Theology in the Reformation*, 60.

[132] Russell, *Lay Theology in the Reformation*, 60.

opponents."[133] For the Evangelical reformers, turning the medieval world upside-down was therefore not only a satirical precept for the games and performances of carnival, but also a matter of salvation and the health of Christendom.

For the desire to turn the world upside-down to exist, communities and propagandists alike would have had to view the world as perverted and in need of reform; thus, the Evangelical satires and theatrical lampoons succeeded and flourished in a society which saw the times as being "radically out of joint."[134] A medieval laity that was already actively engaged in the collective articulation of their religious values on stage in the mystery plays did the same in carnival settings. The common people had begun to perceive real problems developing in their lands with regards to the practices and behaviour of the papal church. On the early Reformation stage, one pattern that emerges is that spiritual or religious grievances are put on display above and beyond socio-economic or political problems (though, of course, these are often in the background of text creation for the sake of effective, relatable satire). The first truly Evangelical theatrical endeavours, taking the form of carnival performances, satirized the corrupt and spiritually-fruitless Roman Church, while celebrating the freedom and victory of the gospel in Evangelical communities. These were common people, all across German-speaking Europe, who were motivated foremost by Luther's rediscovery of the pure gospel; they were eager to use theatre and satire to symbolically usher in the new faith and reject the old. For example, Strauss indicates in his local survey of Reformation-era documents in Nuremberg (which happens to be the carnival hot-spot in Reformation Germany) that average citizens supported the Evangelical movement en masse primarily for its religious goals: "What they wanted, and what they got, was

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[133] Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, 168.

[134] Ibid., 166.

not a social gospel announcing better conditions but a gospel of faith and confidence, promising a meaningful and saving place for the individual in his own society and that of God."[135] The religious life of medieval man and papal church was out of joint, and, thus, fitting was the carnival setting which would facilitate the first theatrical attempt at reversing and "destroying the charisma of the papacy and the Catholic hierarchy."[136]

The First Evangelical Carnival Festivities

On 10 December 1520, after Luther had defiantly torched books of canon law and the papal bull condemning him, about a hundred students staged a carnival procession.[137] The float, which was called the *Hölle* (the English "hell"), was the centrepiece of carnival festivities; speculation regarding its origin usually leads to the name Nuremberg gunsmiths gave to one of their artillery cannons, which was decorated like a dragon's jaw—the mouth of hell in medieval iconography.[138] These carnival sleds had evolved into various forms, and became the focus of celebratory procession in carnival merriment. In Wittenberg on that winter day, the float itself transformed into visual propaganda, as a giant papal bull was erected like a sail on a ship's mast.[139] The lion's roar of the papacy that exercised dominion over medieval Christendom was laughed at as being nothing more than the squeak of a mouse. The message the students and Wittenbergers sent is that the old church and its leader were, both in a religious and political sense, now rendered powerless and could be mocked as such. The papacy and its angry flurry of

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[135] Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 166.

[136] Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, 94.

[137] Scribner, "Reformation, Carnival and the World Turned Upside-down," 72.

[138] Eckehard Simon, "Staging the Reformation in the Nuremberg Carnival," in *Topographies of the Early Modern City*, ed. Arthur Groos, Hans-Jochen Schiewer, and Markus Stock, Transatlantische Studien zu Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit 3 (Go□ttingen: V&R Unipress, 2008), 66.

[139] Scribner, "Reformation, Carnival and the World Turned Upside-down," 72.

human documents could not triumph over the pure gospel, while the Roman pontiff had no political control over the German nation.

On the float jumped a group of students, among them a charioteer, a trumpeter, and musicians who provided the musical accompaniment to the procession. As the students led the float around the town, they gathered firewood and tossed it on the float with the books of Luther's prominent opponents like Johann Eck and Jerome Emser. The float eventually reached its final destination where the morning flames burned the papal bull; the students and townspeople rekindled the fire so that these works, too, could be publically engulfed. [140] Thus, the community theatrically declared that along with their rejection of the hierarchical papal church came the rejection of the church's academic representatives. Luther and the Evangelical reformers were heralded as intellectual superiors over the papists and scholastic theologians. A man dressed as a pope threw his tiara into the fire, while a mass for the dead and a popular song were sung. It was the first bold statement on stage for the Evangelicals: a victory for the gospel and the repudiation of the Roman Church and its inefficacious decrees by casting the papist documents into a symbolic hell.

On the actual day of *Fastnacht* two months later, 12 February 1521, the antipapal carnival revelries resumed in Wittenberg. A figure representing the pope was hoisted and carried about the town; one is reminded of the Corpus Christi processions that did the same thing with the Host of Eucharist. In a truly carnivalesque manner—crude and wild—the counterfeit pope was pelted with dung and "hunted through the streets in great merriment."[141] By 1522, these carnival theatrics that targeted the old faith had spread across German-speaking lands. On

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[140] All the events recorded here regarding the conclusion of the 1520 event are described in Scribner, ibid., 72.

[141] Ibid.

Fastnacht in Straslund, four monks lugged a plough through the town, with the spectacle supplemented by individuals who vocalized satirical verses.[142] In Danzig, at the same time, Michael Schmarz (a former pupil of the famous illustrator Albrecht Dürer) reportedly directed an antipapal carnival play that re-enacted Luther's struggle against Rome until his disappearance following the Diet of Worms.[143] In Nuremberg, it reached the ears of the town council that a troupe of players was planning to stage a carnival play in which a pope would have been dressed in a chorister's robe with a three-barred cross proceeding ahead of him. Before it was immediately shut down by a council unwilling to condone such blatant hostility, there were plans to stage the play in the most public of places, the marketplace.[144] The next year (1523) in Nuremberg, the papal legate Francesco Chieregati had insisted upon the arrest of a superior in the local Augustinian monastery and all Evangelical preachers. The Nurembergers gave their response in the form of a *Fastnacht* procession that included another satirical "hell," on which there was strapped a guiser dressed as a monk; a spinning wheel of fortune crushed the imitation cleric, and, as was customary, the carnival participants probably torched the float in front of city hall on Ash Wednesday.[145] Moreover, the *Schembartlauf* that year featured a runner wearing a

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[142] Ibid., 73.

[143] Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*, 82.

[144] Simon, "Staging the Reformation in the Nuremberg Carnival," 82. A chasm between popular expression and city interests was not at all uncommon in the early, volatile years of Reformation. See pages 76-77 for examples of how the council discouraged and punished Evangelical sympathizers—one man was even thrown in jail for two months for including a satirical woodcut of the pope in his 1521 almanac. See also Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 217, who notes that the council required all scripts and content matter of plays to be approved before they could be staged.

[145] All details of this incident from Simon, "Staging the Reformation in the Nuremberg Carnival," 78-81.

coat made entirely of indulgence bulls, satirizing the hotly-debated sale of indulgences as a fundraising tactic of the papal church.[146]

Even the theology of the medieval church was blasted in the early carnival performances. Another carnivalesque parody, this time held in June 1524, took place in the small mining town of Buchholz in Saxony.[147] Saint Benno of Meissen, a German bishop of the eleventh century, had recently been canonized in the Roman Church, and his relics were exhibited for veneration that month. In response, the residents of Buchholz held their own mock veneration. They formed a procession with banners made of rags and used gaming boards as pretend songbooks. One man dressed up as a phony bishop, wearing a cloak of made of straw; on his head, he wore a fish basket instead of a mitre, while using an old fish kettle for a for a holy water vessel. Benno's iconographic symbol is usually a fish, tracing back to a legend where a fisherman returned a set of cathedral keys to Benno that had been thrown into the Elbe. Thus, the community ridiculed the sacred iconography of the old faith. Though not openly hostile, the participants' use of the fish-props at least whispered the theological perspective of iconoclasts that icons were spiritually ineffective; the holy image of Benno and the fish, in the eyes of these townspeople, were about as useful to their Christian faith as the mundane objects that the counterfeit bishop adorned in costume. Scribner describes the climax of the performance:

> A horse's head, the jawbone of a cow and two horselegs served as relics, and were carried back to the marketplace. There the bishop delivered a mock sermon and proclaimed the relics with the words: "Good worshippers, see here is the holy arse-bone of that dear canon of Meissen St. Benno"—holding up the jawbone. Much water was poured over the relic to "purify" it, naturally to no avail. The bishop proclaimed an indulgence, the faithful were admonished to give their offerings and the antiphon "Dear St. Benno, attend us" was intoned. Then the figure of the pope was taken up on the dung

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[146] Scribner, "Reformation, Carnival and the World Turned Upside-down," 73.

[147] All the events described here from Buchholz are from ibid., 74.

> carrier and tossed into a fountain, along with his bearers. An eyewitness reported that the spectators laughed so much that they could not stand.[148]

The cult of the saints and saint veneration pervaded society during that time, and indeed had become central tenets of the medieval church. Popular piety—as well as the dogma of the official hierarchy—accepted and affirmed an intercessory role that saints played between living and the dead, and between the earthly and heavenly realms. For a community to parody and ridicule such ubiquitous theological practice is truly indicative of a wave of new collective religious attitudes that was eroding and washing away the old.

Complementary Carnival Media: Satires and Dialogues

Closely accompanying the carnival plays as theatrical propaganda were rhymed satirical texts that could be circulated, read aloud, or performed. One such anonymous text, *Ein clag und bitt der deutschen nation an den almechitgen got umb ersolung auß dem gefenknis des Antichrist* ("A Complaint and Plea of the German Nation Addressed to Almighty God for the Release from the Prison of the Antichrist")—probably from north Germany in the early years of Reformation—ramps up the antipapal diatribe, simply labelling the pope as the ultimate eschatological antithesis of Christ.[149] This obviously echoed the cries of Luther, who continually (and from early on) saw Christendom as being shackled by the dominion of the pope. In his institution of a system that revolved around wicked and misleading practice, the pope had, for Luther and the Evangelicals, become a spiritual tyrant abusing Christ's Church. The influence that the papal office exercised over Christian society was a satanic obstacle to the true promulgation of God's grace; as Luther declared, "When the pope drives the whole world as if

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[148] Scribner, "Reformation, Carnival and the World Turned Upside-down," 74-75.

[149] "*Ein clag und bitt der deutschen nation an den almechitgen got umb ersolung auß dem gefenknis des Antichrist,"* in *Satiren und Pasquille aus der Reformationszeit I*, ed. Oskar Schade (Darmstadt: George Olms Hildesheim, 1966), 1-6.

he had a right to do so, he confuses innumerable souls and seduces them into hell. That is why he is 'the man of lawlessness and the son of perdition' [2 Thess. 2:3], because he has imprisoned consciences and forced them to sanction his injustice, thus filling the world with sin and destruction."[150] Satirizing the pope in carnival processions and games appears light-hearted and comedic, but the satirical texts emerging during the same time demonstrate that the stakes for Evangelical reformers were deadly serious. Written as a mock petition to God, "A Complaint and Plea" calls its German audience to the attention of the pope and his sycophants' calculated suppression of scripture:

> *O ir christen, weinet und vergießet blutige zern*
> *Daß die heilige schrift ist undergedruckt mit gefern!*
> *Denn der Antichrist und großer anhank*
> *Die heilige gschrift han gestoßen under die bank,*
> *Ire gesetze und heidenisch kunst hervor gezogen:*
> *Da mit sie lant und leute haben betrogen,*
> *Daß vil menschen durch ire werk selig hoffen zu warden,*
> *So doch aleine durch Christum mußen hie auf erden*
> *Mit heiligen glauben hoffnung und rechter liebe*
> *Seligkeit Erlangen, aber komen zun hellischen dieben.*
>
> Oh you, Christians, weep and shed tears of blood
> That the holy scripture has been suppressed by misrepresentation!
> For the Antichrist and his great following
> Has kicked the holy scripture under the bench (pew),
> Their laws and heathen art has been favoured:
> So that they may mislead the land and its inhabitants,
> That they believe that they will be saved by their works,
> But only through Christ can they here on earth
> With true faith, hope, and righteous love
> Salvation attain, else they go to the hellish thieves.[151]

Here, the satirist presents the pope and his affiliates as silencers of scripture and antagonists of the Word. These groups and their salvific proclamations revolve around the works and traditions

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[150] Martin Luther, *Answer to the Hyperchristian, Hyperspiritual, and Hyperlearned Book by Goat Emser in Leipzig—Including Some Thoughts Regarding His Companion, the Fool Murner, 1521* (AE 39:194).

[151] "*Ein clag*," vv. 25-34, in *Satiren und Pasquille I*, 2. The translation is my own.

of humans, while the Evangelical communities are presented in contrast as being centred solely on Christ and on faith.

The destruction of any positive papalist identity continues by ridiculing the old church's bishops, monks, and practices. Its bishops are marked as having lost all Christian morality:

> *Die bischof aber des schaden sich an dem volk erholen.*
> *Es sei erschunden geraubt oder gestolen,*
> *Daran ist in nicht groß gelegen:*
> *Des reichs Christi han sie sich ganz erwegen . . .*
>
> But the bishops still take advantage of the people.
> Be it by deception, robbery, or theft,
> It matters little to them.
> They have abandoned the kingdom of Christ . . .[152]

At the same time, the monks are presented as being enemies of the poor and meek in Christian society; monastic orders were only nominally dedicated to mission work, and exploited the common people for self-serving financial gain:

> *Ist irgent ein reichs closter das apt oder eptin hat,*
> *Die achten nicht wie es mit gotis dienst zu gat.*
> *Wie vil personen sie haben in iren convent,*
> *Ab ir schon nit vi list, machen do von clein coment,*
> *Aleine daß sie vil gutis und geldis erubern mugent:*
> *Das achten sie vor die groste und geistlichste tugent.*
>
> Wherever there is a rich monastery with an abbot or abbotess,
> They don't pay heed to how God is served.
> Regardless how many members the convent has,
> They make sure that their donation is small,
> So long as they can accumulate much goods and money:
> This is what they esteem to be the greatest and most spiritual virtue.[153]

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[152] Ibid., 4-5, vv. 127-130.

[153] Ibid., 5, vv. 145-150.

Finally, just like in the carnival environments surrounding the world of the early Reformation satirist, indulgences were mocked as being spiritually useless. Their sale only served the interests of a manipulative Roman ecclesiastical hierarchy:

> *Bepstlichen ablaß und stroern kolen*
> *Die darf vorwar niemants weit holen:*
> *Den numbs gelts willen ist er erfunden,*
> *Zu betriegen lant und leut in allen stunden.*
>
> Papal indulgences and coals of straw
> Have about the same value:
> As they were invented for the sake of making money,
> By cheating the land and its people every time.[154]

The Evangelicals perceived corruption and abuses right from the papacy and trickling down through the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and warning cries rang out as loudly in satirical literature as they did from Luther's hand or the Protestant pulpits.

These accessible satires popped up in great quantity across German-speaking Europe during the first decades of the Reformation. Evangelical writers continued to use bizarre situations and comedic elements for the purposes of demolishing any positive connotations concerning the pope and his supporters. A satire from the 1530s ridicules the Roman Catholic leadership as being in direct cahoots with the devil and his demonic legions.[155] The text is written as a sort of progress report from Lucifer's desk to his allies in the papal church; the letter begins with a cordial and familiar greeting:

> *Wir Beelzebub, fürst aller teufel, gewaltiger herr und regent über alle kinder des unglaubens, entbieten bapst, cardineln, bischöven und allen der bepstlichen kirchen gelidern, unsern getreuen unterthanen, unsern ganz freundlichen gruß.*

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[154] Ibid., 3, vv. 71-74.

[155] "*Beelzebub an die heilige bepstliche kirche. MDXXXVII*," in *Satiren und Pasquille aus der Reformationszeit II*, ed. Oskar Schade (Darmstadt: Georg Olms Hildesheim, 1966), 102-104. According to Schade, *Satiren und Pasquille II*, 309, the text was probably written in Wittenberg in—as the title suggests—1537.

> We Beelzebub, prince of all devils, powerful lord and ruler of all children of unbelief, send to the pope, the cardinals, bishops and all members of the papal church, our servants, our most friendly greeting.[156]

Having the ultimate Christian enemy—Satan—speak throughout the text in such a warm tone surely belongs to the realm of propagandistic absurdity; yet, underneath the humourous counter-reality lies the same sharp criticisms of the Roman See. Beelzebub sniffs out in this letter whether the attempts to reform Rome are gaining any traction; he admonishes his dear papal allies, warning them not to succumb to the silliness of the Galilean (Lutheran) teachers:

> *Fur allen dingen aber, daß ir ja nichts halt vom künftigen leben, es heiße der himel oder die helle, laße sich solchs die narrenpredigt der Galileer nicht bereden, sondern spotte und verlache alles was er davon höret.*
>
> Above all, you must not deem important the life to come be it heaven or hell regardless of the foolish preaching of the Galileans, but indeed, you must berate and mock their preaching on such matters whenever you come across them.[157]

There is an obvious reversal of credibility in the satire as attempts are made to discredit the supporters of Luther. Coming from the "prince of all devils," however, an Evangelical audience is moved to laugh by such dissent to their religious values. By Satan's influence, the papists obsess over worldly power and prestige with no regard to the heaven's kingdom, while the Evangelical communities celebrate their own confidence in salvation and indifference towards worldly gain.

Satirists also turn to scripture for inspiration for mockery and ridicule. This highlights the back-end of a Protestant trajectory of satire and drama creation, where in the later years of the Reformation, the uniquely Evangelical engagement with these made scripture the centrepiece of propaganda. A 1544 satire—a rather late document, then—is entitled *Ain ewangelium*

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[156] "*Beelzebub*," 102. The translation is my own.

[157] Ibid., 103.

Pasquilli, darin das römisch leben gegründt und bestetiget wirt ("A Gospel Lampoon Concerning That on Which Roman Life is Founded and Practiced").[158] It is a direct counterfeit of scripture, adapting the sacred stories of scripture in such a way that acidly portrays a Roman Catholic lifestyle as the antithesis to the saintly life that Jesus preached and lived. It uses the same familiar language of scripture to continue the caricaturing of self-serving papists:

> *Die carpinel sagten zu im "maister, was ist zu thun, daß wir das gelt besitzen?" da sprach er zu inen "in unserm gesatz ist geschriben: 'liebent gold und silber auß ganzem eurem herzen und auß ganzer eur seel und das gelt als euch selber.' das thut, auf daß ir lebent. wann dises gebot gib ich euch, damit view ich thu, ir auch also thut und mir nach volgent."*
>
> The carpinals said [to the pope], "Master, what shall we do that we may possess money?" Then he said to them, "In our law, it is written: 'Love gold and silver with all your heart and with all your soul and love money as you love yourself.' Do this and you shall live. For this command I give unto you, that howsoever I do, you also shall do and you shall follow me."[159]

As with other Evangelical propaganda, the text suggests the Roman pontiff lives a life in complete and utter opposition to that which Jesus did and intended for his disciples. The author uses Jesus' famous preamble to the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) to mark clear distinguishing lines between godly and wicked. The Evangelical communities are encouraged to hold fast to the humble and altruistic way of the gospel as preached by Jesus; on the other hand, the pope and his underlings seem to invent their own sacrosanct methods of living that only serve themselves.

In Nuremberg in particular, satirists wrote religious dialogues (fictional skits featuring a conversation between two characters) that complemented early satires and pure plays. Hans

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[158] "*Ain ewangelium Pasquilli, darin das römisch leben gegründt und bestetiget wirt,"* in *Satiren und Pasquille aus der Reformationszeit II*, ed. Oskar Schade (Darmstadt: Georg Olms Hildesheim, 1966), 105-7.

[159] *"Ain ewangelium Pasquilli*," 105. The translation is my own. "Carpinals" is a play on words from the Latin *carpere*, meaning "to seize" or "to take."

Sachs, a local shoemaker and one of Germany's most widely-published writers—certainly the most prolific German playwright of the sixteenth century—became one of the Evangelicals' most effective propagandists.[160] His elementary, memorable, and witty rhetoric was a crucial component to his success in persuasion: "Much of Sachs's appeal—to his contemporaries in works such as the religious dialogues, as well to later admirers of his dramas—stems from his vigorous use of a sturdy vernacular."[161] By the mid-1520s, the citizens of Nuremberg had taken a deep interest in the Evangelical theologians' calls to reform; the theological differences between the new, refreshed faith and the old medieval patterns of belief and piety were attractive to German audiences. Luther's doctrine of justification by faith found especial resonance in various communities.[162] In 1523 and 1524, Sachs's polemic was at its peak, as his own zeal for Evangelical theology lay at the heart of the religious dialogues, echoing the reform-minded theologians. As Strauss notes, the artisan's "street ballad version of the new creed [his 1523 *Wittenberg Nightingale*] . . . only put into easy doggerel what the preachers in most of the city's pulpits had been saying several times each week for at least a year."[163]

Thus, the dialogues were an effective medium in early Reformation Nuremberg for the Evangelical cause; once again, old versus new is set in a contrasting theological light. Sachs employs deliberate character names and types for the purpose of establishing audience

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[160] For a chart of the leading Evangelical publicists from 1518-1525, see Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*, 26-27. Hans Sachs was among the most popular already in the early years of the Reformation.

[161] Robert Aylett and Peter Skrine, introduction to *Hans Sachs and Folk Theatre in the Late Middle Ages: Studies in the History of Popular Culture*, ed. Robert Aylett and Peter Skrine, Bristol German Publications 5 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), xiii.

[162] Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 166-68. For detailed statistics of editions of Luther's works published by city, see the charts in Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*, 22-25. The study reveals Nuremberg as a hotspot for interest in Luther during the first decade of the Reformation.

[163] Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 168.

sympathies. One skit entitled *Dispute between a Shoemaker and a Canon* does just that, where—like in Reformation carnival revelries—an individual of humble estate and social class not only equals the papal ecclesiastic, but indeed turns the status quo on its head by besting the educated social superior. In the dialogue, competing views on justification are prominent:

> *Shoemaker:* Paul tells us, in Romans V, that man is justified by faith without any works of the law, and told the Romans that they will be judged according to the way they live their faith.
> *Canon:* Yet James says, in the second chapter, that faith without works is dead.
> *Shoemaker:* A genuine Godly faith does not need to be demonstrated, since by its own virtue it yields good fruit, as in Matthew VII: "a good tree cannot produce bad fruit." However, such good works are not done out of desire to earn salvation, which Christ has already earned for us, nor are they done out of fear of hell, since Christ has freed us from that, nor are they done because we must offer them to God. They are done out of Godly love as a thanksgiving and benefit to our neighbour. Well, how do you like Luther's fruits?[164]

The dialogue also caricatures the response of the papal church to dissension from religious communities or figures. The papists are mocked as a bunch of paranoid thugs who cannot combat the Evangelicals with scripture or sound theology, so instead lash out with violence. Philip Broadhead writes, "Sachs presents the canon as a ridiculous figure, who states that the best way to silence the heresy of the Evangelicals was by force, for all the problems of the church would be solved if the Evangelical preachers were burnt like [Jan] Hus before them."[165] Of course, when the shoemaker continues to outclass the canon with Evangelical theology, the canon's reaction is a desire to strike the artisan.[166] The Nuremberg playwright hoped to create an

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[164] Hans Sachs, *Hans Sachsens Werke*, ed. A. Keller and E. Goetze (Tübingen: 1870-1902), 21:337.1-2, translated in Russell, *Lay Theology in the Reformation*, 173.

[165] Philip Broadhead, "The Contribution of Hans Sachs to the Debate on the Reformation in Nuremberg: A Study of the Religious Dialogues of 1524," in *Hans Sachs and Folk Theatre in the Late Middle Ages: Studies in the History of Popular Culture*, Bristol German Publications 5, ed. Robert Aylett and Peter Skrine (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 57.

[166] Ibid.

Evangelical substance that proclaims true salvific theology based on faith, holding true to the gospel despite the hostile backlash from the Roman Church.

Niklaus Manuel's *Fastnachtspiele*: Fusing Satirical Text to the Carnival Atmosphere

Theatrical propaganda in the early years of the Reformation has been analyzed above in terms of its effectiveness through such elements as communal participation, absurdity, humour and ridicule, and caustic satirical text. Where these ingredients are welded together most coherently are in the *Fastnachtspiele* of the Swiss city Bern. Niklaus Manuel composed some of the first Evangelical Shrovetide plays there, and unlike the carnival processions and plays from the German towns, these play-texts have survived. As Ehrstine notes, distinguishing between Zwinglian or Lutheran theatre is virtually impossible in these years, particularly in the first decade of the Reformation, which was a pre-confessional era.[167] In *The Pope and His Priesthood* (or *Die Totenfresser*—"*The Devourers of the Dead"*) of 1523, Manuel uses seven separate scenes to skewer the bellicose, self-indulgent, and pompous nature of the papacy and its supporters. The play's pope delivers the first substantial monologue, who demands that the revival of the gospel be suppressed, instead reaffirming the proliferation of papal decrees:

> [*The Holy Father Pope*:] Be quiet about the gospel
> And preach only papal law.
> We will then be lords and the laity servants
> Who bear the burdens we lay upon them.
> All is lost however
> If the gospel gets outs
> And things are measured by it.
> For it teaches none to give and sacrifice to us—
> Only that we should live simple, impoverished lives.[168]

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[167] Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 2.

[168] Manuel, *"Vom Papst und seiner Priesterschaft,"* p. 7, translated in Ozment, *Reformation in the Cities*, 112. Ozment is quoting verses 60-69.

The pope's lines reinforce in the minds of the audience a popular perception of an institution that ensnares and suppresses God's Word. The modest and selfless precepts of Jesus and his disciples have little use for a religious community whose meaning and purpose stem from its desire to prosper at the expense of common people. New characters and speakers are introduced that continue to demonstrate that members of the Roman ecclesiastical community, of all ranks, are indeed feeders on the dead, tyrannizing the spiritual lives of medieval society. Towards the end of this soliloquy by the pope, Ozment notes that in just a few short lines, the "popular origins of the Reformation" are highlighted: burdensome canonical decrees; money-grabbing tendencies of Rome; indulgences; spiritual fear-mongering; and crooked theology out of tune with scripture.[169] The "rhetorical strategies" of Manuel plead for religious change that would address the real concerns of the community, while the carnival context provides an entertaining means of ridiculing—often crudely—the moral and theological faults of the medieval church.[170]

In an examination of the same play, Glenn Ehrstine points out the production's success in enacting local reform in Bern by appealing to the political leadership and nobility for help. Certainly, the victory of the Reformation in creating Evangelical communities was not only contingent on winning over common people, but also on influencing those individuals with the authority to facilitate reform. One nobleman in the play is portrayed positively, as he sides with the common people and the gospel against the medieval church that hoodwinked and robbed him:

> You've terrified people with purgatory; that has brought you princely possessions. You conceived of it through your greed. . . . If one of you is bold and pious enough to show

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[169] Ozment, *Reformation in the Cities*, 112. For the grievances suggested, see especially Manuel, *"Vom Papst und seiner Priesterschaft*," 8-9.

[170] Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 105.

> me basis in Holy Writ, then I'll believe it, but otherwise not. We noblemen can bear it no longer: We must circumcise your cabbage-heads![171]

All levels of the community are advised to take action against the abuses and corruption of the papal church. Another character by the name of Doctor Lütpolt Schüchnit (possibly modeled after Luther—"Luth[er]-bold") represents the side of the gospel and truth in the play. He prays in the closing scene:

> Oh sweet Jesus Christ, I ask of you: Illuminate us all with your spirit, and the authorities especially, so that they shepherd their sheep properly and recognize that they are your servants and do not wish to be lords themselves, mixing in their own compositions and dumping them before your sheep.[172]

The Bernese playwright purposefully includes all members of the community make-up, attempting to foster a multidimensional and collective criticism of the papal hierarchy. Consequently, for the Evangelical reformers, freeing the gospel from the chains of the medieval church and illuminating true Christian practice is valuable to any willing member of the community.

The whirlwind of Evangelical reform that moved across German-speaking Europe engulfed even the celebrations of Shrovetide, and thus altered the carnival stage to become the first uniquely Evangelical form of theatre. The carnival processions, play-texts, and satires examined here suggest that the Evangelical reformers seemed to have found mutuality with the common people they hoped to champion in that both were disturbed by the practices of the papal church and were keen on introducing religious reform.[173] Satirizing and mocking the Romanists

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[171] Translated in Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 101. The 1923 Leipzig edition given in my bibliography only contains verses 751-52 from this monologue.

[172] Manuel, *"Vom Papst und seiner Priesterschaft,"* vv. 1756-63, as translated in Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 104-5. For discussion on the origin of Doctor Lupolt, see Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 104n69.

became a marker for the identity of Evangelical communities, whose plays and theatrical texts erased positive colouring of the Roman Church, repainted it as an institution of the wicked and morally degenerate, and ultimately set themselves as the bearers of the true, freed gospel. Of course, for a religious movement set on the revival of scripture and true Christian practice, the carnivalesque atmosphere—vulgar, wild, and uninhibited—was not the ideal context for Evangelicals. The Protestant polemic theatre would therefore morph into its final form during the Reformation years as the humanist Evangelicals began taking an interest in the stage during the decades of confessionalization.

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[173] See Ozment's preamble to his discussion on Manuel's *"Vom Papst und seiner Priesterschaft*," in Ozment, *Reformation in the Cities*, 112-13. He writes, "As a performed popular play, *Die Totenfresser* illustrates, even better than the vernacular pamphlets that were read to the nonliterate laity, how these laymen came to have as profound a grasp of the issues of the Reformation as any Protestant don."

Chapter 4

The Rise of the Evangelical Humanist Drama:

Theatre in the Reformation Era for Post-Carnival Communities

> I would not at all be displeased to see the acts of Christ performed in boys' schools as plays or rather comedies, in Latin and German, written in a chaste and fitting manner, for their remembrance and for a great impression upon the more uncultivated.
>
> —Martin Luther, letter to Niklaus Hausmann, 1530[174]

The Waning of Carnival

The marriage of Evangelical reform goals to the riotous and bawdy carnival stage was indeed a fleeting moment in Reformation history. On a spring day in 1539, a month after Shrovetide, Martin Luther grumbled about the Nurembergers who, "in contempt of the Gospel and out of hate for the pastors, had again instigated that most impious spectacle"—the *Schembart* carnival festivities.[175] That year, the *Hölle* took the form of a ship, an image traditionally associated in medieval society with the church. Of course, the Evangelicals gladly seized upon this symbol in polemical visual propaganda, often linking the ship of the Catholic Church with the "ship of fools" that was popularized by Sebastian Brandt's satirical 1494 book.[176] As the float coursed through the Nuremberg streets, one guiser on the float struck the eye of the local observers. Dressed in the black robe of an Evangelical preacher and adorning a thick beard, the carnival player was obviously mocking Andreas Osiander, the pastor of St. Lorenz church and a

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[174] Epigraph translated in Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 1.

[175] WATr 4: 297, no. 4406, translated in Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 116.

[176] For a lengthier treatment of the symbolism of the ship in late medieval culture, see Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, 106-15.

leader of Lutheran reforms in Nuremberg.[177] This time, a prominent Evangelical reformer commandeered the ship of fools, which the carnival participants happily burned at *Fastnacht*'s end.[178] As Simon writes, "It was the first time, Luther may have sensed, that the *Schembart* guisers—who had earlier gleefully lambasted the old church—turned on an authority figure of the new religion."[179]

The wild carnival revelries perhaps proved to be too wild for the new faith that increasingly sought to clarify and concentrate its message. Protestant church statutes repeatedly reveal religious leaders in the Evangelical communities denouncing the *Fastnacht* celebrations as the product of the devil and heathen practice—it was, for them, a true creature of the Catholic tradition.[180] Not surprisingly, in Nuremberg, Osiander regularly demanded an end to the carnival festivities, "which he castigated as remnants of the papal church originating in pagan rites."[181] Ulrich Zwingli and later John Calvin were just as opposed to the carnival based on moral grounds, echoing sentiments that deplored the Shrovetide celebrations and its plays for the shameless and licentious behaviour that thrived in carnival context.[182] The nature of carnival celebrations as an opportunity for rebellion and rioting may also have motivated the bans placed on them by anxious town and city councils—after all, something has to explain the fifteen-year

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[177] Simon, "Staging the Reformation," 61.

[178] See Sumberg, *Nuremberg Schembart Carnival,* 139. The *Laüfer* (runners) burned the *Hölle* to destroy the "symbol of folly or evil usually represented on it."

[179] Simon, "Staging the Reformation," 62.

[180] Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 116-17. Ehrstine lists various church statutes from *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des 16. Jahrhunderts,* ed. Emil Sehling et al. (volumes 1-5: Leipzig: O. R. Reisland, 1902-13; volumes 6-15: Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1955-1977).

[181] Simon, "Staging the Reformation," 70.

[182] Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 117.

hiatus that *Fastnacht* took in Nuremberg until the 1539 Osiander incident.[183] Whether one of these factors or a combination of all of them contributed to carnival's virtual disappearance across German-speaking Europe is secondary to what *Fastnacht*'s waning meant for Evangelical playwrights looking to continue the wave of theatrical propaganda. The carnival plays, like the medieval mystery plays and Corpus Christi cycles steeped in papal influence, were no longer viable options to Protestant playwrights. Evangelical communities wanting to sharpen their confessional standing on stage and distinguish themselves from the Roman Catholic tradition prompted a novel form of Protestant theatre that could adequately meet the theological and religious needs of the new Word-focused populations.

Humanism, Education, and the Renewal of Classical Drama

The carnival theatrics and satirical skits from the first decade of the Reformation had proved successful enough for the Evangelical cause that extracting the propagandistic potential from the stage would continue on past *Fastnacht*'s demise. And "in the early 1530s, there was only one dramatic tradition that was not immediately reminiscent of Catholicism: that of humanist dramaturgy."[184] The humanists of this time endorsed a renewed concentration on the ancient texts and influences that stood before medieval humanity. Their mantra: *ad fontes* ("to the sources")! Renaissance humanism settled and flourished in European schools in the century preceding the Reformation. A lasting educational artefact of the humanists was the *studia humanitatis*—"the studies of humanity"—which expanded the scope of the traditional curriculum, the *trivium* and *quadrivium*, to include poetry, history, and moral philosophy. Not only did the humanist curriculum modify content, but also set the new subject matter in a place

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[183] Sumberg, *Nuremberg Schembart Carnival*, 179-80.

[184] Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 135.

of preference. Naturally, then, excelling in the *studia humanitatis* meant a comprehensive immersion in the Greek and Latin authors of antiquity, whose writings accentuated the very linguistic and cultural content that the humanists prioritized. A specifically Christian humanism emphasized reintroducing the church *fontes* into contemporary medieval religious life: Christian humanists placed the church fathers and scriptural texts as the centrepieces of their reform programs. Prerequisite to accessing these early voices and sacred texts from classical antiquity was certainly a firm Greek and Latin linguistic foundation.

Within the broader educational and cultural reform goals of humanism, more microcosmic alterations took effect. In the hands of Renaissance humanists, the stage of antiquity was melded with the precepts of Christianity to create a hybridized form of theatre that subsumed both classical literary form and Christian sources of inspiration.[185] At the turn of the sixteenth century, classical dramas blossomed in the German classrooms, and had become an integral part of educational curriculums.[186] Indeed, in the final years of the fifteenth century, school boys and university students began performing the works of such individuals as Seneca and Plautus; two decades later, Philip Melanchthon himself—close ally and colleague of Luther—had translated and published his own edition of one of Terence's plays at the age of 19.[187] As early as 1523, the Zwickau school was performing a Terentian comedy every

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[185] James A. Parente, *Religious Drama and the Humanist Tradition: Christian Theater in Germany and in the Netherlands 1500-1680*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 39 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), 11.

[186] Bacon, *Martin Luther and the Drama*, 26-28. See also Parente, *Religious Drama and the Humanist Tradition*, 13. He notes that "by 1500 several editions of individual plays as well as the complete works of the Roman dramatists were being printed and read in the leading humanist centers from Deventer to Strabourg in the west to Wittenberg and Vienna in the east."

[187] Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 135-36.

Wednesday.[188] At the Strasbourg Academy, instructor Johannes Sturm eventually had to move performances of the *Schuldrama* ("school drama") out to the school's courtyard because of the ancient plays' popularity in the community.[189] Yet, the schoolmasters had obstacles to overcome: humanist dramaturges and translators before the Reformation had to defend themselves against scholastic theologians' charges of pagan immorality and even heresy when it came to their revival of Greek and Roman plays.[190] Ehrstine notes the early justification of adapting pagan theatre which had occurred before Reformation-era humanists transformed it: "In response, they adopted patristic arguments for the utility of classical literature, emphasizing the plays' sententious wisdom, the pedagogical value of negative exempla, and the necessity of rhetorical training to fully understand the tropes of scripture."[191] Reading, translating, and performing the comedies and tragedies of the ancients was a humanist's way of interacting with the classical world and understanding those contexts in which early authors composed the Christian sacred literature.

Evangelical Validations and Uses for the Ancient Stage

Protestant playwrights who turned to classical theatre to continue forging Evangelical communities built on a host of pedagogic, moral, and theological validations for classical dramaturgy. These justifications for adapting ancient literature were expanded upon by the reformers in later years, when in the late 1520s, Evangelical dramatists infused neo-classical

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[188] Kelly, "Theater and Theology," 170.

[189] Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 137.

[190] Ibid., 135-36. See also David Price, *Political Dramaturgy of Nicodemus Frischlin: Essays on Humanist Drama in Germany*, University of North Carolina Studies in the Germanic Languages and Literatures 111 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), who notes that literature needed justification in a sixteenth-century context: "As writers fully knew, dramas were judged according to political, theological, or moral merits, perhaps least of all on artistic criteria."

[191] Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 136.

poetics with Christian ideals to create unique biblical dramas that imported the form and linguistic style of the Greco-Roman stage.[192] Given that the resurgence of these works originated in educational settings, the pedagogical aspect of ancient comedies and tragedies was the application first advanced by the Evangelical reformers. For Melanchthon, the trailblazing advocate for classical dramaturgy, "a thorough knowledge of classical antiquity, Roman and Greek, was prerequisite to a proper concept of Christianity. Like Luther, his concern for education reforms was highly charged with the spirit of revolt against scholasticism in the cloister schools."[193] In the Evangelical reformers' eyes, the papal church and the academic traditions it had spawned muddied Christian education, and drinking directly from the sacred *fontes* meant refreshing classical study in the German classrooms.[194] Melanchthon taught his classes Greek and Latin, and once the students had been familiarized enough, he proceeded to converse and teach in Latin; on top of this, students were required to memorize ten lines from Terence's dramas each day.[195] Surely, Melanchthon's zeal for classical literature and plays stood behind Luther's eventual support for them as Evangelical tools. On the *Fastnacht* of 1525, Luther even hosted in his cloister-turned-home a performance of a classical play by local Wittenberg students.[196] However, the pedagogical value of biblical dramas was certainly much broader than just the linguistic instruction and benefits that students received from them. The Evangelical playwrights saw an opportunity to teach not only the children, but the community at

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[192] Ibid.

[193] Bacon, *Martin Luther and the Drama*, 51.

[194] See also Kelly, "Theater and Theology," 170. She writes, "The Latin classics inculcated a sense of clarity and rhetorical skills without which any kind of conviction in the proclamation of the Word was impossible."

[195] Bacon, *Martin Luther and the Drama*, 52.

[196] Ibid., 49-50.

large, the texts of scripture and the rediscovered gospel that had freed them from the papal church. Luther remarked that religious communities "might, as in a public image or play, teach their people and youth to trust in God, to be pious, and to place all hope in God for help and consolation in all trials and against all enemies."[197]

The biblical drama adapted to Greco-Roman theatrical form was also an effective medium in that it could be used to instill moral values in the audience. For an author like Terence, drama's success is reliant upon deliberate character creation and double plots that clearly and theatrically demonstrate contrastive human behaviours.[198] Dramatic techniques of the ancients include other characteristics that the Reformation playwright could utilize for moral purposes, such as pithy or proverbial generalizations, soliloquies, elaborate speeches, or characters who, dominated by a single obsessive passion, meet their eventual doom.[199] The use of contrast on the Reformation stage has been treated above, but the classical style of dramaturgy in particular provided opportunity to distinguish Evangelical and papal. As Melanchthon argued, audiences only grasped ethical lessons on stage, irrespective of the play's genre, if virtuous and wicked behaviours were portrayed in clear, contradictory terms.[200] Moreover, by the 1530s, the Evangelical playwrights increasingly sought to cement the identities that the first wave of theatre and satires had helped generate, and the moralistic sayings and sermon-like dialogues of humanist dramas clarified how members of the German-speaking communities should behave as functional individuals as part of a social Evangelical whole.

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[197] Luther, WADB 12: 6.22-24. As translated in Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 22.

[198] Brockett and Hildy, *History of the Theatre*, 44.

[199] Ibid., 46-47. The features listed here by the authors refer specifically to Seneca and his tragedies.

[200] Parente, *Religious Drama and the Humanist Tradition*, 20.

Evangelical reformers gave a firm theological backing to the humanist dramas for their creation and circulation in the communities. On top of the moralistic and pedagogical usages that Luther saw in the drama was his assertion that sacred writings themselves exhibit qualities of classical plays: "And it may be that the Greeks took their manner of performing comedies and tragedies from the Jews just as they took other wisdom and forms of worship. For Judith makes a good, earnest, valiant tragedy, just as Tobit makes a fine, sweet comedy blessed to God."[201] Some supporters of the classical style argued that rhetoric and poetics found their origin in the Bible, or at least were gifts given directly from God to humanity; others advanced their support based on their recognition of rhetorical or poetic conventions in scripture, and thus, ample familiarization with classical style necessarily preceded proper biblical exegesis.[202] Of course, importing biblical stories to the medieval stage did not start with the Evangelical reformers or the Renaissance humanists, as the popular mystery plays and Corpus Christi processions had already done just that. Yet, the theological distinction between the biblical plays of the Evangelical stage and that of the old church was "a fundamentally different understanding of the interaction between audiences and religious imagery: one that fostered intellectual comprehension rather than an emotional response."[203] The popular characters and events from the affective and over-the-top mystery plays could be relayed with new significance, and the classical techniques adapted by Evangelical playwrights facilitated their transition into the new Protestant theatrical contexts. The transcendent mystery plays of the medieval church portrayed events taking place outside the tangible course of human activity, but the Protestant dramatic compositions

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[201] Luther, WADB 12: 108.10-14, translated in Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community,* 22.

[202] Price, *Political Dramaturgy of Nicodemus Frischlin,* 14.

[203] Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*, 85.

continually stressed the historicity and very real consequences of the events staged in their works.[204]

The Extra-Biblical "Pammachius" and the Thousand-Year Reign of the Antichrist

One important play for the Protestant cause that did not draw directly from biblical sources but that should be included nonetheless in the Evangelical humanist drama is *Pammachius*, published in 1538 by the south German Thomas Neogeorgus.[205] A sympathizer of John Calvin, Naogeorgus, as a dramatist and pamphleteer, was just as interested as any Lutheran in skewering the papacy, and he borrowed from the Latin classical style to do so. In the opening scene, Naogeorgus sets the tone of his play and the degree of polemic he intends to hurl at the papal church. The pope is, in true satirical Evangelical form, labelled immediately as the Antichrist. Naogeorgus's Christ character laments to Peter and Paul, in dichotomic phrasing, the earthly form his eschatological archenemy will take:

> I bore on my shoulders the cross for my death; he will be carried aloft on the shoulders of many. I healed those whom no one else could heal; but he will destroy those, whom no one else can destroy. I wore on my head a crown of thorns; he will advance proudly wearing the triple diadem. On bare feet I covered most of my journey; but he will be adorned with gilded shoes. Teaching the good news I travelled through the towns; he as an armed warrior will surround them with his troops. I brought peace to disturbed consciences; he will be an enemy to peaceful consciences. I blessed very many with my riches; he will empty the purses of all realms. Also my testament, which I founded on the last supper, he will treacherously overthrow, lest it taste too much of me. In sum, nothing ever cloaked itself in my name which was so diametrically opposed to me.[206]

Naogeorgus goes on in his tragedy to tell the story of Pammachius, a fictional pope, who complains of a truly Christian lifestyle, and bitterly criticizes Christ for his foolishness. After all,

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[204] Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 26.

[205] All citations from *Pammachius* here taken from Thomas Naogeorgus *Pammachius*, trans. C. C. Love (Toronto, 1992), http://projects.chass.utoronto.ca/rnlp/pammach.html, accessed March 20, 2013.

[206] Naogeorgus *Pammachius* 1.1.

Christ's willing death and scriptural teachings are completely in opposition "to reason and to the common sense of men."[207] The pope is lambasted as a religious leader seeking his own well-being and ignoring the value of scripture. The Evangelical playwright, though not directly adapting biblical texts, makes reference to them to draw a contrast between his own gospel-oriented community and that of the papal church. Pammachius continues:

> Shall I not seek revenge? Shall I throw away my tunic and my cloak? Shall I delay when from a distance he summons me to come before him? When struck, shall I allow myself to be struck further? Finally, above all, shall I love my enemies? Or do a kindness to those who hate me? Shall I pray for those who persecute and slander me? What prudent man ever did such things?[208]

Those teachings straight from the mouth of Jesus are cast aside by the pope as the nonsensical ramblings of a mad man, and instead, Pammachius props himself up as the bearer of true wisdom and intellect. He thus strikes a deal with Satan, switching spiritual allegiances for the sake of worldly gain and glory.[209]

The play's emperor, Julian, is depicted as a victim of papal tyranny, forced to hand the temporal keys of the kingdom over to the pope, "through whom [he was] converted to the faith."[210] Naogeorgus, a playwright voicing a distinctly German perspective, here attempts to win the sympathies of the Holy Roman Emperor, understanding that recruitment of the political leadership to the Evangelical cause was invaluable to reform's success during the Reformation. The emperor deliberates with his advisor, Nestor, revealing Pammachius's plans to conquer all of Christendom:

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[207] Naogeorgus *Pammachius* 1.3.

[208] Naogeorgus *Pammachius* 1.3.

[209] Naogeorgus *Pammachius* 2.4.

[210] Naogeorgus *Pammachius* 3.1.

> Julian: He says that the whole empire shall be his.
> Nestor: Arrogantly enough.
> Julian: And afterwards the emperors must be appointed by him.
> Nestor: Ignorantly enough.
> Julian: He says that the Apostles and all the first bishops were both naive and ignorant of all things because, being content with the gift of teaching, they did not take away their empires from any of the kings.
> Nestor: Impiously enough.
> Julian: For this he claims that he has the authority of the scriptures and that Christ has handed it down.
> Nestor: Falsely enough.[211]

What the Evangelical dramatist is seeking to do, like some of the carnival playwrights before him, is to appeal to all members of the Christian faith, encouraging a true multipronged assault on the papal identity. As one of the pope's supporters pulls out the familiar argument of Petrine succession to justify Pammachius's rise to power, Naogeorgus pleads with those in power to reject faulty interpretations of scripture.[212] The playwright finishes *Pammachius* by once again broadening his petition to include all members of the Evangelical community. Indeed, every audience member is told that they are the newest actors, and the rule of the Antichrist is being performed around them. After an unresolved plot is seemingly on its way to conclusion, the speaker of the epilogue declares:

> Do not expect now, good spectators, that a fifth act is to be added to this play. Christ will act that out one day at his own time. Meanwhile the plots of the fourth act move our affairs to and fro as is well seen at the present time. The whole business of Satan is now making a loud noise. The Papacy is defended and so is the worship of what is wicked. There is strenuous opposition to the glory of Christ.[213]

Naogeorgus breaks from classical style—surely, few plays of the ancient drama would leave a story unfinished—to ensure that the audience is left pondering their own salvation and the health

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[211] Naogeorgus *Pammachius* 3.1.

[212] Naogeorgus *Pammachius* 3.4.

[213] Naogeorgus *Pammachius* 5.1.

of Christendom. Therefore, the intellectual response evoked in the audience met the theological criteria of the humanist drama, encouraging spectators to engage themselves spiritually with the events on stage.

Evangelical Biblical Dramas

Most humanist dramas, despite the success of an extra-biblical play like *Pammachius*, did draw directly from scripture. In addition to this, for the purposes of communal accessibility, the zealous humanist playwrights were forced to compromise pure Latin style, as works were also being composed in the vernacular.[214] Communication media that met the linguistic realities of German-speaking Europe were commonly employed by the reformers, and the new Evangelical theatre was no different: "Luther himself recognized the need to engage audiences in a language they could comprehend, so that he wholeheartedly endorsed play performances in German."[215] Though the humanist dramas were now composed in both German and Latin alike, Protestant playwrights affixed their plays to the ancient models of theatre for a stage built on the slogan of *sola scriptura*.[216] Evangelical communities collectively hoisted a refreshed scriptural banner on their newly-created form of theatre, unreservedly displaying their commitment to the gospel and to the Word.

The Evangelical humanist dramas made clear in their audiences' minds the historical continuity between Christian communities in the 1500s and those biblical figures from Jesus' world, and indeed even earlier than that. Biblical dramas contemporized the scriptural accounts to modern settings in order that the audiences could indeed experience that intellectual

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[214] Kelly, "Theater and Theology," 138.

[215] Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 138.

[216] Ibid.

connection to the scripture theatrically displayed: "actors wore contemporary clothing without attempting to historicize the play through costumes or scenery. In dress and manner, actors resembled the spectators around them, inviting them to see themselves in the events unfolding on stage."[217] In addition to this, playwrights altered the historical settings of their productions to match the contemporary contexts of their audiences. In Saxony, a Lutheran dramatist directly paralleled the battles for the Holy Land described in the apocryphal literature to the religious conflicts between Catholics and Lutherans in his present-day Germany.[218] In Bern, court clerk and popular playwright Hans von Rüte continually employed this technique, making his David an *Alpknecht* ("Alpine sheepherder") in *Goliath*; a character in *Gedeon* refers to the city's *Zytglogge* ("clock tower"); and in *Noe*, the frequent allusion to mountain pastures and dairy farming morphs the Ark's resting place to the contemporary Swiss lands.[219] The new form of Evangelical theatre thus served as a community's mirror, encouraging a spiritual introspection motivated by a striking tangibility of scripture found on stage.

As communities clarified confessional and theological standings, the plays echoed the new focus that religious leaders placed upon doctrine. The anti-Roman polemic still undercoated the creation of human biblical theatre, and the Evangelicals did not resist the opportunity to liken the papal hierarchy to the representatives of Satan, but by this time, these dramas were used more to "instill piety and extol the virtues of a specific church."[220] In particular, competing views on salvation take priority in the plays' content matter, where the Evangelicals emphasized a salvific

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[217] Ibid., 146.

[218] Loewe, "Proclaiming the Passion," 255.

[219] Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 146.

[220] Parente, *Religious Drama and the Humanist Tradition*, 61.

understanding of justification by faith alone. Burkard Waldis, a Franciscan monk who converted to the Evangelical camp in the early 1520s, displayed the doctrine overtly in his 1527 *De parabell vam verlorn Szohn* ("The Parable of the Prodigal Son"), where the prodigal is welcomed back into the community of faith by a gracious and merciful father. The older brother, likened to the works-based Catholic Church, cannot comprehend the love and grace of his father, and bitterly gripes about the notion that one could be granted redemption after having done no good works or acts of penance. In the end, the older brother even demonstrates his displeasure by joining a strict monastic order that lined up more closely with his salvific understanding![221] Rüte's *Goliath* is an Evangelical identity marker in its suggestion that faith is the key to spiritual and worldly success, especially for temporal governance; King Saul as a faithless leader is cast aside so that David—a man of true faith and spiritual integrity—can take his place. Rüte links the pure and righteous faith of the Israelites to the new faith found in Bern, whose people are also surrounded by the enemies of God (that is, the Swiss Confederacy bordered by Catholic cantons).[222] In his 1538 *Joseph*, Potiphar's wife is allegorized as the corrupt and shameless Catholic Church, assaulting the virtuous protagonist who is obviously made a hero figure for the Evangelicals. Rüte gives his play a distinctly christological theme, associating Joseph, a saviour figure for his time, with Christ, as his faith and spiritual uprightness helped him endure the hardships he faced for the ultimate triumph of good.[223] Martin Balticus's theatrical rendition of Joseph painted Jacob's other sons as the fallen members of the church on earth, while Joseph

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[221] Ibid., 74-75.

[222] The text is treated in fuller detail in Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*, 148-57.

[223] Ibid., 146, 157-66.

symbolized the victorious church of Luther that remained committed to the true salvific faith in spite of Catholic persecution.[224]

Reform-minded playwrights also sought to engraft in their communities proper Evangelical behaviour that stood in opposition to the medieval status quo. They mined scripture for stories and themes that could transport forceful social commentary for their audiences. The motif of *Dives* ("the Rich Man") and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) was particularly common in Reformation biblical drama for obvious reasons. The polar opposite nature of the two characters provided quick mental associations for the dramas' spectators, who could easily relate the biblical figures of *Dives* and Lazarus to certain members of their medieval communities.[225] The earlier dramas that adapted this biblical story to the stage were rich in antipapal polemic. In an anonymous 1529 Zurich play, the author attacks the Roman See by suggesting the Rich Man's gluttonous dinner company—his posse, as it were—are members of the College of Cardinals.[226] Wailes states that even though the Catholic clergy are not explicitly named as the dinner guests, there is much in the play to see "the widely criticized luxury of the Roman Church is embodied in the banqueting of the Rich Man."[227] Social concerns that originated in the treatises of reform-oriented theologians also made an appearance in theatrical portrayals of the Lucan text. The German schoolmaster John Krüginger depicts his Rich Man in a 1543 play as the embodiment of usury, which echoed the outrage of Luther towards this practice during his time.[228] In the same play, the Rich Man's servant, Dromo, typifies Luther's conservative approach to social teaching

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[224] Parente, *Religious Drama and the Humanist Tradition*, 41.

[225] Wailes, *Rich Man and Lazarus on the Reformation Stage*, 24.

[226] Ibid., 70.

[227] Ibid., 87.

[228] Ibid., 173-74.

in the 1540s as the exemplary servant, like the Wittenberg Reformer, chooses not to give any socio-economic inequalities any intrinsic value over living a content life of faith.[229] In one monologue, Dromo declares: "Enough talking. Whatever I've said here was not meant to make my master despised, for I am indeed his servant and should exert myself to help him so that I demonstrate my loyal heart."[230] In a revamped version of the same play over a decade later, Krüginger makes clear that being wealthy is not unchristian or damnable on its own, but still illustrates a life of luxury and greed as antithetical to a truly Evangelical and pure way of living. His stage directions employ blatant theatrical juxtaposition: the Rich Man and his ilk laugh and revel in the banquet hall while Lazarus is carried to his grave.[231] Therefore, the Evangelical biblical dramas demanded from their audience an intellectual response that also triggered evaluation of communal moral and social behaviour.

The content and form of the Reformation humanist dramas, whatever function a specific play its dramatists hoped to provide to the Evangelical community, revolutionized the stage as an interactive religious medium. The Lutheran Joachim Greff seems to have perfected the art of evoking response in his audience, as his lively interactive style made sure that the theatre could truly succeed as a multidimensional and hybridized mode of communication.[232] At the end of *Judith*, following the heroine's celebratory monologue, both audience and players alike sang a popular German hymn, thus using the stage as an invitation for worship.[233] As Loewe writes, the "communal singing of a popular Lutheran chorale" at the end of Greff's production truly

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[229] Ibid., 180-81.

[230] Translated in ibid., 181.

[231] Wailes, *Rich Man and Lazarus on the Reformation Stage*, 190.

[232] Loewe, "Proclaiming the Passion," 256-57.

[233] Ibid., 257.

separated the Evangelical biblical drama from any medieval play before it: "it enabled the playwright to turn a passive audience of listeners into an active group of singers, sought to elicit an active response of faith, and therefore marked the transition from stage to church and the transformation of secular audiences into Lutheran congregations."[234] The stage here, in essence, epitomized Evangelical theatre as a type of Reformation pulpit.

The humanist biblical dramas that flourished during the remainder of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries gradually saw their once-sharp polemical edges blunted as the most divisive years of the Reformation faded into memory. They easily glided across confessional lines, and both Catholic and Protestant communities alike incorporated them into communal theatrical arrangements. However, in the first decade of the sixteenth century, the religious Evangelical theatre, along with the *Fastnachtspiele* and satirical literature that had come before it, served the purpose that reformers hoped they would—that is, at its core, forging Word-focused Evangelical communities while assaulting the representatives of the Roman Catholic Church whom they perceived to be enemies of the rediscovered gospel. The reform-driven playwrights and satirists were instrumental as Evangelical propagandists, complementing the leaders of the Reformation with important media forms that could truly get in touch with all members of the German towns and cities. Because of their work, their own communities were freed from the shackles of papal servitude, and the resurrected Christ in all his pure grace and glory could be proclaimed. By the middle of the sixteenth century, Evangelical communities could joyfully sing in unison with the play-going audiences of Greff: "*Christ ist erstanden! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!*"

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[234] Ibid., 258.

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