PART TWO

PRINTING AND THE REFORMATION
TURNING LUTHER’S WEAPONS AGAINST HIM: THE BIRTH OF CATHOLIC PROPAGANDA IN SAXONY IN THE 1520s

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In the beginning there was Martin Luther. The woes and worries, the epiphanies and the battles of a single man brought about the Reformation. Luther was an academic, a theologian, a prophet, but what set him apart from other reformers in the first place was that he was a media event (Berndt Hamm). The figures are impressive. In 1517, the year of their original publication, Luther’s 95 theses were printed three times. Two years later, the new ideas from Wittenberg were already spread through 250 editions, which accounted for roughly 250,000 copies. The tide rose from year to year: in 1526, about 6 to 11 million pamphlets circulated in the Empire, all discussing Christian faith and the future of the church.

Only a small fraction of these Flugschriften took the side of the old church. Andrew Pettegree has pointed out that this sets the early Reformation in Germany apart from the Reformation as an European event. In the French Wars of Religion, for instance, both sides used the press equally and the most important centre of the printing industry in France, Paris, remained Catholic.

The volume of Catholic propaganda in the German Reformation was much more humble, especially during the early years. According to Mark Edwards’s statistics, only 296 pamphlets opposing Luther appeared between 1518 and 1524. Looking at these figures, the

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